

## India at WTG

### With 35 Medals at the World Transplant Games, Team India Makes Waves Down Under

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Team India at Perth



Opening Ceremony



Javelin competitor Heera Singh Daspa (Gold Medalist)

In April 2023, after 18 months of preparations the largest contingent of athletes, Team Management and Support Staff – 32 athletes, 2 support staff, 5 Team Management, 3 volunteers – took off from India and headed to the World Transplant Games 2023 at Perth, Australia. Breaking all previous records, Team India made a splash at the World Transplant Games, winning 35 medals, and came back to magnificent receptions in their various cities and communities! Participation in transplant sports is a tremendously effective way to raise awareness amongst the public and we hope to take a bigger team to Dresden, Germany in 2025.

For many years, India's participation at the Games was mostly driven by the athletes themselves. Teams of 2-3 athletes have been participating, and winning medals since at least 2011, but the change came in 2019 when Light A Life – Reena Raju Foundation took a 14 member contingent to the WTG 2019. That set the stage for 2023, when ORGAN India became the official Member Organization and Team Managers for India for the World Transplant Games 2023.

#### The Team

In all, 32 athletes participated in the Games, consisting of 24 organ recipients and 8 organ donors/donor family. This included 3 heart recipients, 17 kidney recipients and 4 liver recipients. A medical team Dr. Deepak Bhatia – Orthopaedics, Mumbai, Dr. Jo Joseph, Kerala, Heart Transplant Surgeon, and Mr. Manjeet Kumar – Physiotherapist travelled with the team.

Mr. Karhun Nanda, a heart transplant recipient and golfer, was appointed by the team management as Team Captain and proved to be an invaluable asset. Mr. Vijaybahadur Yadav, a fantastic donor athlete was de facto coach while at the Games. He was also Donor Athlete of the Tournament at WTG 2023!

The athletes were from across India but concentrated in large cities in the North and South. Athletes from Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Delhi were represented in considerable numbers. Representation from Western states was less than was expected and sadly, there was no participation from the Eastern States.

Regrettably there was only 1 female recipient athlete, Meryn Paul from Kerala. This highlights both the disparity between female/male recipients as well as the under-representation of women in sports in India. Conversely, women were considerably well-represented in the donor category, with Ankita Shrivastava, Mili Tony, Deepa, and Maggie Paul, as women in India are massively over-represented when it comes to living donation. We also had a junior athlete for the first time ever! 13-year-old Varun Anand from Bangalore bagged 3 gold medals in tennis, table tennis and badminton!

#### Partners

Considerable financial support was required for the entire project. A major fundraising campaign proved fruitless. Eventually, several Trusts and corporate organizations like Dinesh Vyas Trust, Geekay Winding, To The New, and EXL came forward. Regrettably, no healthcare stakeholders supported the project.

To ensure the best allocation of any funds received, a Resource Allocation Committee was created to disburse funds consisting of ORGAN India representatives, a former national level athlete, transplant doctors, a sports journalist, and the Team Captain.

We were fortunate enough to find a partner for technical, nutritional, and psychological training in this endeavour, in the form of Dr. OP Bhalla Foundation and Manav Rachna Group of Institutions, through their dedicated Sports Science Center in Faridabad. Manav Rachna hosted 2 separate camps in August 2022 and March 2023. Around 20 athletes attended each camp.

The camps were invaluable as they also provided a meeting ground for team members to meet and bond prior to the Games. The Team India was a more cohesive unit, thanks to this opportunity.

### Visa Issues

After much documentation, 8 visas were refused, with the common reason that the applicant had failed to prove they would return to India. Team management urged the organizers to intervene with the Australian government. The organizers were extremely helpful and all 6 athletes who re-applied were granted visas. It's worth mentioning that all 6 came back with medals!

### Team Management

A 5-member coordination team from ORGAN India travelled with the athletes to provide logistical and administrative support to the athletes and ensured that an ORGAN India representative travelled with all athletes who were travelling for the first time. Team Management coordinated daily the transportation to and from venues for the athletes and barring one day, team managers were present at all the venues.

The team from ORGAN India included: Sunayana Singh (Country Representative), Shankar Arora (Team Manager), Anika Parashar (Chairperson,

Parashar Foundation), Aprajita Verma, Dr. Sourabh Sharma, Eeda Gujral Chopra, Inayat Puri, and Zoravar Singh.

Outreach and Public Relations – A social media and PR campaign was launched a year prior to the event, leveraging the considerable social media reach of ORGAN India to spread awareness about the Games. Pre-departure and post arrival press events were held where athletes and team management engaged with media persons.

There was a collaboration with Whistling Woods International, Mumbai to create a special team song, entitled 'Hissa Bann', sung by Raag Suri.

After 10 years of working relentless in the field, including extensive awareness activities throughout the country, we realized that people still view organ donation and transplant with some degree of uncertainty, and are largely unaware of the positive outcomes of organ donation and transplant. We felt India's successful and well-organized participation at the World Transplant Games would demonstrate the country that not only is organ donation a wonderful gift to others, but that transplant recipients can go on to lead extremely healthy, fit and happy lives. This aspect of organ donation needs to be highlighted and there was no better way than to do it through excellence in sports – an aspect of our lives which brings about feelings of patriotism, joy, and positivity.

Our 32 amazing athletes have done just that!



Master Varun bagged 3 gold medals at the WTG 2023

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Press event in Delhi



Dinoy & Karan – Athletic Events



Athletes from Team India

