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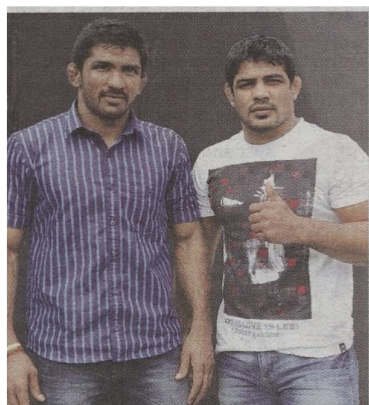
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Sushil and Yogeshwar seek support for wrestling



Yogeshwar Dutt and Sushil Kumar in the Capital on Thursday PARVEEN NEGI

By **Soumalya Santikari** in New Delhi

THE proposal to exclude wrestling from the 2020 Olympic Games has evoked strong reactions from sporting and political circles. On Thursday, Olympic medalists Sushil Kumar and Yogeshwar Dutt called on all Indians to back their efforts to get the sport back into the fold.

"The wrestlers should not panic. The whole country is with us and this campaign will help the people express their solidarity with us. Wrestling's removal from the 2020 Games will ruin the prospects of budding grapplers as their only dream is to win a medal at the Olympics," Sushil said on the launch of Mountain Dew's campaign 'Push for Wrestling'.

"The move will hurt India the most as we are an emerging power in the sport. The next IOC meeting is very crucial and if Japan wins the bid to host the 2020 Games, then it will push for wrestling's inclusion" Sushil, who won a bronze in

Beijing (2008) and a silver in London four years later, said.

But India's greatest grappler is not thinking on the lines of several Bulgarian and Russian wrestlers, who have returned their Olympic medals protesting the snub and said that there are other ways to make their feelings known.

Say dropping the sport from Olympics will hurt India most

"A lot of hard work and sacrifice goes behind winning an Olympic medal. I don't think returning the medal is the right form of protest. But I am confident that wrestling will be back because of its massive following," said Sushil, the only Indian to win back-to-back individ-

ual medals in Olympics.

Yogeshwar, who won bronze at the 2012 Games, however, was more vocal and said that he was ready to return his medal if it ensures the sport stays in the Olympic programme. "For me, the Olympics don't mean anything if wrestling is not there. I am ready to return my medal if it helps to keep the sport in the Olympics. Whatever we have achieved is because of the game and I'm willing to sacrifice the medal for its sake," Yogeshwar said.

When pointed out that squash's Olympic bid was being promoted by celebrities, Sushil said several politicians have thrown their weight behind wrestling and he was satisfied with the response. "Many personalities have supported wrestling's cause and I'm satisfied with that," Sushil said.

Wrestling has to fend off competition from squash, softball, baseball, karate, sport climbing, wakeboarding, wushu and roller sports for one spot at the 2020 Olympics.