

MISSION TOKYO OLYMPICS: MARATHONER SRIKANT YADAV LOOKS FOR SPONSORS TO AFFORD KENYAN COACHES

By Alok Brahmhatt, Ahmedabad Mirror | Updated: Mar 11, 2018, 02.00 AM IST



In dreams begin responsibilities, said WB Yeats. Srikant Yadav's journey has started, for he has a dream. An athlete who has run and won many a marathon in the State, Yadav has set his eyes on the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. He has participated in every marathon in the State, finishing at the podium almost each time. Most recently, he won the Ahmedabad and Vadodara marathons. He completed the last marathon of 42 hours in 2.43 hours.

There lies the glitch! To qualify for the Olympics, Yadav needs to complete the marathon in 2.19 hours. And, only professional training can help him shed 24 minutes to qualify and additional 11 minutes to equal 2016 Rio Olympics gold medallist's finish time of 2.08 hours. These days, a lot of his time and energy is spent looking for an international-level coach and funds to sponsor his training. By his own confession, 31-year-old Yadav has no competition in State. Hence he competes with his watch.

He started proper running four years ago. In last three years, he has won several marathons and half-marathons in Gujarat and other states. Besides the recent Ahmedabad and Vadodara Marathons, he finished first in Lonawala Ultra marathon too. In Pune half-marathon, he was third while in BSF halfmarathon, he ended second. He is 12 minutes away from the national record for halfmarathon and 3.5 minutes for the one for 10 km race.

Unfortunately, while the dedicated practice has ensured that he finishes at the podium in almost every race that he runs, it is not enough to see him off to the Olympics.

Yadav, originally from Uttar Pradesh, has settled in Ahmedabad with his family comprising mother, grandmother, younger sister and two nieces. He has been working for SAC-ISRO, Ahmedabad, for seven years and is now the senior assistant in administration. "My director has been extremely supportive. I can avail leave without pay (SAC has allowed him to take up to five years of leave without pay). Now I need to prepare to qualify for Olympics; unfortunately there are no coaches around," he rues.

He believes that if he can run with elite runners, he may be able to better his timing with their help and guidance. "But even that is not possible in Gujarat. So I refer to the schedule and training regime of Kenyan international athletes on the internet. They are the best athletes, but following their workout schedule is difficult without the proper coaching and systematic schedule that Kenyan coaches suggest and the diet those athletes follow," remarks Yadav, whose diet comprises home-cooked food.

He cannot afford training in Kenya; one year of training will cost no less than Rs 16 lakh, he says. "There are no coaches in Gujarat who can help me improve my timing to qualify in National team. Hence, I am trying to get funds so that I can go to Kenya for training by the best coaches," he adds. The salary that Yadav earns goes towards supporting his family, paying off a home loan and funding his nieces' education, leaving little to invest in hiring an international coach.

Carrying his dream everywhere

Yadav, an extremely polite and punctual athlete, was holding a khaki file with his dreams in it. The file had all his certificates and details of his goal. On the second page is written 'My dream' in blue ink alongside the printed logo of Tokyo Olympics 2020. He has written to and met every person he thought could help him achieve his dream. SAC director Tapan Misra is all praises for Yadav's sincerity. "It is so surprising to see his promptness and punctuality in office despite waking up at 5am for workout.

He continues his training in the evening after office, but never have we observed any lapse in his timing at work. We as an organisation are also ready to sanction leaves to him and give medical support he requires for his muscle strengthening. But he should get training from some international coach. I am quite optimistic that he will make the nation proud.” Thakursinh Koshti, a marathon winner who had been sponsored by a city-based running group for 15-day training in Kenya, says he admires Yadav’s running skills. “I have been following his footsteps. Looking at his dedication, I sincerely wish he makes it to the Olympics. The 15- day training that I got is not enough for the goal that Shrikantbhai has set for himself,” he adds.

His achievements

- 1st in Ahmedabad Marathon
- 1st in Vadodara Marathon
- 1st in Lonavala Ultra Marathon
- 2nd in BSF Half Marathon
- 3rd in Pune Marathon

