

The Right Stroke

TUSHAR SHAHANI IS ONLY 18-YEARS-OLD BUT HIS LOFTY SPORTING ACHIEVEMENTS MAKE HIM UNIQUE. BINDU GOPAL RAO LEARNS ALL ABOUT HIS INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

What does it take to beat the odds and emerge a champion? Clearly a lot,

and when it happens to a child, it speaks of rare perseverance and discipline. Meet Tushar Shahani, who, as a child with low immunity, first took to chess and excelled at it at the national level. "I owe my passion for sports to my parents who enrolled me into several extracurricular activities whether it was tennis, chess, golf, skating, or swimming. I was a Chess National Champion till the age of nine and the youngest junior contender to play a match with chess maestro Vishwanathan Anand," he shares.

When he was seven, Tushar started playing squash - inspired by his father who would play the sport regularly. His life changed after he enrolled at the Peter Nicol Squash Camp at Otters Club, Mumbai, where he not only built on his physical stamina but it also served as the strong base from where he went on to become the National Champion in 2014 and 2015. He also finished 4th in the world at the British Junior Open Championship at Birmingham, UK in the under 17 category in January 2018.

In spite of a lull, he was chosen as Ambassador for Squash by the World Squash Federation at the Youth Olympics Games 2018, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. "I was finishing second, third or fourth in most events. Everyone started becoming stronger and faster. Until May 2019 I did not win a single event. But I continued to believe in the process and my hard work and finished first in the selection trials 2019 for the Asian and World Juniors."

Being calm and patient are his key traits as a squash player. "I like to hear criticism from others because it helps me understand the areas I can improve on. I feel when I lose I come back stronger than before."

Naturally then, Tushar's sporting idols are Ramy Ashour, Roger Federer and M.S. Dhoni and he is now looking to win accolades in the World Junior Championships to be held in Malaysia at the end of July 2019. Having completed 12th grade with flying colours (93%), he is headed to the University of Pennsylvania to pursue further studies in Economics.

