

Samina Khatoon, Kargil's pride, reflects ice hockey aspirations among women in Ladakh

Fifteen-year-old Samina was the youngest member of Ladakh's Ice Hockey Team at the Khelo India Winter Games 2025 in Leh

Kargil (Ladakh), January 28, 2025: Samina Khatoon's mother gave a mild disapproval about taking up a sport which was predominantly pursued by boys in Ladakh's Kargil District. "You will turn black and blue," her mother had warned her. However, Samina could not resist the pair of skiing boots lying idle in her house. The boots were a gift by her uncle to her elder brother whose disinterest in the pair proved to be Samina's glide to glory.

Fifteen-year old Samina Khatoon, studying in the 9th standard in Mutahhary Public School, Baroo (Kargil), didn't want to give up the opportunity and so juggled between school and practice, 2020 onwards, and won her parents' approval along the way. Her classmates envied her. However, they helped her catch up with missed class notes, lectures and assignments.

Samina's toil paid off as she made it to Ladakh's Women Ice Hockey Team in 2023, making her the youngest player of the team at the Khelo India Winter Games of 2025 and the first female from her village -Trespone in Kargil District.

Prior to this, she played for clubs from Kargil and went on to play in tournaments such as the LG Cup/CEC Cup. In the CEC Cup of 2024-25, she scored 6 goals while representing Downhill Kargil Adventure Sports Club and was declared the Player of the Series. On Monday, she scored once in Ladakh's 4-0 win against arch-rivals ITBP en route to the KIWG-2025 Gold.

In Kargil, communities have opened their doors to opportunities for the new generation of boys and girls alike, sans any gender bias. Women are now being supported and encouraged by their families and society at large to follow professions and passions of their choice.

Abid Ali, District Youth Services & Sports Officer, Kargil shares that he has witnessed this positive change take over in the recent years, highlighting that this progress is a part of an ongoing process with more girls taking up sports, especially male-dominated ones such as ice hockey which is considered a taxing sport. Proof of this lies in the fact that there are over six women's ice hockey clubs in Kargil District formed over the recent years spanning from Kukshow, Chiktan, Bodkharbu, Mulbek, Drass, Kargil, etc.

Ali adds that to promote participation, players are being provided gears/equipment at subsidized rates. Moreover, the clubs were last year provided with equipment free of cost under the UT Administration's Special Development Package, informs Ali. Under a similar package, rinks are also being developed across Kargil.

Ladakh Women's Ice Hockey Foundation, founded in 2016 has been travelling to rural regions of Ladakh and providing coaching to young children. During the visits the foundation realised the willingness and eagerness amongst the girls to play ice hockey and have, therefore, continued with their endeavour.

"We have come a long way in making a mark and we take it upon ourselves to ensure that fresh and competent players are identified for the team," shares Noor Jahan, goalkeeper of the Ladakh's women team.

Taking note of the success of such endeavours, a similar coaching programme has also been initiated by the Youth Services & Sports Department in Kargil which provides basic ice hockey coaching for children under 14 years in different zones across Kargil. Ali states that out of a registration of approximately 200 children, almost 40 % are girls.

Chamba Tsetan, founder of Adventure Sports Frontier of Ladakh (ASFL) and part of the Indian men's ice hockey team says that ice hockey in Ladakh has been promoted as a safe game and, therefore, girls are encouraged to take up the sport. "It is a beautiful game, enjoyed by the players and spectators alike," says

Tsetan, adding that the facilities for the players, especially the female players, are ensured to be in place. “Safety is the first thing parents ensure and since it is in place, there is no hesitation, no boundary,” he adds.

Despite all the glorified support system for the women players, they strongly feel that at the end of the day, it is each other’s encouragement and camaraderie that keeps them going. “There are many discouraging factors but we have learnt to deal with them in the greater interest of the team,” shares Noor Jahan.

Samina had begun her journey by playing at Sher Bagh on the river bank of Suru River in Kargil Town. She subsequently got associated with Downhill Kargil Adventure Sports Club and the rest is history. Her parents, Mohammad Yunus and Fatima Bano, must be proud of their illustrious daughter’s achievements and the laurels she has brought.

Imtiyaz Ali Khan, President, Downhill Kargil Adventure Sports Club, says that Samina joined his club in 2019-20 along with other promising players like Mehroon and Aqila. The club has been consistently encouraging and grooming these players while more are walking on their footsteps and following suit.

Samina has been appointed Assistant Captain of the UT Women’s team. Her teammates share that ‘bulu’ (the little one), as the team members lovingly call her, is a promising player. “I have a lot to learn and a long way to go,” smiles away Samina.



