

#SPORTS

# FATEMA MUJIB

## The lioness behind the sabre

In the bustling alleys of Dhaka, where life often oscillates between the hopes of dreamers and the harshness of reality, Fatema Mujib stands as a beacon of what perseverance and raw talent can achieve. Her eyes radiate innocence, and her soft-spoken demeanour could easily lead you to think she's as harmless as a lamb. But place a sabre in her hands, and Fatema transforms into a lioness; fierce and unyielding in the fencing arena.

Fatema wasn't born with a silver spoon, nor did she have the luxury of world-class facilities, or any facilities for that matter, from the start. She comes from a Dhaka that we all know too well — busy streets, long commutes, and the constant hustle just to make ends meet. Her brother Saddam, a fencer himself, used to take her to training sessions on his bicycle, traversing the city's maddening traffic, with horns and rickshaws creating a cacophony around them. The sport that now celebrates her as a gold medallist started for her on these challenging streets. "We couldn't even afford a second fencing uniform. I trained in my brother's uniform," she humbly recalls.

In Dhaka, where societal norms often expect women to prioritise family over personal ambition, Fatema stands tall as an awe-inspiring exception. She is not just a fencer, but also a dedicated mother to her

8-year-old daughter. Fatema's narrative challenges the social constructs of what a woman 'should be able to do.'

Under the guidance of Joseph Maluleke, Bangladesh's National Sabre Coach, Fatema found more than just expert training. She found a mentor who recognised her commitment. "Fatema loves the sport; her

dedication and her ever-joyful nature speak volumes. Even when the training time is up, she yearns to push further," Maluleke observes, highlighting her indefatigable spirit.

The 13th South Asian Games were a turning point, not just for Fatema, but for the countless young women in Bangladesh she inspired. When she secured the first gold medal for Bangladesh in women's sabre individual, the nation collectively came to know for the first time that it has fencers with the calibre of beating opponents with far more advanced equipment. With Fatema's homecoming, Bangladesh acknowledged that a new icon had risen.

In a country where female athletes still grapple with societal prejudices, Fatema has incited a silent revolution. Suddenly, fencing is not just a sport; it's a promise of liberation for young women. For many, she has become the face of what is possible when dedication meets opportunity, especially in a city like Dhaka, where struggle and survival are part of everyday life.

As Fatema gears up for the upcoming Asian Games, she echoes the sentiments of a nation in need of heroes. "We are a nation of gifted people, there are many more like me waiting to prove themselves," she passionately declares.

Fatema Mujib is a living testament to the resilience and dreams that fuel Dhaka's beating heart. Her story is not just about a sportswoman achieving her dreams; it is a narrative of hope, a lesson that, with enough perseverance, the narrow lanes of Dhaka can lead to the world's grandest arenas. Through her struggle and triumph, Fatema doesn't just score points in a match; she scores a victory for every dreamer, telling them that dreams, no matter how big, can come true.

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In Frame: Fatema Mujib

