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Slum kid kicks her way to international taekwondo turf

Kavana K, 14, has battled poverty to become an international-level taekwondo champ, and will be leaving to Belarus today to take part in an international tournament.



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It's been five years since Kavana got into the sport.

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Express News Service

BENGALURU: In a school playground in Hebbal, a 14-year-old taekwondo champ and a student of the school, Kavana K, gives us a demonstration of some of her best moves. It's been five years since Kavana got into the sport, and in this short time, she has gone from competing at state-level competitions to representing the country internationally.

Kavana bagged the gold in all the five categories (junior) of the recent 6th South Asian Invitational Taekwondo (ITF) Championships, 2018, held in Kathmandu, and is heading to Belarus in eastern Europe for the 13th Junior Taekwondo World Championship to be held next month.

Her journey didn't start very far from here. A resident of a slum in Tindlu, Kavanna's mother Mangala swells with pride when she talks about her daughter. "I gave birth to my third girl child at KC General Hospital, Malleswaram, on August 24. I remember not even having `100. Many advised me to leave her in the hospital itself. But I was determined to keep her at any cost," says Mangala.

Kavanna enrolled at Parikrama Centre for Learning in Hebbal, and has been there since. The school has been a major source of support towards her taekwondo pursuits. "My first proper taekwondo class was at the Sahakaranagar Taekwondo Club, a part of the Taekwondo Association of Karnataka. I was the only girl there. In my first few weeks there, I was like a punching bag. I would have cuts and bruises every day," she says.

While it is natural for any parent to be worried, Mangala is not like other mothers. Having seen adversity her whole life, she knew her child had to go through some discomfort before she achieved anything. "I told her that if she gets beaten up now, she will be able to face the world better," says Mangala, adding, "Many times, relatives have tried to dissuade me from giving so much freedom to my girls. But I want them to excel in life," says Mangala.

In 2014, Kavana participated in her first national-level tournament but lost to a participant from Delhi. "This girl was much bigger and taller than me. But I was determined to beat her. The next year, I took part in the junior category of a national tournament and beat the same girl. I cherish this win," she says.

Another incident she remembers fondly is at the national tournament again in 2017 in Rajasthan. "It was the self-defense display round, where each team comprised one girl and two boys. Our team had members with red belts, while others had black belts. We still won the gold," she says. Kavana will be competing in four categories in Belarus, and her individual category (sparring) will be on her birthday. "I hope to make my mother and country proud," says Kavana.

Hopes pinned on Kavana

Shukla Bose, founder, Parikrama Humanity Foundation, says, "Kavana excels in studies and taekwondo. She got 94 per cent in Class 9, and is a role model to others." Pradeep Janardhana, Kavana's coach and an official at the Belarus tournament, says, "Kavana was not performing well at first, but, over the past three years, she has achieved a lot. She is persistent and has been practicing every day for five hours since January. We hope she brings home laurels."

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