

The cost of failed athletic dreams

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Drenched in the glory of the floodlights, you gallop forward to score a goal in the dying seconds or charge in to take the wicket in the last over. It's the adrenaline and the rush that jolts you forward, and for those truly passionate, they devote their lives in pursuit of that adrenaline.

Almost everyone has dreamt of becoming an athlete, at least once in their lives. It is universal but only some truly follow up on it and continue to push through.

However, the odds are stacked against young people. With a culture that continues to discourage an unorthodox career pursuit, it becomes even harder for those with the dream of making it to the top.

Daheer Farsim, 17, a cricket academy player, reflects on the beginning of his journey, "Watching the national team, imagining myself in their shoes and making my nation proud spurred me on. My fascination soon turned to passion when I bought myself a full cricket gear with my savings and enrolled in a nearby academy."

Ashreen Mridha, national basketball player and co-founder of Deshi Ballers, recalls, "When I started playing basketball, a national team did not even exist. Although I was eventually part of the country's first national basketball team, I never pursued sports for that title."

Everyone finds their calling a little differently. Some find it on the TV, others uncover it through playing in alleys and rugged fields. Regardless of wherever the dream ensues, there is no doubt that to fully adopt the mindset and the lifestyle, one must be under the guidance of a professional.

Amit Hasan, coach and technical director at Next Level Sports Management (NLSM) and Brac University, comments, "What really holds our players back is that the early stages of development start a little too late. To integrate discipline and fully grasp the foundations of the game, they should start really young. There is a lot of raw talent all around the scene but no structure to cultivate it. The biggest clubs in the country don't have the accommodations of a proper home ground, let alone an academy for young players."

In addition to a lack of resources for young individuals, the dream starts to wane further when academic commitments creep in. This involves coaching classes in addition to school, which snatches away important practise hours and even the need to be physically active.

"It wasn't easy having to cope with a drop in my average grades. I was out and about, going to practise, attending camps, and playing matches," Daheer says. "This was right around the time when my parents expressed their concerns and so, I had very little time to devote to cricket. Practises were replaced with exams, and matches with classes."

There is no way around for most young folks to manoeuvre around their academic commitments, which have to take priority over their passion. They need to practise regularly, build up their athletic muscles and gain enough attention from the coaches to be given a chance. The process is arduous, to say the least.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Ashreen says workplaces should also strive to implement a friendlier work schedule, where employees can have the opportunity to devote time to some physical activity and overcome lethargy.

Gulnazar Mahbub Monika, national basketball team player and co-founder at Deshi Ballers, emphasises the importance of daily practice, "To reach a certain level in-game one needs to be consistent. Without regular practice, an athlete or a coach can never improve."

She adds, "As we grow older, we have to take on academic responsibilities, work on our careers, and give back to society. This forces some to take a step back and shy away from their dreams"

Gulnazar further illustrates the fragile nature of it all. She says, athletes must train their minds alongside their bodies. The need to be prepared for the worst is imperative. The monetary issue coupled with a cultural one breeds an outlook that trickles down to fear and concern over the child's future.

"Female players are often criticised and ridiculed by friends and family. The only thing that holds players back is their willpower. Sure, an athlete should aspire to reach the highest level but that should never be the main goal," says Ashreen.

Nonetheless, Amit and his team at NLSM have sought out to change the landscape. "We strive to give young

players a taste of what it's like to play and train under the rigours of an academy. Alongside grooming them as professionals, we also help the players attain athletic scholarships to prestigious universities."

However, not everyone will make it. Does that mean they have to completely deviate from the sport? Absolutely not. There are innumerable jobs outside the field.

"Get your coaching badges, pursue a major in sports management, pick up commentary. The world of sport is evolving all the time," Amit shares. With the rise of franchise sports, there is a realm for the creative as well as technically gifted behind the scenes.

Ashreen shares the intrinsic value of outdoor activities, saying, "There are so many benefits of playing sports – physical and emotional well-being both included. You make so many friends through sports. You learn the value of teamwork and discipline, which pay off in other avenues in life."

"It is important that athletes learn to share their feelings and open up to people who are in the same situation. To cope, one must communicate and perhaps, find new aspirations to strive to," adds Gulnazar.

Ashreen believes that foundational support will aid in breeding a more open mindset towards sports. "Educational

institutions must prioritise sports and provide equal opportunities for both genders. At Deshi Ballers, we try to raise awareness among parents to recognise the value of physical activity along with academics for their child," she says.

"If athletics, as well as the arts, were implemented into the system, perhaps, we could see our dreams flourish. The youth can truly take flight with the right resources in place," asserts Daheer optimistically.

Like all other aspirations, the dream of playing at the highest level must be backed by belief and hope.

"You never know where your life could take you, especially until you're 25. Pursue it relentlessly," concludes Amit Hassan.

Some dreams gradually leave the grips of our fingertips and become unfulfilled promises to our younger selves but the perception of failure must be reimagined. The definition of success is one-dimensional and quantified through money and fame. While those are aspects of any career, it's not the only measures of success.

Ashreen concludes by urging young players to see the greater value in sports, "Years down the line when you are done with studies or when you have retired from the job, you don't want to say that you wish you had spent those years playing the sport you love."

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