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I will go for gold in Olympics: Sushil

NEW DELHI, May 9 (PTI): He might have qualified after two missed opportunities but Beijing Olympics bronze medallist Sushil Kumar today said his confidence never wavered during the rough phase and the grappler is now eyeing a gold in the London Games.

Sushil put Indian wrestling on the world map after winning the bronze at Beijing four years ago. In 2010, he stamped his authority by clinching the World Championship title in the 66 kg freestyle competition at Moscow, Russia.

However, what followed was a series of poor performance as he first failed to defend his title at the 2011 World Championship and then could not qualify for the London Games at the Asian qualification event last month.

But Sushil finally answered his critics when he earned his ticket to London, winning the gold medal at the World Qualifier in Taiyuan, China — to make his third successive appearance at the mega event.

"There was never any pressure on me. If I think about pressure I won't be able to perform. I just believe in working hard. I will give my best and I am confident of doing better than last Olympics," said Sushil, who beat 2008 Beijing bronze medallist Tushishvili Otar 3-0 on his way to a gold at China.

"I had injured my shoulder and couldn't perform but the coaches knew that I can do well in China. I believed in myself and knew that I will get well. Everybody around me kept saying that I will qualify and it kept me motivated," he said on the sidelines of the unveiling of a docu series 'Travelling with the PROS' by model-turned actor Bikram Saluja.

Sushil's coach Yashvir Singh, who received Federation of International Wrestling (FILA) Coach of the Year award for 2010, said his performance dwindled mainly because of injury and felt his qualifying late won't affect him in London.

"There was a one-year gap between CWG and 2011 World Championship in Istanbul and before Asian Olympic Qualifiers in Kazakhstan, he was injured, so he couldn't perform. I don't think his qualifying late will affect his chances. His competitors also qualified late," he said.

"We have two and a half months to go for the Olympics and we are planning to go to Colorado, USA in June as it is in high altitude and it will help the wrestlers. In July, we will train at Belarus. We had earlier trained there before the World Championship," he said.

Asked if any technical changes have been made in Sushil's game, Yashvir said: "Our prime target was qualifying for Olympics after he didn't do well in 2011 World Championship. So we changed his technique a bit.

"But now that he has qualified we will study the videos of his competitors and accordingly form a strategy of attack, defence or counter-attack. So basically style will remain the same but strategy will be opponent-specific," he said.

Talking about Sushil's prime competitors, Yashvir said: "There is an Iranian wrestler (Mehdi Taghavi). He is the 2011 World Champion. Sushil has never met him, but others from Japan and Azerbaijan, he has played and won and lost both."

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