

In the spotlight

The boys from the Nandi Pipes academy are leaving an indelible mark on the sport



SAY CHEESE The young players are all smiles

When the Nandi Pipes Badminton Academy was set up at Nandyal, Kurnool in June 2002, many of its students belonged to the under-10 and under-13 years categories that other academies were hardly interested in. Most didn't even know how to hold their rackets.

Today they wield them like whips, evident from the way they called the shots at the state and two national ranking tournaments recently. No less than Prakash Padukone has acknowledged the team's prowess, while parents are seen warning their children to watch out for the Nandi Pipes players!

The squad's fine run began in late May at the Yonex-Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh state open, where C. Upendra clinched the boys under 10 years singles crown and then combined with Sai Ajit Reddy for the doubles title as well. In the under-13 category, the academy's dominance was even more pronounced. A. Naresh claimed the individual laurel and joined Vishal Reddy for the doubles honours as well. Incidentally, this duo subdued compatriots K. Sriteja and Khaja Jaleel in the final.

From the state capital, their next stop was Kochi for the Servo-Regional Sports Centre (RSC) All India Junior Ranking tournament. Coach Kattoju Venkateswar Rao wasn't willing to take chances, carting a sack of rice to avoid the boiled variety in God's Own Country. The benevolent Nandi Pipes management even provided two helpers to ensure the children had food on time in addition to generous allowances for travel and lodging.

It was an encore of the above-mentioned performances in both categories in the Kerala city as well. Upendra's showing impressed A. Raju, a lecturer at Maharaja's College so much, that he gifted the little lad a badminton kit. The outfitting and playing material for the boys was provided by renowned badminton supplier Ashaway and the Nandi Pipes group.

At the prestigious Krishna Khaitan memorial tournament in Chennai, Upendra not only claimed the under-10 crown, but reached the fifth and last round of the qualifiers in the under-13 category. Meanwhile, Jaleel went down fighting in the semis of the higher age group, even upsetting N. Srikanth 15-21, 21-16, 21-14 in round 16.

While Naresh continued to remain unconquered in the singles of the under 13 category, Tejdeep and Jamal stunned the top ranked pair of Sameer Varma and Arpit Varma.

In an all-Nandi Pipes Academy final, Jamal and Tejdeep prevailed over Vishal Reddy and Naresh, the latter nursing a hip injury.

Such being his interest, Nandi Group Managing Director S. Sreedhar Reddy would call every morning and night to check on the progress of his wards. "We will support these boys till they are 17 or 18," he said while finalising plans to support similar training schemes in at least two more sports. One of them will be swimming. The rationale being that it would be an inexpensive sport for the user.