

Press Release

Karnataka's Srihari, Gujarat's Maana among big guns at KIYG swimming competition

Pune, Jan 9: Srihari Nataraj has fond memories from the Khelo India School Games pool in Delhi last year but, having taken part in three major events for the country since then, the strapping backstroke specialist from Karnataka will look to show how much he has evolved as a competitor.

"I have not participated in a competition since the Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires in October and my coach and I believe it is important to stay in competitive trim," he said after a training session on a chilly Wednesday morning at the warm-up pool in the Shiv Chhatrapati Sports Complex in Balewadi.

"This is my favourite pool, though Thiruvananthapuram and Bhopal are faster."

The Bengaluru lad sets the bar high, seeking to improve his personal best each time he enters the pool. "It will be no different this time," he said, eager to keep his place among the country's elite athletes and remain in his quest to win a medal for the country in the Asian Games in 2022. He added, "I know I can win a medal, after making it to the 100m and 200m finals in Jakarta."

Srihari set the Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Swimming Pool Complex ablaze at KISG2018 winning six gold and a silver medal. The 17-year-old went on to stamp his presence as India's brightest talent when he made it to the 100m backstroke semi-finals of the Commonwealth Games and was first reserve ahead of the 50m backstroke final.

Another swimmer who will be in the limelight is Gujarat's Maana Patel, the Ahmedabad-based backstroke specialist. Having returned to competitive trim after rehabilitation from an injury, she has already shown that she will be hard to beat.

Maana will use the competition here to prepare for international meets later this year in her quest to qualify for the Tokyo Olympic Games.

Many participants in the Under-17 category have the experience of competing in this pool, at the National Junior Championship last April. With the KIYG being divided in two categories – Under-21 and Under-17 – the latter will be pleased they will not have to race against their seniors.

The KIYG Organising Committee overcame the absence of specific data for Under-21 swimmers by allotting higher quotas to the States that have a richer tradition in the sport.

"It was the best solution since we do not have events for youth (U-21) in the country," said Kamlesh Nanavati, Secretary of the Swimming Federation of India.