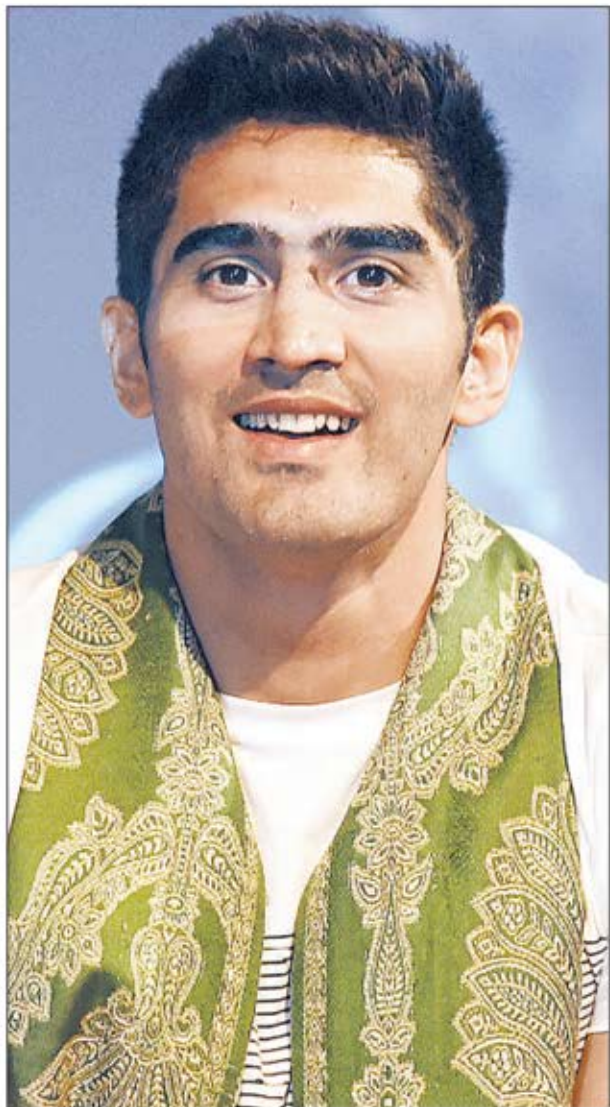


Indian boxers should do well in Jakarta, says the Olympic medallist

Hima Das should be given financial support: Vijender



Vijender Singh in the city on Tuesday. A Telegraph picture

A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta: Hima Das's gold medal-winning performance the IAAF World U-20 Championships in Tampere, Finland, has won her many accolades. But that is not enough, says Vijender Singh.

Hima sprinted to history when she became the first Indian athlete to win gold in a track event in a World Championship triumphing in the women's 400m. Hima registered a time of 51.46 seconds in the final at the Ratina Stadium in Tampere, following which she has been showered with praises by the entire nation, from the Prime Minister to Sachin Tendulkar to Virat Kohli.

But Vijender, who is himself an Olympic medallist, raised a different point.

"She did a great job... It's an amazing achievement," Vijender told reporters on the sidelines of an interactive session with the students of Newtown School, here on Tuesday.

But he was quick to add: "But people only congratulate her. There should be people who will support her financially. She comes from a poor family and she needs financial support.

Talking about his own experience prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, where he won a bronze medal, the 32-year-old boxer narrated how he qualified for the mega event at the very last moment and how hard he had to work for it.

"People had written me off as I made the cut at the last moment. It doesn't come easy, so I feel Hima's effort should be appreciated and she should be supported properly."

Speaking about the upcoming Asian Games, to be held in Jakarta this time, Vijender said: "The Indian boxers' prospect looks good... They should do well in Jakarta."

Vijender, who now fights professionally, was slated to take on Briton Lee Markham for the Commonwealth Super middleweight title but the latter got injured.

The fight was scheduled for July 13 and would have given Vijender a shot at his third title after having claimed the WBO Asia Pacific and Oriental Super Middleweight titles.

"We are planning to have the fight in September, but the dates have not been decided yet."

Asked about whether more boxers should turn pro, Vijender said: "After a certain age, I feel boxers should attempt the pro level. There are boxers who go to Olympics and Asian Games. But what about the rest? They can come to pro boxing. I am not saying that the cream should opt for pro boxing, but those who feel they can do well at pro level should definitely come."

Vijender, who turned to pro boxing in 2015, is ranked fourth in the WBO Super Middleweight category.

But what inspired him to

turn to pro boxing? "You see, I had medals at almost all levels... So I wanted to do something new. I wanted fresh challenges. Also, I get bored easily and that is why I have tried doing different things, like getting associated with cinema and television. I believe life is short and so one should try everything," he said.

However, he insisted that it is boxing that is does the best and enjoys. "Though I have tried so many things, it is boxing that I do best and enjoy the most."

When asked by a student what would he have been had he not been a boxer, Vijender said: "I am from Haryana, from where a lot of people join the army. So maybe I could have been in the Indian Army if I hadn't been a boxer."

While interacting with the students, Vijender said: "I spend a lot of time on training... But whenever I get time, I like love listening to music... Punjabi and Sufi music are my favourites."

Among other sports, Vijender likes watching football and tennis; and as far as his favourite cuisine is concerned, "it's continental".

He also revealed that he had seen quite a few matches of the just-concluded 2018 World Cup in Russia. But which team did he support?

"Oh, it had to be England... You see I am based in Manchester, so I can't support any other team," he said with a smile.