

### ***Ekamra Sports Literature Festival's journey through 5 inspiring seasons***

In a homecoming of sorts, the fifth season of the Ekamra Sports Literature Festival returned to Bhubaneswar from where its journey began in 2018. The festival, now the world's largest sports literary gathering, has become a demonstration of the enduring power of storytelling, celebrating the intersection of literature and sports.

Season 5 unfolded in the heart of Bhubaneswar's iconic Kalinga Stadium Complex, marking yet another milestone in the festival's remarkable journey.

Festival director Sundeep Misra personally believes sports is best read.

“Five successful seasons and a sports literary platform that celebrates narratives woven around Indian sport - the Ekamra Sports Lit Fest has sparked conversations, challenged perspectives, and above all, created a community of athletes, authors, discerning audiences, and sports fans who love storytelling around sports. Personally, I believe sports is best read,” Sundeep Misra said.

### ***A Recognition of Excellence at the Sports Book Awards 2023***

The heart of this literary celebration lies in the Sports Book Awards.

“For me, the Sports Book Awards are the most exciting part of the Festival. We follow a very meticulous process that begins with jury selection and then involves working around a set of benchmarks that each book is judged against. To keep it completely above board, all the books are nominated by the publishers themselves,” Sundeep Misra added.

This year, Sohini Chattopadhyay's 'The Day I Became a Runner' claimed the prestigious title of Ekamra 'Sports Book of the Year.' It is an acknowledgment of its ability to bring the life of athletes, such as 3000m steeplechase Rio Olympics finalist Lalita Babar, vividly to the forefront.

Lalita just did not excel in sport, she succeeded in beating patriarchy, broke the stranglehold of suffocating social mores, and turned her back on all the jibes aimed at her as a young girl who took to running. Lalita broke down during the session as those emotions came cascading back. The audience applauded, celebrating her tears.

Amrit Mathur's 'PITCHSIDE – My Life in Indian Cricket' won 'Autobiography of the Year,' Sudipta Biswas' 'Tulsidas Balaram – The Boy. The Hero. The Tormented Footballer' won 'Biography of the Year,' and R Sridhar and R Kaushik's 'Coaching Beyond, My Days with the Indian Cricket Team' claimed 'Cricket Book of the Year.' Harper Collins was crowned the 'Best Sports Book Publisher of the Year.'

A special moment of recognition, the Special Jury Award, went to 'Grit – The Vishwas Story' by Vishwas KS, VR Feroze, and Sriram Jagannathan. It is an illustrated tribute to a para swimmer overcoming unimaginable hardships.

From a captivating opening session with former World Cup-winning coach Dav Whatmore to discussions on the potential of multi-million-dollar leagues featuring industry experts, Season 5 brought together a formidable panel to explore the nuances of the sports world.

Acclaimed filmmaker R Balki shared insights about his latest film 'Ghoomer' and expressed his desire to create a sports biopic on the late Indian cricket captain Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi.

The session on Potential of Multi-Million-dollar league had a formidable panel from around the country - Saroj Panigrahi (COO, Games 24x7), Shaji Prabhakaran (Secy Gen, AIFF), Abhijit Bhattacharya (Founder, Brahmaputra Volleyball League, Rishikesh Joshi, Founder of Sports For All (SFA).

Saroj Panigrahi felt fantasy sports are a great way for increasing popularity of sports. Abhijit Bhattacharya inspired the audience with his journey of building a unique platform for promoting rural talent through community participation without corporate sponsors.

Italian author Piero Trellini revisited the unforgettable Brazil vs. Italy 1982 World Cup final football match. The cup had Brazil's name written all over it but it was not to be. Trellini went into details why Italy won and how.

British cycling expert Daniel Friebe shed light on why he wrote a book on doping pariah Jan Ullrich, possibly one of the greatest cyclists in the world. Friebe shared why Ulrich did what he did, besides being a very close friend of Lance Armstrong.

The festival also provided a platform for former Indian football captains – Victor Amalraj and Shabbir Ali - to share their experiences and shed light on forgotten legends like Tulsidas Balaram, as featured in Sudipta Biswas's 'Tulsidas Balaram – The Boy. The Hero. The Tormented Footballer.'

A session centered around sports broadcaster Gaurav Gala's book, 'Awakening the Blue Tigers,' tackled complex issues surrounding football in the context of India qualifying for the World Cup. Gala hinted it might take India another 30 years to figure in a World Cup as it would take not just finding the best 11 but cultivating a pool of several lakh football players from whom the final team would emerge.

### ***The Evolution of Ekamra Sports Literature Festival***

The journey of the Ekamra Sports Literature Festival began in 2018 in Bhubaneswar, where 12 sessions and 50 speakers set the stage for what would become a grand celebration of sports literature.

From there, the festival expanded its horizons, moving to New Delhi in 2019, venturing across borders to Toronto in 2020, and embracing Gurugram in 2022.

Each season brought new dimensions, diverse voices, and a commitment to inclusivity.

The global pandemic posed a formidable challenge, but the festival shone through as it continued to champion the spirit of sports literature in the face of adversity.

As the festival unfolded in Bhubaneswar for its fifth season, it revisited the highlights of previous years. From engaging sessions with former Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson, Olympic swimmer Stephanie Rice, and Chelsea legend Pat Nevin to international forays that explored the thin white line of cricket's greatest scandal and the stories of Canada's top women athletes, each season left an indelible mark on the festival's evolving narrative.