

Success is around the bend

Nanavati ward boy wins State's highest sports coaching award for mallakhamb

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YASHWANT SATAM (42), a ward boy at Nanavati Hospital in Vile Parle, has won the Chhatrapati Prize for the best coach. It's the state's highest award for sports coaching for mallakhamb. State sports minister Vinod Tawde presented Satam with the award recently in Pune.

"As teacher, and, athlete, there is no greater honor. The pole has been my best friend since childhood, and, I am truly blessed to be able to continue the tradition of this ancient Indian sport," he said during a training session at Sane Guruji Vidya Mandir in Santacruz. Mallakhamb is the indigenous sport of gymnastics done a wooden pole or a rope, and Satam has been at it since he was a boy. Hailing from a family of mallakhamb enthusiasts, he used to accompany his siblings to the Lokmanya Parle Tilak



Mallakhamb coach Yashwant Satam trains students at the Sane Guruji Vidya Mandir in Santacruz. PIC/SATEJ SHINDE

Vyayamshala in Vile Parle every day, before he began practicing the sport himself.

At eight, he won his first championship at state level, after which there was no stopping. After the death of his father, an employee of

Nanavati, Satam had to take responsibility of supporting the family. Taking up his father's job at the hospital after, he continued to juggle academics and mallakhamb practice.

"After taking up the job, it

became difficult to get time off for mallakhamb, but the hospital authorities were supportive. They'd offer me paid leave and even financial assistance when required," he said.

For Satam, mallakhamb had

helped prepare a sturdy back bone. "You will never see a mallakhamb player with an aching back or hunch back even at 90. Kids today don't understand the significance of culturally rich sports."

Gerard Quaradas, national champion and Satam's student said, if it was not for Satam and his ilk, the sport would have died long ago.

"His dedication is unbelievable. From your hair tips to your toes, mallakhamb uses and stretches every bit of your body. We have been trained to respect our bodies and the pole."

His colleague and friend Ashutosh Potnis liked that Satam is in it not for the money. "He has no personal gain. He trains kids for just ₹120 a month. All he wants is for them to follow in his footsteps and make the country proud," he said.

Satam had coached more than 50 students at the Sane Guruji Vidya Mandir in Santacruz. Six of them have won the Chhatrapati prize as athletes.

Ironically, in his three decade long mallakhamb career, Satam never won the Chhatrapati prize as athlete. "It used to bother me earlier, but when my students began winning, the feeling was greater than if I'd won it myself."

Typically selfless, typically Satam.