

HOME » NEWS » SPORTS » HOW AVANI LEKHARA PREPARED FOR TOKYO PARALYMPICS WITH ELECTRONIC GADGETS AT LAKSHYA SHOOTING CLUB

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## How Avani Lekhara Prepared for Tokyo Paralympics With Electronic Gadgets at Lakshya Shooting Club

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Avani Lekhara on the podium after winning bronze in women's 50m rifle 3P SH1

Avani Lekhara clinched bronze in women's 50m rifle 3P SH1 and gold in the women's 10m Air Rifle Standing SH1, to become the first woman and second Indian to win two medals at a single Paralympics.

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**P**ara shooter Avani Lekhara clinched her second medal of the Tokyo Paralympics with a bronze in the women's 50m rifle 3P SH1 event on Friday. The 19-year-old Avani had earlier won the gold medal in women's 10m Air Rifle Standing SH1 with a world record equalling score of 249.6. This was India's second medal of the day after Praveen Kumar bagged silver medal in men's T64 high jump.

Avani finished with a total score of 445.9 to finish at third place and take the bronze medal. This is India's 12th medal at the ongoing Tokyo Paralympics. She also became the first woman and second Indian after Joginder Singh Bedi to win more than one medal in the same edition of the Paralympics.

The 50m Rifle Prone 3 Positions at the Paralympics is conceptually similar to the more popular Olympic event for able-bodied shooters. The concept of the three position as per the Paralympic website is as follows: "The rules regarding the three shooting positions are adjusted for athletes with impairments. For example, a wheelchair or shooting chair position can be used instead of standing. Athletes who use a wheelchair may employ a sling on the non-trigger arm to bring the gun closer to them and improve stability. In the kneeling position, an athlete shooting from a wheelchair or shooting chair can rest the elbow of their non-trigger arm on a stand."



Indian flag being hoisted in Tokyo

While conceptually the Olympic and Paralympic 3 Position events are similar, the actual execution is from the seating position, like Avani does.

Suma Shirur, under whom Avani has been training at the Lakshya Shooting Club since early 2018, is more familiar with coaching the normal shooters. For her to coach Avani at Para events, Suma had to learn the nuances of it. Suma designed a special 15m simulated Megalink 3D Score Electronic targets. Suma says: "This novel system was developed by Megalink for multiple Olympic gold medallist Niccolò Campriani way back in his university days in the United States. His college did not have a proper 50m range but had a multi-purpose hall that was 15m long. It is well known by now that the Norwegian company developed the 15m target to simulate the 50m distance and the size of the .22 bullet. The masterstroke worked wonders and was a great training tool for Niccolò. The rest is history as we know that he won the 3 Position gold medals in both London 2012 and Rio 2016.



Avani Lekhara and her coach Suma Shirur

“Lakshya Shooting Club also has employed the same targets and the likes of Avani Lekhara, Aishwary Pratap Tomar and Sunidhi Chauhan have been training on this novel system and reaping its benefits. This training system allows me to have a close look at my wards under controlled indoor conditions and is extremely beneficial for fine tuning. Once the shooter perfects the technique under controlled conditions, the next step is to become adept at managing the effects of wind in external conditions that can be done only in a regular outdoor 50m range. But what the 15m novel target does is that it helps in consolidating the technique without external weather influences. The shooter has no scope of blaming the wind and every single shot gives true feedback to the coach.”

Riding high on Avani’s twin successes and feeling proud of Suma’s achievement as a coach is Siddharth Shirur, Suma’s husband and secretary of Lakshya Shooting Club. “Though Avani hails from Jaipur, her connection with Navi Mumbai runs deep because of her frequent visits for imbibing high performance training from Suma. The connection was not known to many Navi Mumbai residents. This double medal-winning feat by Avani and Suma’s presence in Tokyo, has already created a buzz in the city and it is getting ready to welcome the coach in style on her return from Tokyo.



Avani Lekhara speaking to the media

“As far as Lakshya Shooting Club is concerned, all its shooters are over the moon already with this double delight and have planned a major celebration for their beloved coach Suma on her return. It’s a different matter that the coach will be getting ready for her back-to-back third National duty as she will be leading the Indian Junior Rifle team as the chief coach in the upcoming ISSF Junior World Championships in Lima, Peru later this month.”

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