



PETER PARKS / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Preeja Sreedharan of India (left) embraces compatriot Kavita Raut after Sreedharan won gold and Raut won silver in the women's 10,000m final in the athletics competition at the 16th Asian Games in Guangzhou on Sunday.

Family comes first for Indian champ

SURPRISING 10,000M WINNER WANTS TO IMPROVE KIN'S LOT BACK HOME

By LEI LEI
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — Having pulled off a shock victory in the women's 10,000 meters at the Guangzhou Asiad on Sunday, India's Preeja Sreedharan now wants to surprise her family by improving their lifestyle at home.

"I'm very proud and very happy to win the gold," said the 28-year-old Sreedharan. "I hope this can lead to improving the living conditions of my family."

Sreedharan hails from a poor family in the village of Mul-lakkanam in Kerala, southwest India.

Her father died when she was young and her older brother had to stop his studies to go to work to support the family.

Her sporting prowess has also helped the family since she took

up competitive running at the age of 13.

At the Chennai Marathon in 2008, Sreedharan won the half marathon and got about one million Indian rupees (\$22,028) in prize money. It was described by her as "the most precious hour in my life".

According to Indian reporters, Sreedharan could get about \$125,000 for her victory at the Asian Games.

She currently works as a clerk to support her running career.

She has been training with Nikolai Snesarev of Belarus for about one year.

On Sunday, Sreedharan won the gold medal in 31 minutes, 50.47 seconds, a personal best. She was followed to the line by compatriot Kavita Raut in 31:51.44.

The Indian runners beat favorite Shitaya Eshete Habtegebrsel of Bahrain, who finished third.

Sreedharan said her victory

stunned her as Raut, who won bronze in the 10,000m race at this year's Commonwealth Games, was considered the team's main gold medal contender.

"It's magic," Sreedharan said after the race. "It is my dream come true."

Before Guangzhou, Sreedharan had already made mark on the international stage.

At the 2007 Asian Championships, she won three gold medals in the 1,600m, 10,000m and 5,000m races.

Her first two gold medals were won in under three hours on the opening day — an incredible performance by a middle and long-distance runner.

It marked a turnaround in her form as she finished fifth in the 5,000m and 10,000m races at the 2006 Doha Asian Games.

Due to those achievements, she was selected to the Indian national team for the Olympic Games in 2008.

In Beijing, she competed in the women's 10,000m and finished 25th in the final.

Coach not impressed by 'gift'

By TANG YUE
CHINA DAILY

India's Sudha Singh thought she had provided the best farewell gift to her coach by winning gold in the women's 3,000m steeplechase on Sunday, but her mentor was less than thrilled by his charge's performance.

"I'm very, very happy to win the gold medal. I didn't expect to win here," said Singh. "The Chinese girl was running very fast and I didn't know whether I had won until the result flashed on the scoreboard," said the 24-year-old after defeating China's Jin Yuan by 0.07 sec.

"Today's result is already my personal best. I improved myself here and I'm now the new national record holder."

But her coach, Nikolai Snesarev, whose contract expires on Nov 30 after working with the Indian track and field team for 5 1/2 years, was not impressed.

"I'm disappointed in her performance today, it was too slow. She was running much faster in training. One more such performance will kill me," said the Belarusian.

"You know what is my motto? As soon as you are satisfied with your athlete's performance, the progress will stop. That's why she could run faster and faster," he said.

However, he appeared more upbeat when asked if Singh, who works for a railway company when she isn't competing, should be regarded as a professional athlete.

"I don't think it depends on whether she has another job, but her results," he said.

"Her performance was the best. It showed her professionalism better than anything else."

Jin won the silver medal while 37-year-old Minori Hayakari of Japan bagged the bronze.