

THE UNIFYING BEAUTY OF THE OLYMPICS

A recap of the most memorable moments from **Rio 2016 Olympics**

Coalesce 2016

A lot of us will wonder today about the peculiar title of this article. While writing it, we were looking for a word that captures the essence of what the month of August 2016 brought to the world. And there wasn't a more apt word than something that means "to unite so as to form one mass, community or movement". The Games of the XXXI Olympiad were symbolic of just that. A pure, unadulterated and coalescent movement of sport, that brought together billions of people around the globe through 11,000 athletes, from 207 National Olympic Committees across 28 Olympic Sport Disciplines. That is the behemoth power of Sport.

A more relevant scale of measuring the ripples caused by Rio 2016 would be to look at the social media impressions alone. Over 187 million tweets were sent about the Games and in total, this led to 75 billion impressions (views on and off Twitter) of tweets about the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. Over 277 million people across the globe had 1.5 billion interactions related to the Olympic Games on Facebook, making it one of the "most social and interactive events" to date.

These are not just numbers. These are clear indicators of the magic and the thrill that actively engages billions across the globe. And more importantly, indicators that a nation like India sat up to watch a badminton match like it were some Cricket Cup finals.

Pertinent to note that Rio 2016 saw the biggest contingent from India and there was a projection of at least 10 medals being brought back home. But a reality check shows us that they won only a bronze, a silver and a billion hearts. Because disappointment only means that they tried, did not give up and caused ripples of change. While the national media and sport "experts" and opinion leaders now get down to the postmortem of our performances, often breathless, apportion blame, and then remain silent till the next Olympics, we shall quickly take a few moments here to highlight the amazingly heart-warming, unforgettable, less written about and unique highlights that this Rio 2016 held.



The Bolt in Slo-Mo:

The most talked about picture at Rio 2016 couldn't have been a better picture than this. The fastest man on earth sailed into yet another final for a gold medal in this race for the semi-finals for the men's 100m sprint and made it look like a walk in the park while the others struggled to even keep up.

#OneWorld #OneRio:

This year Kosovo, still officially part of Serbia, made its Olympic debut with eight athletes after the IOC recognized its bid for independent status. But this summer, one group's participation, doubtlessly outshined even Kosovo's historic inclusion. The first ever refugee team participated at the games in Rio, representing not a country, but the 65 million people displaced (internally, or outside their country) by war and persecution. The ten athletes represented Syria, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Despite overcoming unimaginable hardships on their way to Rio, all of the athletes share an ardent desire that their refugee status not define them. "We still are humans," said Yusra Mardini, 18, a heroic swimmer from Syria who last year helped drag a sinking boat full of fellow refugees to safety. "We are not only refugees; we are like everyone in the world."



Defying Physics- The Biles Routine

It doesn't take a veteran to rewrite rules of physics. It only takes a 19 year old gymnast all packed in a small, powerful and swift package called Simone Biles. With 5 medals in Rio 2016, she has already been called the best gymnast ever in the history because of her physics defying "Biles" triple layout routine. We believe that words will not do justice to the mind-boggling science behind it, so heres a video to understand why this 19 year old has left the world spell-bound.

The Silver Queen

While the nation celebrated P. V. Sindhu and her amazing journey to the country's first silver in badminton, a lesser seen but powerfully touching moment happened on the courts of the Women's Singles Finals during Rio 2016. Carolina Marin shouted and screamed in joy and flung her racquet to the side of the court before kneeling down in absolute joy over winning the Gold against Sindhu. As the world looked on and celebrated, a humbled but proud Sindhu walked over to Marin, helped her stand up on the ground, congratulated her and then walked away to let her soak in her victory. The world saw this gesture that is commonplace in the world of sport and in the spirit of camaraderie. What a lot of people missed was the absolute respect to the sport that Sindhu brought through the rarest of the gestures. She quietly lifted Marin's racquet lying on the court, walked over to Marin's bag and placed it next to it. This shows how much she respects her sport, and how much she respects her opponents. Absolutely befitting the qualities of a queen.



No Hope for Solo losers!

U.S. goalkeeper Hope Solo scored an own goal when she flipantly tweeted about the risks of the Zika virus before the Olympics. She greatly expanded her legions of critics by insulting the Swedish team immediately after they ousted the top-ranked Americans.

"I'm very proud of this team. But I also think we played a bunch of cowards. The best team did not win today. I think you saw American heart. You saw us give everything we had today," Solo told reporters. "Sweden dropped off. They didn't want to open play. They didn't want to pass the ball. They didn't want to play great soccer. I don't think they're going to make it far in the tournament," she added. "I think it was very cowardly."

Sweden won silver. Team USA went home without a medal for the first time in history.

Miss Congeniality

If a poll were to be taken for the most popular athlete in the games, Chinese swimmer Fu Yuanhui would win hands down. The 20 year old caught everyone's attention with a TV interview where she expressed shock that she'd qualified for the final of the 100 meter backstroke. "I was really that fast?" the expressive Fu said when an interviewer from China's CCTV5 told her how well she'd done. She only got better after that, explaining she had "expended her primordial energies" to swim so fast, a quote that quickly went viral. Her gleeful, infectious energy was in sharp contrast to the stoicism of most Chinese athletes. She was certainly the first to discuss the pain of swimming during her menstrual period. Then she surprised herself again by winning a bronze in the final of the 100 meter backstroke. More exuberance ensued, and she was soon being followed by millions on Weibo, China's version of Twitter.



The 400 mt. gold dive

In perhaps the most memorable moment from these Olympics, Shaunae Miller prevented Allyson Felix from adding to her legacy by diving head-first into the finish line in the 400 meter final. "The Dive," as it has become known, was immediately put under a microscope with many believing Miller's fall shouldn't have been allowed even though it was perfectly legal. Either way, it made for a thrilling finish and one that will forever be remembered.

America's Hijab

It's no surprise that Ibtihaj Muhammad almost edged out Michael Phelps as the flag-bearer for the United States in the opening ceremony. Not only did she become the first American athlete ever to wear hijab at the Olympics, she also became the first American to win a medal while wearing a hijab when she helped Team USA defeat Italy for the bronze medal in the women's sabre. Beyond her Olympic success, Muhammad is fully aware of her impact on a global scale and is excited to "challenge the stereotypes and misconceptions people have about Muslim women."



While there are hundreds of stories that warm the heart and inspire, the message from them all is one-Sport is the greatest unifier in the world.

During the Miss Universe pageant of 1993, Madhu Sapre was representing India on the global stage and when it came to the final round of Q&A, she was posed with a question about the first thing she would do if she became the leader of the country. Pat came the reply from the 20 year old athlete-that she would set up the biggest and the best of sports infra facilities. She didn't win the crown, was ridiculed by our nation and the world at large. But in retrospect, she probably made more sense than any contestant had ever. Because, if the children of today are brought up with a sporting culture embedded in them, the youth of tomorrow will surely make the world a better place to live in.

Before we go, here's an interesting video that will make us reflect on how it's not the Olympians who have evolved. It's the sport that has.

<http://qz.com/757648/it-isnt-olympians-who-have-evolved-its-sports/>