



SDAT-AKG TABLE TENNIS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE
Supported by **UFT** Ultimate Table Tennis

Indian Legend
Trained by Rao Brothers
Achantha Sharath Kamal
Commonwealth Champion



Table toppers

SDAT-AKG TABLE TENNIS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE - SPORTS



The SDAT-AMG Table Tennis Development Centre is spearheaded by the Rao brothers, two coaches from the same family who have given their all to the world of table tennis. It is currently based in a sprawling 12,000 sq.ft hall at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, a far cry from their humble origins. Their immense contributions and tireless efforts have led their academy to be regarded as one of the finest facilities in the country.

Born and brought up in Rajahmundry in Andhra Pradesh, Srinivasa Rao and Muralidhara Rao, started playing

table-tennis at the age of 17 and 13 respectively. The club at their city town-hall allowed the brothers to get involved primarily in three sports activities, namely: table tennis, ball-badminton and chess. However, they took up table tennis seriously, simply because they had access to their elder brother's table tennis racket. Hence, their foray was purely accidental and little did they know that it would become such a significant part of their lives.

Their unwavering attachment to the sport brought them victories soon enough.

Srinivasa Rao became state champion in just two years. Muralidhara Rao, his younger brother, in the very same State Championships was placed at 5th position and both of them won 1st place in the doubles category. Srinivasa Rao went on to enter his first nationals in 1973 which took place in Chennai. At his second nationals meet at Indore he had a brief moment with G. Jagannath - National table tennis champion in 1970 and an Arjuna awardee - whose kind and encouraging words really lifted his spirits.

Both the brothers started work at government departments in Chennai around 1975-76 which gave them a stable line of income. Their playing era was only 11 years long with lots of achievements at the state, university and national level. Though the brothers had trained well enough to compete at the national level, they were beginning to feel the pinch and wanted to transition into a coaching role. Srinivasa Rao after his training at the National Institute of Sports (NIS) started as a coach at the Don Bosco school in Egmore in 1983. Soon after, his brother joined him too and the both of them started coaching together in SBOA school and Santhome school simultaneously.

When the Rao brothers had started their coaching journey, there were hardly three coaching centers in the whole of Chennai at that time. The coaching at Santhome school that started in 1984 which included outsiders too as they believed it would be in the best

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interest of the trainees, went on till 1988 before they shifted to the Young Men Indian Association at the Mylapore club. A coaching unit in Padma Seshadri school too was started in 1986 and continues till date.

Spotting great potential in B. Bhuvaneshwari, a youngster of 13 years, and after intensive training under them, she reached the National level. She was the runner-up in the under-13 category and under-17 category. She then led the Tamil Nadu team to win the National championships in both the categories and was placed 5th overall in All-India seniors.



where he was the runner-up. Muralidhara Rao says that it was easier for them to work with Sharath because he was quick to follow any instruction and trusted his coach. This was not the case with many of their other trainees.

Around 2003, the Rao brothers approached the Tamil Nadu Sports Development Authority with an application to start a bigger coaching unit with better facilities. They suggested a place within the Nehru stadium. The place provided to them was spacious, but with minimal infrastructure. Over the years, the Rao brothers have had to invest on lighting, equipment and furnishing to set up the proper coaching arena that it is now.

Around 2005-06, the AKG Trust was started by the Rao brothers in the memory of their mother. When this new academy was started, most of their students initially were underprivileged kids from the same area. Even though some of their trainees were achievers at the national and international levels, they believed their training was more about fostering discipline and building character. They charge a negligible or no fee for players

from underprivileged backgrounds and compensate for the training costs by charging the privileged ones. They train around 200 students as part of their weekly training programme. Around 60% of their trainees who are participating in the state-level tournaments, belong to the lower-income strata. The academy aims to provide them with the necessary training and sports equipment free of cost and even find the appropriate sponsorship at later stages. Specially-abled persons, hearing-challenged individuals and people with artificial limbs are also their trainees.

The current daily routine of the Rao brothers involves coaching their trainees from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. and then from 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Srinivasa Rao has recently taken up Chennai District Secretaryship and Muralidhara Rao, the role of Vice-President at the Tamil Nadu State Association. Hence, the brothers are looking forward to their sons Rajath Kamal and Sharath Kamal taking up coaching at the SDAT-AKG Academy in the near future, while occupying an administrative/advisory role there. The Rao brothers hire qualified fitness trainers, and talk to them regarding

the training regime listing the muscle groups that need to be trained for better activation. Based on this the fitness trainers prepare a conditioning routine for the trainees that helps them improve their performance.

Srinivasa Rao was awarded the Dronacharya Award in 2018, just after Sharath bagged two medals at the Asian games. The Rao brothers also represented their respective departments, Income Tax (Srinivasa Rao) and Central Excise (Muralidhara Rao), at the All-India level and won medals until the last year of their retirement bringing accolades to their department.

Table tennis is a fast-growing sport. In 2018, three TN players won two medals at the Asian games. The rubber material on the racket, the size of the ball and the use of robots to assist training players have only made the game more exciting and challenging. The governments have also taken up initiative by allocating more funds, cash prizes and sports quotas in various employment categories to improve the livelihood of athletes and also encourage new ones.

The primary struggle involved in coaching they feel is the parent's interference in their ward's game. The Rao brothers call this pseudo-intelligence, as the parents are untrained in the technical aspects of the sport. When requested not to, the parents tend to pull their ward off from that coaching center as the options nowadays are abundant. This ultimately hampers the ward's progress. One other drawback is the limited live viewership for the sport. Despite these drawbacks, the Rao brothers have given 40 years of their lives to coaching children from diverse backgrounds, guiding many to victories and enabling growth of the sport. The KSA Trust applauds their tireless efforts in building the academy and contributing wholesomely to the world of table tennis and so truly are the Champions of Chennai.

In the 90s the Rao brothers were not in a position to train senior players due to the lack of resources. Players eventually left for bigger coaching centers with better facilities. Around 1990 two of their exemplary players, Chetan. P. Baboor and S.Raman left the Rao brothers coaching for a senior coaching facility. They take immense pride in having contributed their expertise to four who went on to become Olympians, namely S.Raman, Chetan. P. Baboor, Sharath Kamal and Neha Agarwal. They started training Sharath (Srinivasa Rao's son) who was 6 years old then. Sharath entered his first National tournament in 2002,