

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Srihari makes big waves as a nascent talent

A potential champion has arrived at a time when India needs ace swimmers to shine internationally

by S S Shreeekumar

Queen's Road: Srihari Natraj, the eighth grader from Jain Heritage School, Bengaluru created ripples in the National aquatic championship in Pune recently.

The lad sunk three national records in the 100m and 200m backstroke and the 200m medley relay.

Srihari idolises the legendary US swimmer Michael Phelps and follows other sports like cricket, tennis, and football too. But his ambition is to represent India in the Olympics as a swimmer and do well in academics as well.

"I created a state record in the three events. The national records were quite distant from the state records. I worked hard and while swimming at the nationals, realised that I was way ahead of the competition. That is when it occurred to me that I was inching closer to the national record. When I looked at the timing at the end, I realised that I had, indeed, created a new national record. This was a moment to cherish as I had performed beyond my own expectations. I thank God, my family, and my coach for all the support," said an elated Srihari.

Srihari got hooked to swimming as a kid after watching his elder brother Balaji swim. He took to water like a fish and has already raked in more than 50 gold medals in the national and zonal level swimming competitions.

"I won my first medal, a gold in 2006 in the 25m backstroke. I remember that medal to this day as it was my first and motivated me to do better every time I competed. Since it was my first medal in backstroke, I seem to have taken a special liking to it and continue to set new records in it. This experience was really exciting," added Srihari.

"The entire community in JHS has been of great help in supporting my aspirations in swimming. I am also getting financial support in the form of a subsidised fee. Our sports director Archana is the one who keeps me going," said Srihari.

Srihari manages to find time for his studies in between his rigorous swimming schedules even though it can be struggle at times. "Given my routine, balancing studies and swimming is tough. During the weekends, I read the textbooks and then go over the notes that I

Srihari idolises the legendary US swimmer Michael Phelps and follows other sports like cricket, tennis, and football too. He is also a keen academician

have collected from school. My brother Balaji is a big help as he tutors me. His unique way of teaching has helped me understand subjects like science and maths in sufficient detail," he said.

In any case, a potential champion is in the making and Srihari could not have arrived at a better time.

