

Expect two more Boxers to Qualify for Olympics: Sandhu



Gurbax Singh Sandhu

NEW DELHI: India's long-serving boxing coach Gurbax Singh Sandhu expects two more of his wards to make the cut for London Olympics from the Asian qualifying event in April after four of them booked their berths in last year's World Championships.

Four Indian boxers -- L Devendro Singh (49kg), Jai Bhagwan (60kg), Manoj Kumar (64kg) and Vikas Krishan (69kg) -- qualified for the Games by making the quarterfinals of the last year's World Championships.

Sandhu said two more should join the quartet during the April 4 to 13 Asian Olympic Qualifiers to be held in Astana, Kazakhstan.

At best, India can qualify for six more slots as there are 10 weight categories in all but Sandhu said he wants to keep the expectations at a realistic level.

"Ideally, I would want all six of my boys who would go to Astana to qualify but realistically, I am aiming for two slots and hoping that my boys would exceed my expectations like always," said Sandhu without elaborating on the weight categories he has pinned his hopes on.

Talking about the Olympic build up, Sandhu said the emphasis would be on ensuring that the boys get as much international exposure as possible so that they are familiar with their likely opponents in London.

"We will be going to Germany and Czech Republic in March for competition-cum-exposure trips. These are not important medal wise, the emphasis here would be to get as good practice against international boxers. It is basically a confidence-building exercise," he explained.

On being asked that, if on the downside, such exposure trips cause injury problems, Sandhu said, "No boxer is without injury. Minor niggles are always there but yes if the team doctors feel that a particular problem might get aggravated by competing, we will rest the guy."

"For them, except for the Olympics, every tournament is a sparring opportunity and they should not feel any pressure," he added.

"By competing in these exposure trips, the boys themselves would get a fair idea of their strengths and weaknesses and that would ensure that the plans are in place when they step into the ring in London."

The national camp will also continue till the day the qualified boxers catch the flight to London.

"The camp will not break but the guys who have qualified will get time off in between," he said.