



Chikkarangappa

If anyone ever told me about eight years ago that I would be the best junior golfer in the country I would have laughed. Having been born and brought up in a village (Rangegowdanna Doddi) near Bangalore to a family that did not have much, being a professional golfer was far from a dream.

My first introduction to golf was at The Eagleton Golf Resort near our village. I thought that this game was hockey with a lot less running around. When I asked friends what the game was all about they tried to share with me what they knew of the game, though never forgetting to add the disclaimer “it is not a game for poor people”. Yet, the game intrigued me and I always wanted to know more.

Intrigue perhaps is the best form of currency, because my curiosity led me to a job at the Gold Course as a ball boy. Spending hours on the course I overheard lots of instructions and tips, though none of it made sense, as I did not understand the language. Slowly but surely progressing up the ladder, I started to work as a caddie on the course. And that is when things started to change.

Observing the form and style of all the players, I began playing at the sides of the ranges. I practised during weekdays with a wooden golf club that I hand crafted, in the fields of my village. One day, while hitting a few balls on the range, my current coach Vijay Divecha saw me play and mentioned that he noticed my good swing and that I should consider the sport seriously. His suggestion while it was sincere was impossible to take up because I knew that this was a ‘rich man’s sport’. I had to stay away only because I could not afford it. But surprisingly that was not an excuse that Vijay Sir wanted to hear, he gathered that I was interested and then persuaded the committee at

the Eagleton Golf Resort, to help me explore golf at a professional level. I was ten-and-a-half years old then, a poor boy with a great swing and an angel of a mentor on a playground called the Eagleton Golf Resort.

The Eagleton Golf Resort has ever since been a big influence in my life. The people here have supported me since I was ‘a boy from the village with a wooden club’, never once treating me differently because I was just a caddie or didn’t know the language.

Recognising the talent I had, Vijay Sir suggested I become a professional golfer. I did not know how to react to that - happiness at the prospect of doing something I loved and apprehension at the thought that my family may not react very encouragingly. According to my family, I was working at the golf course to earn money that would support my studies. Playing golf was a far-fetched dream for them. So when I came home to tell my mother that I had been given an opportunity to play and possibly look at playing professionally, she very adamantly asked me to forget about it. She was so mad at me even thinking about it, that she refused to speak to me. So, I went back to the resort and told them I couldn’t play anymore because my family was just not open to the idea. But as I continued working, I couldn’t stop myself from trying to play golf on the sly. With my mother having no clue that I was playing golf at the range, I continued to slowly and surely practise every day. And then I was caught – an uncle of mine had seen me playing when he knew it was not allowed and had gone and sneaked to my mother that I was disrespecting her orders. She was furious! She yelled her heart out, reiterating the fact that the sport was for the rich man and that my duty was to study and get a degree. In between the tears and the fighting, I begged for a year off from my studies to just concentrate on the sport. I also laid down the ultimatum - that if I did not achieve anything significant in that year, I would forget about the sport for the rest of my life and only concentrate on studying and working. I don’t know if it was the ultimatum or the continuous persistence that changed my

mother's mind, but she finally relented and agreed to the year off. That day I felt like 'the king of the world.' My family's support and acceptance means a lot to me. If my mother had continued to stop me from playing, today I wouldn't be the champion that I am.

During my first tournament in Ooty, I came second. That win surprised everyone. Then, I thought to myself that maybe I was really good at golf and I would be able to achieve something in the future. When I was competing in my second tournament, I was playing against some of the best players in India. I won that tournament, defeating Khalin Joshi, one of the best golfers in the country then and a close friend today. Everyone was shocked and surprised that I had the talent to defeat the best player. It was that confidence that helped me in the following tournaments.

At the end of my first season, after each tournament I would sit and read through my diary where I had made notes about my wins. And I would be absolutely amazed - it all did feel like a dream! The biggest dream was playing against Khalin and defeating him. After this I realised that I should try my hand at national level tournaments and competing at a higher level.

I played my first national tournament in Mumbai. This was a time when I did not understand English or Hindi, which was a huge disadvantage. It was impossible for me to even understand the caddies who were trying to tell me something about the game. Apart from the language barriers, I was extremely shy and frightened during practice because this was a national tournament – some of the best players of Indian Golf were participating on the same course as me – it was intimidating – extremely intimidating. I won that tournament! Yes, I did, and apart from being my



first national title, the win helped my confidence immensely. That is the day I told myself that, 'no matter what happens, I want to be the top player in the world.'

The victories also helped my parents appreciate the sport. From not knowing anything about the sport they were now advising me on how to 'work hard, have faith and practise harder'. After seeing me in the top three at various tournaments, they were happy to be part of my achievements. They would feel extremely proud of me when they would see my name in the headlines or my picture in the newspapers. Relatives and other people in the

village would come home to congratulate my family and they would be glad to know that I had achieved a lot of success. Which makes me very happy as well, because now I see how proud my parents are of my achievements.

There are so many talented children who do not come from privileged households. Yet, they become great personalities. Take for example, my idol Sachin Tendulkar, who has not completed his education and is the world's best cricketer. Even Praveen Kumar and Vinay Kumar do not come from well-to-do families, yet they have made a mark for themselves in cricket. Children who show an interest in sport, not necessarily golf only, should be allowed to do whatever they want to. Now that I am at point of my career that I can progress further, I am on the lookout for talented children in my village. I want to train and help sincere and interested people. While they do not have a coach, I like to at least teach them the basics of golf with the ultimate aim of creating a player who is better than me!

Playing golf has changed my life drastically. I have now become a 'gentleman' and learned how to behave in public. I have developed social manners. Now

I know how to dress appropriately. I have developed language skills and can speak in Hindi and English. My outlook towards every aspect of life has become positive. I feel myself getting mentally and physically stronger.

Sport has also taught me a lot of values. During my game in the earlier days, I used to be an angry player, a sore loser, not appreciating anyone's victories but upset that they had defeated me. I just could not accept any sort of defeat. Eventually, my coach and family explained to me that losing is a part of sport. So the most important value that sport has given me is to be humble and accept victories or losses in the same manner.

Sport has also given me an opportunity to develop bonds of friendships and to be a humble human being.

I believe in working hard so that you can enjoy your life while you're smiling, all the time!



*As a rising amateur golfer of India, **Bangalore's Chikkarangappa** has not only dominated the Junior Golf circuit but also gone on to carve a niche for himself as a talented amateur golfer. He is the youngest player to win the All-India Amateur Golf Championship in 2010. He has also won the All-India Junior title, becoming the only proud owner of both - the junior and senior titles. With his excellent stroke play and humility, Chikka is on the rise to sports stardom.*

