

Press Release

Genes drive Maharashtra's Dev to judo and now a KIYG gold

Pune, January 13: Till four years ago, 17-year-old judoka Dev Thapa wanted to be a cricketer. His obsession stemmed from the fact that he lived in the same town as cricket's biggest icon Sachin Tendulkar and was subject to the constant buzz he shared as a sports loving kid.

Hailing from a family of judokas – his father Tilak was a former India International and mother Meenu a multiple national champion – Dev's passion for cricket was miles away from his inherent genes.

"It was his choice. These days kids want to carve a niche of their own; create their own identity," explains Tilak.

Dev, who was a pace bowler during his school days at J.K Singhanian, Thane, always longed to play for India and was stubborn in his desire to do so.

Adds Tilak, "He tried a lot. At one point I felt I should tell him (Dev) that cricket is a pipedream but preferred to hold back."

The father, Tilak, is a silver medallist from the Commonwealth Judo Championship, in Malta in 1994. He also represented India at the World Judo Championship in Hamilton, Canada, back in 1993 and is also Shiv Chhatrapati Award winner. Tilak was a member of national coach R.W. Patil's judo club at Mumbai's Podar College.

Dev, now a student of G.N. Khalsa College, Matunga, often tagged along with his father and went through practice drills in an alternative.

Having seen his son fall short several times, Tilak decided to give Dev a reality check. Recalls the teenager, "Dad told me there's nothing in cricket and the next thing that I know was that he entered me in a district-level judo tournament."

The gamble paid off with Dev taking the top spot and what followed was accolades and recognition at school. Importantly, it also gave Dev a much-needed boost in his confidence.

Thereafter there was no stopping Dev who has been state champion thrice. At the Khelo India Youth Games here at Pune, he won the biggest medal of his career; gold in the Under-17 boys below-66kg category in under 10 second against Manipur's Thangiam Abun.

It was Maharashtra's first judo medal at KIYG and it was also his genes finally talking.