

Where there's a will, there's a way.

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In conversation with CM Samarth J Rao and his father, Jagadish Rao Basrur Shankar

There is a way. We can plan out our lives as much as we'd like but, life more often than not, alters our path. As a parent of a son with a disability, I know what it means to push against the current, to not conform, to fight against the place society wants to carve out for people with disabilities. *How do we create a path that honors us? In this edition we connect again via Zoom and have a conversation with Samarth and his father Jagadish.*

When Samarth was a young boy, his mother saw that he was left out from playing on the school's playground and introduced him to chess. This introduction to chess changed everything for Samarth.

Samarth, you've had many challenges but, this has not stopped you from setting goals and trying to achieve them. How do you overcome wins and losses on and off the board?

If I have a challenge against a player, I want to win. I am not worried about the loss because I see this as a challenge to try to win again. Whether I win, lose or draw, this is not a concern, it is yet another challenge to try to overcome and stay focused on my goals.

Samarth is representing India in the Online Chess Olympiad for People with Disabilities. What do you think about playing in this event?

This event is a good opportunity for players with physical disabilities because this allows them to play from home, which is more comfortable. Samarth doesn't require assistance and does not use adaptive devices, just a normal laptop.

How did you prepare for this event?

He is taking lessons from several chess coaches, Mr. Ajith M P of Mysuru and team coach, Mr. Durgaprasad V. He has improved a lot because of this. Samarth also played in a practice match with WIM Jennitha Anto K from India, a 6-time World Champion in IPCA and he won this practice game against her. This made him very happy.



Samarth, you are 21 years old now. How old were you when you played in your first chess tournament? What is it about chess that motivates you to continue?

I played in my first chess tournament at 13 years. I want chess to be my career and one of my goals is to become a GM like Anand, this motivates me. I was very happy to be honored by Anand in Chennai and my favorite Anand game is one he played against Kasparov.

Samarth is also studying in university. How are his studies going?

Samarth has been focusing on chess and his university studies. He is very active! He is in his final year and will earn a Bachelor's Degree in Commerce.

Anand and Samarth, Photo courtesy of Jagadish Rao

What has been the most rewarding experience in your chess career?

Visiting the USA for the first time for the World Junior Chess Championship for Players with Disabilities and earning a medal made me very happy.

How do you pick the tournaments you want to play in?

Right now, due to the pandemic, he is playing a lot of online games. Taking this opportunity to expand his knowledge in chess with high rated players, maximizing his time and focusing on chess only. He studies and plays chess 12-13 hours a day.

Do you prefer chess online or in person?

In person, over the board.

Who is your favorite chessplayer, living or in history?

I love Fischer because he is an attacking player.

As Samarth's father, you have always believed in him, always supported him. What words of encouragement and motivation do you tell Samarth right before his games?

I tell him to do his best. Don't worry about your opponent's rating. You play your game only. Everyone makes mistakes. If they make a mistake, take advantage of that, punish the mistake and then you can win the match. He has taken this advice and I think this is why he is at this level. I am happy and very proud of him.

Samarth is unable to stand or walk independently and you assist him in every way you can. Having dedicated and supportive parents is very important. What is the most challenging thing about parenting?

Where there's a will, there's a way! I have the will to do something about Samarth, so I took this as a challenge for me. I travel with him everywhere and as far as possible. At some point, I won't be able to carry him because of my age. While I have the strength to hold and carry him, I will try to support him as much as possible in his goal of becoming GM. He wanted to win the World Junior Championship for Players with Disabilities in New Jersey, USA but, because of a slight mistake in his game against Ilia Lipilin from Russia, he missed this opportunity.

You've traveled to many countries, which is your favorite?

USA and Czech Republic.

What do you look forward to the most once this pandemic is over?

I want to play online and offline as much as possible and start to play in over the board tournaments so that I can increase my rating to over 2000. I want my rating to be over 2000 because in the next Chess Olympiad for People with Disabilities, a goal I have set for myself is to be in India Team 1. Also, I would like to go back to the USA so if you organize a World Youth Championship for Under 25, I can take on this challenge and try to win a tournament in the USA.



Photo courtesy of Jagadish Rao

You are a big inspiration Samarth. Anything you'd like to say to people who might have a difficult time in achieving their goals?

Anybody can achieve anything!

Wishing you the very best Samarth! Until next time...play on!