



## **KIYG 2023: Encouraged to Take Up Fencing by His Mother, Manipur's Zenith Begins Campaign with Epee Individual Silver**

**Chennai, Jan 21:** Manipur's Zenith SH's phone started ringing soon after his Epee final against Tamil Nadu's N Anbles Gowin in the Khelo India Youth Games 2023 as his mother SH Romola Devi wanted to know how his match panned out.

Hailing from Imphal East, Zenith credits his mother for whatever he has achieved in fencing. It was her decision to push her son to take up the sport at the academy adjacent to their home.

Fencing is an expensive sport and Zenith's father SH Arlex, who runs a neighbourhood grocery store, had to dig deep into the family's resources to support his training till the youngster began making a mark on the national circuit and was selected to train at the Guwahati campus of Sports Authority of India after reaching the quarter-finals of the Sub-Junior Nationals in 2021-22.

"When I started off at the nearby academy, my parents had to bear the costs of dress, shoes and the weapon. After coming to Guwahati, even though weapons are issued from SAI, my parents have been supporting me in every way they can. There were days when I could sense there's a struggle but my parents ensured that they won't let me feel that pressure," said Zenith, who also has a younger sister.

The move to Guwahati wasn't easy though. Zenith became homesick and wanted to return home. But his mother motivated him to stay put and work on his skills. "Initially it affected a bit, but then my mother would make me understand and also Guwahati isn't that far off from my place," he said.

A few months after he joined SAI Guwahati, he went on to clinch a gold in the sub-junior Nationals and a year later followed it up with a bronze in the Cadet category.

Zenith was also part of the Manipur team that in the previous edition of Khelo India Youth Games in Bhopal, which lost in the quarter-finals. But they bounced back in style in December 2023 by winning a team gold in the 18th Cadet National Fencing Championship at Mehsana, Gujarat.

Fresh from the feat, Zenith came to Chennai high on confidence and was understandably happy that he could open Manipur's medal account at this edition of Khelo India Youth Games.

"It was a close finish in the final, I had a very good outing. The silver medal means a lot to me, and to my state, especially to my mother.

"This medal is the stepping stone to the next level, there's a bigger goal and I'm focussing on maintaining consistency to achieve that goal — of representing India at the Olympics. It's my mother's dream," he added.



Zenith also expressed his gratitude to the coaches at the SAI centre in Guwahati for their support, saying, “Whatever I have achieved till now is because of the constant support of my coaches at the SAI centre. They have been very supportive of my studies too, as I’m going to appear for my Class X board exams. The facilities at the centre are quite good, and our dietary requirements are properly taken care of.”

Zenith will now be participating in the Epee team event at the Khelo India Youth Games and they are targeting the gold medal.

“We have a very good team, and had a great outing recently. Hopefully we can return with a gold, we are preparing towards that goal,” Zenith said while also sending a few images of the victory ceremony to his mother.

## **ABOUT KIYG 2023, TAMIL NADU**

The 6th Khelo India Youth Games 2023 from January 19-31 are being held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Chennai. This is the first time that Khelo India Youth Games are being held in South India. The Games are being played across four cities of Tamil Nadu, namely Chennai, Madurai, Trichy and Coimbatore. The mascot for the Games is Veera Mangai. Rani Velu Nachiyar, fondly called Veera Mangai, was an Indian queen who waged a war against British colonial rule. The mascot symbolizes the valour and spirit of Indian women, embodying the strength of women power. The logo for the games incorporates the figure of poet Thiruvalluvar. Over 5600 athletes will be participating in this edition of Khelo India Youth Games, spread across 13 days in 15 venues with 26 sporting disciplines, over 275 competitive events and 1 demo sport. The 26 sporting disciplines are a diverse mix of conventional sports such as football, volleyball, badminton etc. and traditional sports such as kalarippayattu, gatka, thang ta, kabaddi and yogasana. Silambam, a traditional sport of Tamil Nadu, is being introduced as a demo sport for the first time in the history of Khelo India Youth Games.

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