

People of Determination

Times have moved on & much has changed. What has not is the essential nature of the Indian Soldiers & Military Leadership. They remain men of character, determination, committed to fulfil their promise made to the nation & to their Countrymen. Army Paralympic Node established in 2017 at Pune [India] has aimed to create more inclusive society within which we exist by aligning with International Paralympic Games which had started in 1989 and having a cooperative relationship with the International Olympic Committee [IOC]. The success stories of two-star athletes of Paralympic Node of Indian Army are shared in our series of 'Behind the Headlines'

A soldier first identifies himself as Indian, carries countrymen faith bestowed upon them, ready to sacrifice to secure nation's sovereignty, act as shield for public safety, nation's economic & social progression and fulfils his responsibility with conviction, courage, commitment, devotion, dedication and determination. A soldier trains himself with shoulder to shoulder with his comrades with a commitment of NATION FIRST. Indian Army equips such rural talented youths as professional soldiers with phenomenal abilities with outstanding adaptability

In securing nation's sovereignty against snowclad mountains located at high altitude areas with arduous terrain & harsh climatic conditions, the risks remain very high. The Terrorisms, Counter insurgencies & Internal Security challenges set forth constant threats leading to serious consequences, many times with a high impact resulting in visual/auditory impairment, relegating their physical ability due to the fatal injuries of automatic weapons by terrorists, Improvised Explosive Devices [IED] blast by forces having inimical interests, claymore mines in Line of Control [LOC] scenario. These fatal injuries relegate Soldiers' ability to again actively & equally participate with his comrades. **The mechanical equipment, prosthesis, assisting devices are the supporting steps to realign their ability.**

The biggest challenge to Leaders & Institution is firstly to strengthen such soldiers' psychological, mental health with their commitment of unconditional support & equip them to realign their strength and restore their dignity. These soldiers demonstrating determination, utmost responsibility, commitment and mental robustness respond to challenges & difficulties of life with more courage & resilience with their skills to convert

‘adversity to possibility’. **Sports is an effective medium aiding in their rehabilitation, overall well-being & for their integration in an inclusive society.** Participation in sports for these soldiers help rebuilding their confidence, fostering a sense of community, and providing a healthy outlet for managing their stress and trauma.

The Army Paralympic Node established in 2017 at Pune [India] has aimed to create more inclusive society within which we exist by aligning with International Paralympic Games which had started in 1989 and having a cooperative relationship with the International Olympic Committee [IOC]. **The Army Paralympic Node is strategically structured as world class centre, tactically poised to demonstrate phenomenal adaptability of Indian soldiers by successfully realigning their incredible abilities to showcase the athletic achievements of Indian para-athletes’ soldiers.** *Since 2017 the collective efforts have earned a remarkable medal tally, comprising 69 international and 144 national medals across a diverse range of events.* The Army Paralympic Node has produced an Olympian and has one Asian record and seven national records to its credit.

Our Military Leaderships at all levels with Army Paralympic Node bring out practical, acceptable and very successful Man-Management & Organisational Development Lessons, fostering a more inclusive society with values of determination, commitment to convert **“Adversaries To Possibilities” by adopting professional approach of aligning strengths with workplace environment.** *The success stories of our Indian para-athletes’ soldiers fortify the team spirit of camaraderie as serving soldiers of Indian Armed Forces who give impetus to maintain high level of motivation & professional commitment of Indian Army in nation building process. The success stories of two-star athletes of Indian Army are shared below in our series of ‘Behind the Headlines’*



Hokato Hotozhe Sema



Soman Rana

Hokato Hotozhe Sema : An Indian para-athlete from Nagaland and a Junior Commissioned Officer in the Indian Army, lost his leg in 2002 in landmine blast. He realigned his abilities & wins a bronze medal at 2024 Summer Paralympics at Paris in men's shot put F57 event with a personal best throw of 14.65m. He is true to his regimental salutation of 'Tagra Raho', arose like a phoenix from the ashes and took to Para Sports like a fish takes to water.

Soman Rana : An Indian para athlete from Bihar & belonging to a humble background of farmers in Meghalaya joined Indian Army in GORKHA RIFLES in 2001, suffered a mine blast injury and lost his right leg while serving with his unit in 2006 .He competes in men's shot put F57 & qualified to represent India at the 2024 Summer Paralympics at Paris, his second Olympics. In the shot put F57 category, he finished 5th at the Paralympics following a throw of 14.07m.

While most people would consider losing a limb to be the end of their dignified career as it is accompanied by its psychological ramifications. True to the spirit of the Indian Army instilling positive outlook on life & their institutional support ,these soldiers overcame their fears and continued para-athletics training with tenacity. They have made our country proud and are an inspiration for all the para-athletes in the Indian Army & Nation.



Hokato Hotozhe Sema was born in P. Vihoto in the Niuland district, Nagaland. At 17, he joined Indian Army with 9 Assam Regiment. Hailing from a humble background in Nagaland, he is the second of the four children in a farmer's family. Young Hokato always dreamt of joining the elite Special Forces (SF) to serve the motherland and displayed highest levels of physical fitness and mental robustness when he joined his unit in highly active field area on the Line of Control in J& K in Jul 2001. However, tragedy struck and his dreams were shattered on 14 Oct 2002, when during a Counter Infiltration Operation, he became a casualty of mine blast and lost his left leg. Ironically, this was just three days before he was to leave for his probation for the SF [Special Forces].

The gravity of the injury struck home when he regained consciousness after his surgery at 92 Base Hospital at Srinagar [Kashmir] his leg amputated below the knee level. Hakato's broke down in tears as he envisioned the rest of his life walking around in crutches. His memory is hazy and blurred from 2003-2015 as lived his life as a floater without any aim and was detailed for mundane administrative duties in his unit. His only source of happiness during the period was watching videos of physically impaired people participating in sports. However, there was no guidance available to him and it was then that he decided to apply for premature retirement and do something with his life. His visit to the Artificial Limb Centre, Pune in 2016 to get a new foot before hanging his uniform was the turning point, when he came to know about the Army Paralympic Node. **With his penchant for physical fitness and his desire to serve the country rekindled, H Hokato Sema, true to his regimental salutation of 'Tagra Raho', arose like a phoenix from the ashes and took to Para Sports like a fish takes to water.**

At 32, he started shotput and trained under coach Rakesh Rawat. He first participated in National Para Athletics Championship in the year 2017 and won a Gold Medal in Standing Shot-put. There has been no looking back for him ever since and in a short span of six years, he has won 09 x National Medals and 03 x International Medals.



Presently he is ranked sixth in the World Rankings. Hokato Sema won the bronze medal in shotput F-56/57 category event at 2022 Asian Para Games in Hangzhou, China and again won the bronze medal in shotput F-57 category at the 2024 Summer Paralympics in Paris with a personal best throw of 14.65m.



Soman Rana was barely six months old when Kapil Dev lifted the World Cup at Lord's Cricket Ground, England on 25 Jun 1983. Maybe that is his uncanny connection with sports which has scripted his destiny. Belonging to a humble background of farmers in Meghalaya, Soman, as a child and a bubbly teenager, was more inclined to the sports fields than classrooms and this led him to joining the Indian Army in the GORKHA RIFLES in the year 2001.

His physical prowess was spotted early in his



training days and Soman was selected to be a part of his Regimental Centre Boxing Team even before he was allotted a unit. In his first five years of service, Soman Rana trampled many of his opponents in the boxing ring and participated in the selection trials for Army Boxing Team, the competition for which was at its peak during that period. He represented Meghalaya in the Senior Boxing National Championship in 2005, where he reached the last eight. In 2006, while preparing for the Army Championship again, he was posted to his unit which was getting inducted to Line of Control in J&K. Unfortunately for him and the Indian Army, he became a casualty in an accidental discharge of the Claymore Mine during training and he was one of the five individuals who lost lower limbs. *After his treatment at various Military Hospitals and his rehabilitation at Artificial Limb Centre at Pune, Nk Soman Rana continued to serve with his unit in both peace and field wherein he carried out administrative duties and desk jobs with a prosthetic leg.*

The year 2017 was the watershed year in his career, when he came to know about the establishment of Army Paralympic Node and that the Army was training physically impaired soldiers to participate in Para-Sports at the apex level. Nk Soman Rana instantly volunteered for the same and won his first National Medal within three months. In his short sports career of just six years Soman has won thirteen National Medals and two International Medals in Seated Shotput, Discus and Javelin.

India won 10 medals apart from earning 17 quota places for the Paris Paralympics, at the world championship. In 2019, he represented India at the Dubai 2019 World Para Athletics Championships in the men's shot put F56/57.



Currently he is National Record Holder and ranked fourth in the world, who finished fourth at the Tokyo 2020. Paris [France] Paralympic Games -2024 he secured fifth at the Paris Paralympic Games. In February 2025, Rana won the gold medal at the National Para Athletics Championships at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Chennai. He defeated Hokato Hotozhe Sema, the Paris Paralympic bronze medallist, in the F57 category with a throw of 14.42m.

Displaying highest levels of grit, determination and mental strength he trained himself to overcome his contemporaries in Seated Shotput and represented the country in Tokyo 2020 Paralympics (held in 2021) and he won a gold at the Tunis World Para Athletics Grand Prix. As a result of his excellent performance, he was given an out of turn promotion to the rank of Junior Commission Officer in the year 2021. He won a silver medal at the 2022 Asian Para Games at Hangzhou, China



*Author- Tapash Chatterjee is a decorated officer of the Indian Army. He combined his vision with his man management skills to conceptualize and implement the mission 'Ability Beyond Disability' as First Nodal officer in conjunction with Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India & Indian Army. The Mission was aimed at restoring the dignity of persons with disabilities, strengthen the grassroots & community level activities by connecting rehabilitation professionals with those in need, residing in remote, under-served and border areas of the country. The mission found its mention in the Niti Ayog reports for outstanding achievements. He is regular contributor to the "**Behind The Headlines**" column of the Indian Interdisciplinary Research Journal Disabilities & Impairment est. 1987 and strong advocate of social entrepreneurship and adding positive value to society through empowerment & development.*