

SHOOTING STARS

Rising Stars

INDIAN SPORTS IS ON AN UPSWING, WITH MANY PLAYERS OF GEN Y MAKING A MARK IN THE INTERNATIONAL SPORTS ARENA. **NOEL FERNANDES** PROFILES SOME OF THE NEW EMERGING SPORTING TALENTS OF THE COUNTRY

**Bhambri Beats**

Yuki Bhambri recently won the Australian Open boys singles title defeating Alexandros-Ferdinandos Georgoudas of Germany in straight sets. Yuki came into the Australian Open as the top seed. He is the only Indian to win a Junior Grand Slam after Leander Paes won the Wimbledon in 1990 and the US Open in 1991. This win makes Yuki the only Indian to win a junior title at the Australian Open.

**Dream Run**

Somdev Devvarman reached his first ATP Tour final at the 2009

Chennai Open beating two-time Chennai Open former champion and world number 42 Carlos Moya of Spain and 25th ranked Ivo Karlovic of Croatia. Rainer Schuettler of Germany pulled out due to injury in the semi-final giving way for Devvarman to move into the finals. In the final however he lost to Marin Cilic of Croatia. In the year's first Grand Slam, i.e. Australian Open 2009, Somdev was seeded 28th in singles qualifying.

Mahesh Magic

Mahesh Manganekar won the British Junior Open squash title recently by defeating Oliver Holland from England in four games. By winning the British Junior Open tournament, Mahesh became the third Indian boy to put a hand over the title. Earlier, Anil Nayar and Saurav Ghosal had won the Drysdale Cup (Boys under-19 title). Mahesh also became the first Indian to win the boys under-15 category.

**Dazzling Dipika**

Dipika Pallikal played her first international squash

tournament in

London when she was in her sixth grade. And till date, Dipika has won the German Open, Dutch Open, French Open, Australian Open, Scottish Open on the European Junior Squash Circuit. She trains at the ICL-TNSRA Academy at Chennai under Cyrus Poncha and Major (rtd) S. Maniam.

**Swimming Sensation**

Fifteen-year old Virdhawal Vikram Khade is the world's fastest swimmer in his age group by virtue of his timings in three different categories. Virdhawal clocked 23.92 seconds in 50 metres freestyle and 1m 54.18s in 200m freestyle at the recent National Games in Guwahati, where he bagged six golds, to go with his 52.12s in 100 metres freestyle at the Doha Asian Games in December. The 100m and 200m freestyle timings are the best Indian performances.

**Thapa Treat**

Promising junior boxer Shiv Thapa won a gold medal on his international debut in the sixth Hyder Aliyev International Junior boxing championship in Azerbaijan. L. Devendro Singh won the other medal for India, winning bronze in the 48kg category. The 16-year-old Guwahati youngster's appetite for success was evident when he said that he did not feel any pressure in his maiden international tournament and has set his eyes on the 2010 Commonwealth Games in India.

**Pot Shot**

Rahul Bakshi became the youngest all-India amateur champion when he beat Abhishek Jha with seven holes to spare, in the 36-hole final at the 107th LG All-India Open amateur golf championship here. It was Bakshi's second National amateur title within a month after he had won the Sunfeast All-India Junior championship.

Drag-Flicker

Indian hockey has found a highly talented drag-flicker in Diwakar Ram. His utility to the side could be seen in the two games India played in the junior Asia Cup in Hyderabad, particularly the manner in which he produced two goals against a fighting Japan in the championship opener. Diwakar is making progress at an astonishing pace and in four international tournaments in his short career. He has struck 26 goals from penalty corners, a conversion rate that would be the envy of any defender.

**Chess Wizard**

Chess prodigy, Arjun Vishnuvardhan is a young International Master in the USA. At 15, he became the National Chess Champion of the US, by beating the top International Master Edward Formanek who is a professor of Mathematics in the Pennsylvania University of USA. He was the State Champion for Under-18 years and Under-9 years age group when he was below 9-years. He posted the National record in India in the year 2000, by becoming the youngest International FIDE rated player of the country. Arjun had developed an unique talent to playing blindfold chess since he was 11 years of age!

