

Press Release

Maharashtra gymnasts script a tale of golden success at Khelo India Youth Games

Pune, January 14: Ending the tournament on a high, Maharashtra's Under-17 and Under-21 gymnastics teams walked away with the overall title in both categories by a comfortable margin ahead of closest rivals West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. In all, Maharashtra finished with 14 gold medals (U-17 five and U-21 nine).

The first day in the U-17 category was dominated by Uttar Pradesh. Mohd. Rafey and Raj Yadav secured the first two places in the men's artistic gymnastics all around competition. Maharashtra bagged silver (Siddhi Hattekar) and bronze (Riddhi Hattekar) in the women's artistic gymnastics all around competition behind West Bengal's Protistha Samanta.

The rhythmic gymnastics all around competition that followed saw Bavleen Kaur of Jammu and Kashmir steal the show. But the rest once again went to Maharashtra, Shreya Bhangale taking silver and Krisha Chheda the bronze.

The final day of the U-17 category belonged completely to Maharashtra. It was the day of apparatus finals and the home team did not disappoint, winning as many as 17 medals which took their total to 21. Shreyas Mandlik, Manesh Gadhave, Siddhi Hattekar, Shreya Bhangale and Krisha Chheda won one gold each.

Other than the home team, Bavleen and Protistha shared the limelight again winning seven medals between themselves that included five gold. Rafey also maintained his A-game to take away two gold medals.

At the end of the day, Maharashtra had topped the U-17 medal tally with 21 (G-5, S-7, 9-B), followed by Uttar Pradesh with 10 medals (G-5, S-2, , B-3) and West Bengal with four (G-4).

The story of the Under- 21 category followed similar lines. Maharashtra secured three medals on the very first day including one by their star performer Arik Dey. The women's artistic all around competition was taken by West Bengal with Bidisha Gayen leading the way. The rhythmic gymnastics (IAAC) section was won by Aditee Dandekar, another Maharashtra gymnast.

The apparatus finals which took place over the next two days were a treat for the audience. The men's section saw strong competition between UP and Maharashtra with Agnivesh Pandey (UP) and Arik locked in battle for top honours. Arik ended the Games with a individual tally of five medals (three gold and two silver) while Agnivesh had the same number (one gold, four bronze).

Bengal's girls continued their stellar performance in the women's artistic section, taking away five medals (one gold, three silver and a bronze). Rhythmic gymnastics saw a tussle between

Aditee Dandekar, Meghana Reddy of Telengana and Delhi's Mehakpreet Kaur who shared a total of 10 medals.

Maharashtra took the U-21 championship with a total of 18 medals (G-9, S-6, B-3). Powered by the medals from their women, West Bengal finished second with 11 medals (G-3, S-6, B-2) while Uttar Pradesh were third with six medals (G-2, S-1, B-3).

Maharashtra gymnastics team's head coach, Mahendra Babhulkar received the trophy on behalf of the team. Understandably, he was extremely pleased with the team's performance as they picked up a grand total of 39 medals in both categories. He credited the strong performance to the fact that they had the opportunity to practice at the host complex in Mhalunge-Balewadi days before the event.

Many of his young gymnasts have been training at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) training centre in Aurangabad, Maharashtra. Speaking about the same, Babhulkar added that having a SAI training centre in the state makes a huge difference to the way his gymnasts train as the facilities and equipment provided there are very good and add efficiency in training.

Said Babhulkar, "A major part of the credit for success in gymnastics goes to the coaches. But I believe execution on the day is crucial, and I'm glad that my athletes were able to do that." He said that family support was vital during the event which was to be found in plenty since this was home ground.