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Pole Vaulter Maria Jaison rises to the challenge

Twenty-year-old student of Jain University says hardships faced by her parents have helped her confront all the difficulties she encounters in life

● Prince Augustin

Unlike most kids who enjoy playing video games or watching cartoons in their childhood, Maria Jaison pursued her interest in sports. The student of Jain University was introduced to long jump when she was seven years old, but things did not work out as planned and then she decided to shift her focus to pole vault. The athlete, 20, currently holds an All India Inter-University record of 3.65m achieved last year, which is also her personal best. She eclipsed Kyathi Vakharia record of 3.40m.

Besides the record, Maria, BA Economics third year student, has achieved a number of highs in her career. She won gold medals in National School Games in 2013, 2015 and 2016 and finished runners-up at the Asian School Meet held in Malaysia 2013. She currently trains at SAI, Bengaluru, by her mentor Robert George.



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George. "At her age, Maria is the best in the country. Given her dedication level in training, she has it in her to attain bigger things in the future." Robert tells *City Express*.

Despite all the success, her journey has not been all rosy. Born in a poor family, the girl from Kerala is thankful for all the encourage-

ment, which she has received over the years. Coming from poor background, buying kits was also a challenge for her family. "I come from a family of farmers and the hardships my parents went through for my sake, help me face all challenges. My family was so poor that they found it very difficult to afford even the kit. But, my father somehow managed to get them for me and I am thankful to him for it," says Jaison, who was felicitated during the Annual Awards Ceremony last week in the university.

Like all other teenage athletes, the problem also arises when they have to strike a balance between studies and sports.

Dr UV Shankar, sports director, Jain University, says, "Maria is able to balance sports and studies quite well. We hope that one day she would represent the country and make all of us proud."