

Dream Turns Into Heartbreak



Every year, thousands of children take up tennis, hoping to become the next Sania Mirza or Rafael Nadal. Very few of them make it to the top, though.

Dhairy Ingle tells the story of a broken dream.

Her showcase stacked with trophies, countless certificates and old newspaper cuttings highlighting her game at the State and National level. Each moment spent on the tennis court was memorable for her and with a choked voice she says, "I wish I would have got sponsorship at that time, my life would have been completely different."

Supriya Mallaya ruled the domestic tennis circuit for three consecutive years but gave up the game due to lack of sponsorship. As she opines, "Tennis is a very good and acclaimed game but yet, it is extremely difficult to get sponsors which makes it impossible for us players to go ahead and make a career in this sport."

It was sheer disappointment for this tennis ace when she realized that she had no sponsors. She confides, "At one point, I had no other dream except hitting the international circuit. However, tennis being a very expensive game, my parents could not afford the cost of making me a professional tennis player. Every time my dad went to the sponsors and came home dejected, I would be shattered. To play on the international circuit, you need to play at least five to six tournaments in a month and each national tournament costs Rs 50-60,000 on an average, including the travelling, hotel expenses and coaching expenses. We couldn't afford these expenses."

Each year thousands of children hit the tennis court with a dream of becoming Rafael Nadal or Serena Williams. But their dreams get shattered as they cannot go ahead due to lack of financial backing. Out of the thousands, only few like Sania Mirza get sponsorship and the Government support to make it BIG.

Supriya, a hardcore fan of Serena Williams started training under her father Narsee Mallaya better known as Babu Mallaya, a tennis coach who has big names like Christopher Marques, Rishabh Shah and Megha Vakharia. All these went on to become top seed state level or national level players. On the topic of sponsorship without mincing his words Babu Mallaya says, "Sponsorship is obviously important for any player to go ahead. Supriya was given a sponsorship for racquets and shoes, but I wanted her to play for India. Being a coach I recognized her talent. So I wanted MSLTA to sponsor her travelling, hotel and expenses for training abroad as I couldn't afford that, but sadly that did not happen."

A Mithibai college student, Supriya bagged cash prizes from the Maharashtra State Lawn Tennis Association (MSLTA), for ruling the domestic circuit. MSLTA awards only those players who remain in the top three rankings.

However, she is the second person in her family to give up tennis because of lack of sponsorship. Her elder sister, Nalini Mallaya, who is now married, also played tennis and was a top seed player in

the U-12, U-14 categories. However, she quit after the age of 16. Supriya explains, "When I realized that nothing could be done and I will have to quit tennis, I had a nervous breakdown and did not touch my racquet for six months."

Today Supriya is contributing towards the game by assisting her father to coach many aspiring tennis players. She says, "I feel happy shaping the careers of the kids who do not have an experience of playing tournaments. Seeing their dreams getting fulfilled gives me immense satisfaction as they are a reflection of my aims and aspirations."

However, Supriya has still not given up hopes. She plans to play the women's tournament this year if she gets enough sponsors. She asserts, "I will play for my mom who wants me to be an international tennis player."

Natasha and Nitin, the younger siblings of Supriya are also very good tennis players. However, their father wants them to concentrate on their studies because he does not want tennis to break the hearts of his children once again.

dhairyaingle@gmail.com

