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Game Design

Architect Manish Gulati tells us why designing a spiffy sports complex in India is a whole new ball game...

Utilitarian designs have long defined sports architecture in India. But winds of change have been blowing in recent years, with the newer sports facilities opting for sophisticated designs, technologies with multiple sports services and recreational spaces. "Apart from the need to keep up with international trends, this shift has become necessary to make these venues sustainable," says **Manish Gulati, Principal Architect, M:OFA Studios**. Delhi-based M:OFA (Manifestation of Fluid

Architecture) has planned and designed sports cities, stadiums and academies, as also multiple grassroots level sports infrastructure facilities in the country's interiors. The list includes Dewas Indoor stadium, Dewas; MP Shooting Academy, Bhopal; MP Equestrian Academy, Bhopal; National Institute of Water Sports, Goa and Satgarhi Sports City, Bhopal.

Besides sports complexes, M:OFA has handled projects in other sectors too. At M:OFA,

The trend of integrating several facilities in a sports stadium to make it sustainable is seen at the MP State Multi-Sports Stadium, Dewas.



The MP State Multi-Disciplinary Sports Complex in Gwalior uses local materials like Agra red sand stone and Gwalior *jaalis* with aluminum and glass, while local hardy plants are used for landscaping.



Architect Manish Gulati



Instead of creating obvious blocks for various ranges, the National Shooting Academy, Bhopal uses a flow of dynamic forms which merge, and a material palette that includes RCC, steel, reclaimed wood for baffles, kota and *kadappa* stones.





Designed under the guidance of former badminton player Pullela Gopichand, the MP State Indoor Badminton Stadium, Gwalior was built with materials that are low on maintenance and high on durability.

architectural realms are redefined. Says Gulati, "Architecture, in this context, becomes a more fluid expression continuously throbbing with life. Here the walls bend, column grids twist and the floors rise up and fall responding to the ever-changing energy fields created by the life forms it houses. We treat architecture as a living organism that changes, adapts itself and responds to every change around it." M: OFA's team also includes **Abhinav Chaudhary, Associate Architect and Tanushree Gulati, Principal Planner.**

Here, Manish Gulati shares with JANAKI KRISHNAMOORTHY his views and experiences regarding sports architecture...

Q How has designing sports complexes changed over the years in India?

As India begins to accord more importance to sporting achievement and aspires to achieve excellence, sports complexes in India are also beginning to adopt international standards. Earlier, such facilities were unavailable at the grassroot level. Today,

the government provides them at district levels too.

Sports architecture is a specialised field. Before we started designing the stadiums, we researched for about 18 months, understanding guidelines and codes specified by every sports federation, for every official game in the world. This knowledge, combined with our experience within the government environs, helped us in designing and building the stadiums with indigenous techniques and materials.

Q What are the latest trends emerging in sports architecture internationally? Is India keeping pace?

The international trend is to build sports arenas as a community space, with added activities like food courts, sports clubs and other recreational facilities. Such combined amenities lead to increased usage and easier maintenance of the stadium. Indian sports arenas too are trying to keep pace with these international trends. Many stadiums that

host national and international tournaments are being designed with amenities like media room, cafeteria, sports shops etc. Jaypee Sports city, Noida, Raipur Sports City, Ludhiana, Dumurjola Sports city, Kolkata, and our own project Sports City at Satgarhi Village, Bhopal are typical examples of this trend. In the project at Satgarhi, we have integrated all activities to ensure that the stadium becomes sustainable.

Sustainability makes good business sense as it tends to lower overheads and combine resources. Hence, sports stadiums should not be developed for single sports and used only during tournaments and matches. Instead, they should be designed for multiple sports activities. Related retail spaces, food courts, gymnasium, cultural performance spaces, movie shows, health clubs and training centres for amateurs should also be included. This will keep the venue alive as it will be used throughout the year, and will generate revenues for maintenance and upkeep.

Q What are the factors that play a key role in arriving at architectural design for sports

complexes? Are there any pre-set parameters?

High durability would be the primary focus of architectural design. Next is finishing that is lasting, and structures that are low on maintenance and can withstand vandalism, as sports often arouse passion. Lighting has to be done keeping in mind the media coverage, as a HD TV broadcast will require up to 2,500-3,000 lux, while as per the sports norm the requirement may be only 1076 lux.

There are no pre-set parameters or designs. The project, its requirements and its concerns give shape to the design. Project designs which emerge from an understanding of the project's unique parameters, age and fare better.

Q From the design angle, what combination of sports works well when a multi-purpose stadium is being developed and why?

It all boils down to playing conditions and court sizes required. While an athletic stadium can take care of all athletics, track and

Meet the architect

Manish Gulati

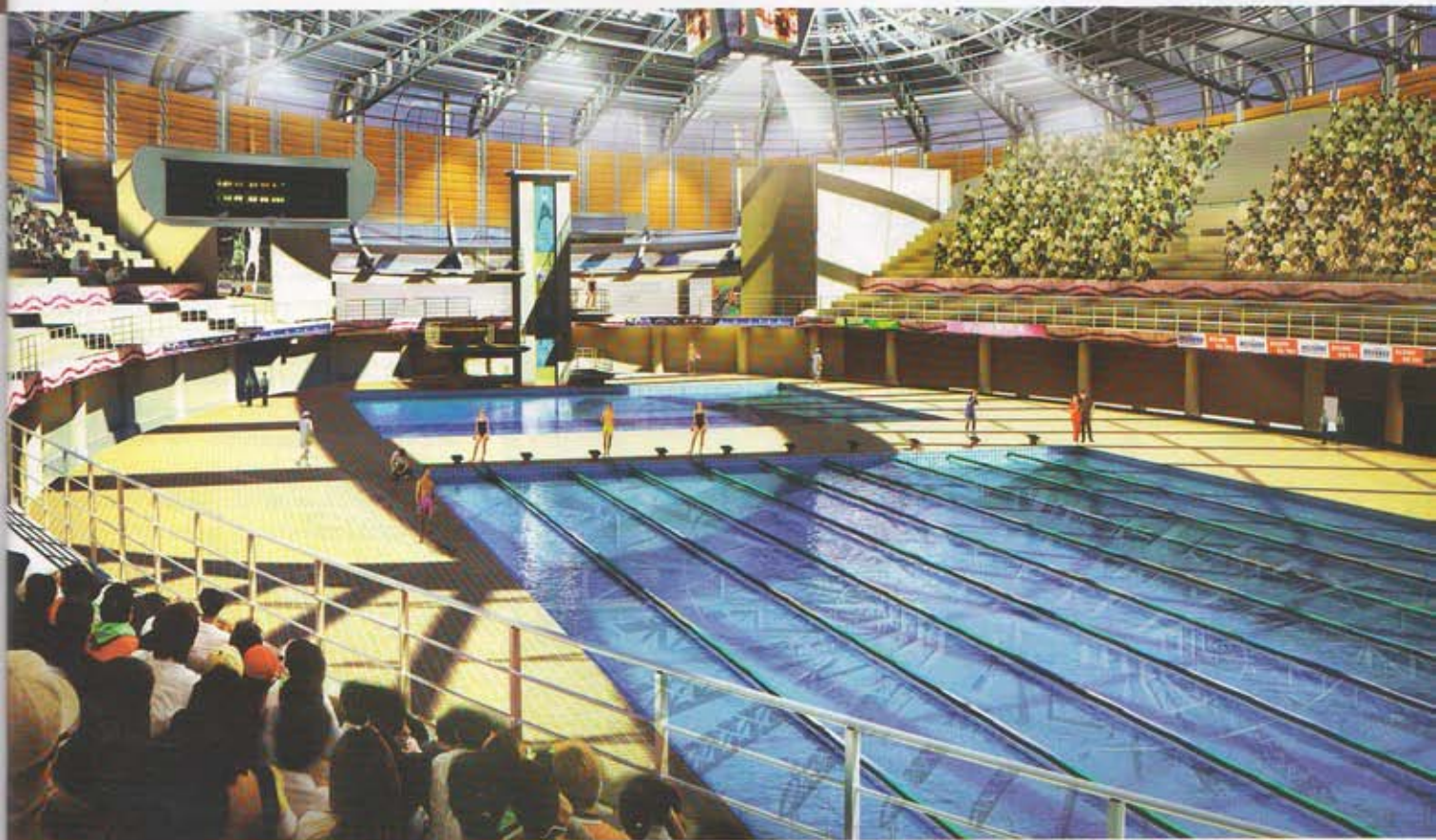
FIRM: M:OFA Studios, founded in 2007.

FIRM SPECIALISATION: Comprehensive architectural design consultancy, interior design, urban design/planning and supervision

DESIGN PHILOSOPHY: Going beyond grids, dimensions and principles and redefining architecture with fluid expressions that throb with vibrations of life

FAVOURITE ARCHITECT/DESIGNER: Le Corbusier.

This event pool is a part of the Aquatic centre in Satgarhi Sports City in Bhopal, and is developed with several other sports and recreational facilities to keep the venue alive throughout the year and generate revenue for its upkeep.



Bottom

The MP State Equestrian Academy, Bhopal balances design challenges that need to balance the needs of the horses and the participants with myriad facilities like indoor arena, dressage arena, show jumping arena, polo ground, horse stables, groom quarters, hostel facilities, etc.

Below

With a continuous river in the northern and southern edge, the Satgarhi Sports City though planned in three parts, was integrated and made contiguous through landscaping and a 12 mt road.

field sports, football or hockey facilities, an indoor stadium can host squash, volleyball, badminton, basketball, gymnastics, table tennis, etc as their requirement vis-à-vis light conditions, court sizes, spectators' area are similar. In some countries, there are multi-purpose stadiums wherein the entire football floor slides out or down to make way for a hockey field or a track and field event!

Q What challenges do architects encounter while designing sports venues in India?

Cost is a major concern; the key challenge is to provide the best infrastructure with inspiring designs while ensuring that the costs and technology are both affordable and implementable in India. The technology used in sports structures is highly sophisti-

cated, requiring precision engineering and execution, and to do so with minimal costs, resources and improvisation in technology is another big challenge.

Q What new materials have had an impact on the architecture of sports structures?

Tensile fabric as roofing material, with its large span capacity, is ideal for covering large areas like sports stadia. It is light weight and provides flexibility in shaping the roof. It allows the entry of diffused daylight, and shelters the interior from the harsh sun. Lighting can be incorporated in the roof itself, thus eliminating the conventional high-mast lighting system, which would create multiple shadows on the playing field.

Q Of all the sports projects created by M:OFA, which has been the most challenging project and why?

Sports City at Satgarhi Village, Bhopal, has been the most challenging project so far. Here, we had to design not just the stadiums but also the housing and a commercial hub around it. We had to integrate food courts, retail, clubs, other recreational facilities and car parking facilities to make the project economically viable. We also had to make the feasibility report, study and design the facility norms and bye-laws for the international level stadium that met all the requirements and technicalities. Then we had to decide on the specifications, select materials, technology and design. The biggest challenge was to work within a modest budget without compromising on the design, durability and sustainability.

Sports architecture in India is evolving and trying to keep pace with international trends despite several constraints. As evinced by Gulati, the sustainability factor will perhaps prove to be all important for propelling the movement forward. **i**



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