

## **KIWG 2026: Army retain ice-hockey gold, Chandigarh win hearts; Haryana emerge overall champions, hosts Ladakh finish No. 2**

Ladakh skater Skarma Tsultim wins highest four medals (2 golds); Ishaan Darvekar (Maharashtra), Nayana Sri Talluri (Telangana) and Sachin Singh (Haryana) finish with two golds each

Leh (Ladakh), Jan. 26: The fancied Indian Army team had to summon all its experience to squeeze past spirited Chandigarh 3-2 to keep their men's Khelo India Winter Games ice-hockey gold medal at the NDS Stadium on Republic Day. The Army match-winner came with just three minutes left on the clock and the Ladakh leg of KIWG 2026 could not have asked for a better and thrilling ending.

Haryana won the team championship title of the Ladakh phase of KIWG 2026, thanks to the four golds won by their figure and ice-skaters. Ladakh, Maharashtra and Telangana each won two golds each but were separated by the number of silver medals they won. Ladakh (5 silvers), Maharashtra (3 silvers) and Telangana (2 silvers) finished in that order on the medal standings.

The Chandigarh men's ice-hockey team became the talk of the town after they stunned hosts Ladakh 3-2 in the semifinals on Saturday. For a team that started playing ice hockey in KIWG 2025, Chandigarh's entry into the final was indeed creditable. Against Army, Chandigarh proved that the win against Ladakh was no fluke. To come back from two goals down and then almost force extra time was simply amazing. Interestingly, Chandigarh had lost 10-1 against Army in the league stage.

NDS Stadium perhaps celebrated Republic Day like never before. The 5000-capacity new-look stadium with a covered roof was full more than an hour before the ice-hockey final was scheduled to start. Army scored first in the sixth minute when Padma Namgail's long-range flick found its mark. In the 10th minute of the first period, Tsewang Dorjaj added the insurance with another firm push that found the far corner.

But Chandigarh did not throw in the towel. The second period did not produce any goals. Chandigarh played clean hockey and unlike most games that see a lot of physical play, the final was clean and attractive from a skills point of view.

Chandigarh stormed back in the final quarter. Chandigarh scored twice in three minutes. With eight minutes to go, Gurtej Singh Bhatti broke the Army defence and then Birshahaanjit Singh made it 2-2 with a deft flick after coming from behind the Army goal. The referees awarded the goal to Chandigarh after reviewing it for more than 10 minutes.

Stunned by Chandigarh's fightback, Army then raised its game and attacked the Chandigarh goal from all directions. The only time the Chandigarh defence lowered its guard, Padma Norboo found the match-winner, once again with a long-ranger.

"I think that we are the winners. It was truly an exceptional experience, and everything happened by the grace of God. This journey has meant a lot to us. We promise to work even harder next time, train with more dedication, and fight for trophies at the state level and beyond," said Chandigarh's head coach Gaurav Raheja.

Goal scorer Birshahaanjit, said: "I have been playing inline hockey for the past eight years, and that experience has given me great confidence in my skating, dribbling and puck-control skills. I believe I was able to demonstrate that control on the rink today. This is only my second year competing on ice. Last year, our team finished in fifth place, and I feel we have made significant progress since then. I am confident that next year we will be playing for the gold medal."

Padma Namgail, who scored the first goal for Army, admitted his team were under pressure after Chandigarh made it 2-2 in the last few minutes of the game. "Frankly speaking, we didn't expect them to be this good. They played really well but again, we were also not at our best today. It happens when you play against less experienced teams. Against ITBP, we took no chances. But compliments to what Chandigarh did today," he told SAI Media.

Republic Day action at the NDS Stadium began with the 2000 metres short track mixed relay heats. The mixed relay sees the best speed skaters in action and all six teams lined up their best combination. The teams were divided into two groups of three each with the best three qualifying for the final.

At least three skaters – Nayana Sri Talluri (Telangana), Skarma Tsultim (Ladakh) and Sachin Singh (Haryana) – were in contention for their third gold medal of KIWG 2026. But Telangana and Tamil Nadu were disqualified from Heat No. 1 and Haryana finished last in Heat No. 2.

The final saw three teams in fray – Maharashtra, Ladakh and Karnataka. Maharashtra had the strongest line-up and that reflected in their performance. The quartet led by Ishaan Darvekar, Anvayee Deshpande, Sohan Tarkar and Schaleen Fernandes – emerged deserving winners with a timing of 3:22.47 seconds. Hosts Ladakh, led by the speedy Skarma started well but finally settled for the silver (3:29.34 sec). The Karnataka quartet ran within their limits and were happy to win the bronze.

At the end of the ice-skating competition, Ladakh's Skarma Tsultim finished with four medals (golds in 1000m long track and relay women; silver in 500m long track and mixed relay); Maharashtra's Darvekar (two golds) and Deshpande (one gold) finished with three medals each while Nayana, who had a hattrick of gold medals in KIWG 2025, finished with two individual golds this time. Sachin Singh of Haryana also finished with two golds.

"Compared to the previous five editions, the overall standard of ice skating improved noticeably. Individual performances showed better timing, technique and consistency. In the men's events, skaters like Muthakani Vishnu Vardhan (Telangana) and Sachin Singh (Haryana) delivered strong individual performances, with impressive timing and race execution. Among the women, Nayana and Skarma stood out with consistent and competitive performances," observed national coach Mohammad Abbas Nordak.

"The next step is to nurture these talented skaters. They must get support, exposure and opportunities to compete internationally. Participation in overseas tournaments will help them gain experience, understand higher competition levels and prepare for international events," added Abbas to SAI Media.

#### MONDAY'S RESULTS

Ice-skating: (2000m short track mixed relay) 1. Maharashtra (Ishaan Darvekar, Anvayee Deshpande, Sohan Tarkar, Schaleen Fernandes) 3:22.47 secs 2. Ladakh (Skarma Tsultim, Stanzin Jampal, Tasnia Shameem, Mohammed Saquaf Raza) 3:29.34 secs 3. Karnataka (GV Raghavendra, Srija S Rao, Omkara Yogaraj, Sahasra Nellaturi) 3:57.01 seconds.

Ice-hockey final (men): Army beat Chandigarh 3-2.

