

THE NEW
INDIAN EXPRESS

Gagan Ullalmath: Reaching for the skies

by S S Shreekumar

Bangalore: Adaveeshaiah Puttaveeraswamy Gagan Ullalmath. Quite naturally, the distance that is his favourite in swimming, the 1,500 metres freestyle event. It is, indeed, a lot, lot longer than his name. But the co-incidence is very obvious.

Gagan was given a berth in the London Olympic 1,500 metres event line-up on an University quota. It came as a big surprise to him for he was pitch-forked into the Olympic pool virtually out of nowhere. He finished 6th in Heat 1 of the 1500 m freestyle event clocking 16:31:14 secs.

But the experience gained was invaluable for Gagan

who trains under national coach Pradeep Kumar at the Basavangudi Aquatic Centre. He returned and virtually set the senior national championships' pool on fire. Gagan bagged the gold in the 400 individual medley and the 4x200 and 4x100 freestyle relay events. Gagan also bagged the silver in the 400, 800 and 1,500 freestyle events.

The Jain University student then boarded the flight to Dubai for the Asian swimming championships and emerged as the sixth fastest swimmer in Asia over the gruelling 1,500 metres freestyle event. Gagan clocked 15:58.00 secs for that record and in the process chipped one second off his previous



Gagan

best of 15:59.00 secs that he had timed in a meet in Singapore. Gagan did well for the Jain University in the recently concluded VIE13 sports meet's swimming event. Having tasted

success in bigger events, collegiate and university meets are now child's play for this 20-year-old endurance swimmer.

Gagan is ambitious but with his feet firmly on the

ground. "My aim is to win a medal in the Asian games in 2014. If not, then I want to make it to the final at least and line up with the best in Asia," said Gagan.

But how does he train for the gruelling event? "Well, I

STAR OF THE WEEK

do about 8 kms in the morning and 8 kms in the evening, except on Wednesdays and Sundays. That enables me to build my stamina needed for the distance," said Gagan.

But then swimming is a very tough sport and takes a lot out of the swimmer. How

does he manage to keep the energy going? "I have been given a diet chart and I try to follow it without fail. I know what to eat and what not to eat. It has been prepared for me by Ryan Fernando, a Bangalore-based nutritionist. He has jotted down the supplements I must take including the timings and quantity. So that way, I get back my energy quickly," said Gagan. "All that I have achieved would not have been possible without the support of Jain University. They have given me all that I need, including scholarships. My coach Pradeep sir has always guided me and I owe it to them that I do something at the Asian Games," Gagan signed off.