

Aarush Tiwari and Hiya Adlakha: Story of two teenaged figure skaters carving a course on ice

Haryana girl Hiya won gold in novice girls' category at KIWG 2026 while Delhi's Aarush won bronze in boys' category

For both skaters an Olympic Council of Asia camp in Harbin, China was an eye-opener

Leh (Ladakh), Jan. 23: On the ice, they skate alone. Off it, they share a journey defined by courage, sacrifice and belief. Aarush Tiwari and Hiya Adlakha (both novice figure skaters) belong to Gen Z of Indian figure skaters daring to dream big in a sport still struggling to find its feet in the country. Separated by geography but united by ambition, these two teenagers represent hope and aspiration into India's growing ice sports ecosystem.

For 14-year-old Aarush Tiwari of Delhi, winner of bronze medal in novice boys' category in Khelo India Winter Games 2026 underway in Leh, skating began before he could remember. At the age of two, Aarush first stepped onto roller skates, quickly finding rhythm and balance. Competitive success followed in roller skating, but a turning point came when he transitioned to ice -- a leap that demanded relearning everything he knew.

The shift from wheels to blades was so transformative that Aarush documented it in a book he authored himself, titled *Wheels to Ice, Born to Rise*. The book traces his personal journey, detailing the technical challenges, mental adjustments and emotional highs and lows of adapting to figure skating -- a rare introspection for someone his age.

"I was not an ice skater at all in the beginning," Aarush says. "Moving to ice was very difficult, but once I started, I knew this was what I wanted to do," he told SAI Media.

Training primarily at the ice rink in Dehradun, Aarush developed his skills under the guidance of coach J.S. Sahney. Progress came steadily, and soon he began representing India internationally.

"I competed at the Asian Open (2023) and Thailand Open (2024), consistently finishing among the top skaters in his category. My biggest breakthrough came in 2025 at the Asian Open in the Philippines, where I won a bronze medal. It was a landmark achievement for a young Indian skater like me," Aarush said.

Another key milestone was his selection for an international training camp in Harbin, China organised by Olympic Council of Asia. Hiya was also there in the camp with him. Beyond technical skating, the camp focused on athlete education, covering anti-doping awareness, safeguarding and professionalism.

"It helped me understand what it really means to be an international athlete," Aarush says.

Competing at the Khelo India Winter Games added another chapter to his journey. Skating in Leh, at high altitude, tested his endurance and recovery. "The oxygen levels make it very tough, but these challenges help us grow," Aarush reflects.

If Aarush's journey is about transition and self-expression, gold medal winner in novice girls' category in Khelo India Winter Games 2026 Hiya Adlakha's story is one of perseverance and quiet resilience.

Hiya, 15, grew up surrounded by sport. Her mother Sapna Gupta is an international rhythmic gymnastics judge, officiating at World Cups across the globe, while her elder sister Life Adlakha once represented India in gymnastics before an injury interrupted her career. Excellence and discipline were part of Hiya's environment, but carving her own identity in figure skating meant confronting isolation.

"Figure skating is a full-time sport. You can't train once a week and expect results." Hiya says. In a country with a limited number of qualified coaches, Hiya often trains alone, analysing videos and correcting technique on her own.

"The solitude is mentally demanding, but it has shaped my independence. Two years ago, my relationship with the sport deepened as I began focusing not just on medals, but on personal growth. Figure skating made me feel closer to myself." Hiya says.

For Hiya, the training camp at Harbin was an eye-opener. Training alongside skaters from across Asia, she was exposed to world-class facilities and elite competition. “That experience changed my mind-set completely. It made me want to represent India even more.” Says Hiya.

Hiya’s progress was reflected at home, where she clinched her first national gold medal in June 2025 after previously winning multiple national bronze medals. Competing in the Intermediate Novice category, just below junior level, Hiya understands the steep climb ahead.

Her inspirations come from different worlds. Internationally, she admires American skater Alysa Liu. Closer home, it is her sister’s comeback from injury that fuels her belief. “If she could come back, so can I,” Hiya says.

For both Aarush and Hiya, the Khelo India Winter Games represent more than a competition. The inclusion of figure skating has opened doors to regular competition, improved facilities and national visibility. With artificial rinks now operational in Ladakh and Dehradun, and more in the pipeline, the future no longer feels distant.





