

KIWG 2026: After setting ice on fire in Leh, figure skater Gauri Rai seeks better infrastructure to meet international demands

- *The 17-year-old from Haryana stunned Jessy Raj Mathrapu, the overwhelming pre-event favourite from Andhra Pradesh, in advanced figure skating*
- *Gauri was a roller skater before she decided to take up figure skating in 2017. She was all praise for Khelo India's move to add figure skating at KIWG 2026*

Leh (Ladakh), Jan. 22: Seventeen-year-old Gauri Rai from Haryana had a terrific outing at the 2026 Khelo India Winter Games (KIWG) first-leg at Leh's Nawang Dorjan Stobdan Stadium (NDS) on Wednesday as she won gold in the advanced figure skating category. For the first time in the history of KIWG, figure skating has been included and Gauri, who lives in Gurugram, etched her name in the annals through her solid performance.

Like many, Gauri was a roller skater to begin with. But then in 2017, she witnessed a figure skating event at the Ambience Mall in Gurugram and that changed the direction of her journey.

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DTzjWS0gfIv/?igsh=MW82cmxpZGh2eXpraQ==>

“Roller skating, I had been doing that for a long time. But I always wanted to do something which had both speed and grace and when I witnessed a figure skating event at the Ambience Mall, I knew what I was going to do from there on. From quads to in-line skating to figure skating, it has been quite a journey,” Gauri, who in India colours also won a silver in the United Arab Emirates Figure Skating Championship in Dubai in 2022, said.

But if truth be told, Gauri was not expecting to get the top finish. If not for a piece of luck, the colour of her medal could have been different. She explains: “I was not confident enough. Because I was out of breath during my performance. I am not used to this altitude, so I couldn't give my best. But my competitor Jessy Raj Mathrapu, the favourite, had a fall which led to my finishing on top,” the modest Gauri said.

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DTxGR0egdzt/?igsh=djhmaGU1ZWducWNj>

“But my mother was always confident that I will win gold. Both my parents are elated. After the results got out yesterday evening, I had a family video call. My parents were also there. A big party were they all asking for,” Gauri, who has also competed in South Korea, Singapore, the Philippines, and Bulgaria, added.

Gauri Rai, who studies at the Manav Rachna International School in Gurugram, also thanked the Khelo India initiative for organising ‘such a fantastic event.’ “I am very thankful to the Sports Authority of India (SAI) for staging such a world-class event. The ice surface here at the NDS is very smooth. Apart from these facilities, we got great accommodation, food and transport. Thanks to the media coverage too, that of DD Sports and others. It is a new sport in India and we need the media to take it out to more and more people in the country,” she said.

Finally, Gauri said that figure skating is on the up in India but there is still a lot of scope for improvement. “Our competitors from the other parts of the world practise 16 hours a day. We need more artificial ice surfaces, Olympic-size. Right now, we have only two in

the country – the other being in Dehradun. That’s the only way to produce more and more quality players.”

Gauri is now looking to do well in an International Skating Union Seminar (in March or April) which conducts tests to decide whether or not a player is ready for international competitions.

For KIWG 2026 medal tally, please click <https://www.winter.kheloindia.gov.in/medal-tally>

For more on KIWG 2026: please click www.Winter.kheloindia.gov.in

ABOUT KHELO INDIA WINTER GAMES

Under the Khelo India Scheme, the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports (MYAS) organizes National-level competitions, i.e., Khelo India Youth Games, Khelo India University Games, Khelo India Para Games and Khelo India Winter Games to provide a platform for talented athletes to showcase their sporting and competitive skills. Starting in 2020, five editions of Khelo India Winter Games have been successfully conducted. While the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir have hosted all editions of KIWG, UT Ladakh started hosting the ice sports from 2024. This will be the third time UT Ladakh will be hosting the ice Games. Gulmarg in J&K will host the snow events. Apart from tapping talent, Khelo India Winter Games also showcase a region’s art, culture, heritage, and promotes tourism through sports.

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