

Press Release

Government schemes, dedicated coaches and supporting parents pave the way for small-town kho-kho talents

Pune, January 17: The Gujarat's Under-17 Girls team may have won only a bronze medal, but their story is as inspiring as any winner, if not more. At these ongoing Khelo India Youth Games, four of the kho-kho players in the Gujarat Under-17 Girls team hail from a remote village called Sampra in Gujarat.

The foursome Chandrika, Rekha, Lasi and Sonal, had a pleasant surprise waiting for them. The organisers have arranged for their parents to come over to Pune to see their medal matches at the KIYG 2019.

Two of them, Chandrika and Rekha had shown the way a year ago, when they were part of the Gujarat's under-17 girls team that won a silver at the Khelo India School Games last year.

These girls have found immense support from their parents who broke the barriers of a conservative society and gave their children the freedom to pursue their dreams. One of the parents said, "This is the first time we have travelled out of Gujarat, and we are grateful that it was to watch our children compete in a top-level event such as this."

These young kho-kho players of Sampra Primary School are beneficiaries of the 'In-school programme' scheme run by the Gujarat Government, that works with schools from talukas and spots talented athletes who are then nurtured. The scheme now has 251 schools and almost 139,000 athletes who are included in the same.

The Gujarat Government has also launched specific schemes with a focus on women empowerment in sport, having upto 40% reservation for female athletes who wish to pursue a career in sport. "We also fund entire course fees for women who wish to pursue a study in sports coaching. This encourages female participation in sport," added Gujarat official Bhaumik Kumar Oza.

Thakor Vasant is a name that brings a smile to the faces of the four kho-kho players as the 21-year old coach has played a pivotal role in their journey so far. They owe a big part of their success to Vasant and are glad she was here to watch them play.

Vasant trains almost 80 kho-kho players herself back home in Sampra and seemed to be over the moon as she spoke about her trainees. "It was a great moment for me when these girls were selected to represent Gujarat and it feels even sweeter to see them win medals," added Vasant who is a kho-kho player herself.

These young kho-kho stars come from the humblest of backgrounds, having had almost no facilities that are common to athletes from urban background. Yet they are not short

on courage and their parents have provided a support that has been as important as that of their state.

The Gujarat Government, through multiple schemes in recent years, have inspired athletes to pursue their dreams with strong financial incentives. Star swimmer Maana Patel had earlier expressed appreciation towards the Shaktidoot scheme for helping her greatly.