



Press Release

TOPS inducts next generation of Squash players with eye on LA 2028 Olympic Games

New Delhi, May14: A majority of the focus may be on the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, but Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports' Mission Olympics Cell (MOC) has also set its eyes on 2028 and started planning for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games and inducted three up and coming Squash players into the Development Group of the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS).

Inducted in the 2028 Olympics programme in October last, Squash has been popular in the country, with success in the Asian and Commonwealth Games. For years, Saurav Ghosal, Dipika Pallikal and Joshna Chinappa have kept the flame burning in India and are now passing the baton to the next generation of players like Anahat Singh, Abhay Singh and Velavan Senthilkumar who were inducted in TOPS Development Group.

Talking about the inclusion, the Squash Racquets Federation of India (SRFI) Secretary General Cyrus Poncha said "the inclusion of squash in the TOPS programme marks a pivotal moment for the sport in India. Beyond immediate benefits like increased participation and enhanced training opportunities, this recognition signifies a broader endorsement of squash as a significant sporting discipline within the country."

He further spoke about how the move will help strengthen international exposure and added "including squash in TOPS opens doors to international exposure and collaboration, fostering exchange programs and partnerships with leading squash nations. This is bound to enhance the overall standard of squash in India."

At 16, Anahat is already a National champion, with over 46 titles in the national circuit so far. On the international front as well, she has started making waves as the current Asian U17 champion and winner of 2 PSA World Tour titles. She also has two Asian Games medals under her belt.

"I am really honoured SAI and SRFI considered me to be added to TOPS and I believe it will be a big support for me in improving my game and getting ready for international competition. I am sure when other Indian Squash players hear about this, they will be encouraged to pick up Squash professionally as they will know the government is supporting them if they perform well and represent India." Anahat said.

She further said that with Squash now being part of Olympics, more junior players have started coming forward and taking part in the prominent events.

"I am certain that more players, both in India and abroad, will now take up Squash. In fact, I feel more junior players have already started coming forward for prominent international tournaments, in the buildup to its (squash's) inclusion into the LA Olympics. The numbers have increased, and the competition is now huge. Every country is now putting in a lot of effort, and I am so happy that even India is making effort in that direction. Everyone is working hard on getting that shot at that 1st Olympic Medal (in Squash) at LA 2028."

Among the men, Abhay Singh and Velavan Senthilkumar were inducted in TOPS. At 25, Abhay is the current National Games Gold medalist and National Championship Silver medalist. He has won 9 PSA World Tour Titles and was part of the Indian Men's team that won Asian Games Gold in Hangzhou in 2023.

When asked what he felt about being one of the first few players to be inducted in TOPS, he said "I'm very honoured to be inducted into TOPS, I've been working hard to climb up the PSA rankings and have been funding all my expenses to travel abroad and train under some of the best coaches. I'm happy that TOPS will now take care of me, and I really hope we keep producing results on the world tour especially the 2026 Asian Games and the again the Olympics."

When asked if Squash being part of the Olympics will help get more people interested in the game, Abhay added "I hope so, squash needs more eyes and more players and it's the responsibility of senior players like me to promote the sport with integrity. Squash obviously became very popular after our Asian Games win in China and it is certainly growing having looked at the junior participants every year in the SRFI Events, it's an exciting time for Indian squash"

The third name to be added to the TOPS list is that of Velavan Senthilkumar, who has had a meteoric rise on the international circuit in the past year and a half. He started the year 2023 just outside the top 200 in PSA World Tour rankings and has now achieved a career high rank of 55. He won 8 PSA World Tour Titles and was runner-up at the Asian Senior Championship 2023.

With Asian Games and Commonwealth Games just two years away, Velavan hopes to become the highest-ranked Indian player at the Games and win prestigious Gold at both the events.

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