




The New Indian Express

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retro star




The World Professional Billiards Championship is one of the oldest sporting world championships in the world, dating to the mid-1800s.

English billiards was originally called the 'winning and losing carambole game'. It is a combination of 'the winning game', 'the losing game' and 'the carambole game'.

celeb speak

Pankaj Advani is not your average young-kid-next-door. The world champion, who has many titles and honours in his kitty, wants to return to college for an MBA



'I miss being a student'

→ **Sharan Poojanna**
BANGALORE

Born genius could be a term commonly used to describe a prodigy, but in the case of Pankaj Advani, the expression gets a whole new meaning. The 24-year-old world champion cueist — in amateur and professional circuits — stands testimony to his name being engraved in the history of Indian and world sports.

The youngster from Bengaluru, has already achieved what most professional cueists may only aim to achieve in a life time. With seven world titles in billiards and snooker, it may well be just his warm-up session to titles quest. He is a much sought-after personality in social events and parties. At fashion shows, he's almost always a VIP.

"I never really had a college life," says this 20-something sports star. He says he attended the crash course that was designed for college sports persons just before the exams at the end of the year. Despite the pressures of proving himself in sports, Advani claims he has always been an above average student. "My college and the management have helped me in my endeavours. I divided my time well between sports and academics."



He recalls an instance in 2003 when he attended college. "My college chairperson asked me what I was doing in college, while I should be practising. He wanted to know when I would get my first world title. I told him I'd have to wait for another couple of years."

As luck would have it, Advani won his first world title within six months at the IBSF World Snooker Championship in China. "I was overwhelmed and overjoyed by the experience. Nobody gave me the win. In hindsight, however, it seems I was destined to win."

When Pankaj came back to Bangalore, he says everyone at the college sports department came to receive him at the airport. "Even the chairman, Chenraj Jain, was there. It was a great feeling to be welcomed like that." Two years later, he won the IBSF World Billiards Championship in 2005 at Qawra, Malta. He became the second cueist (after Malta's Paul Mifsud) to have won both the billiards and snooker world titles.

Coached by Arvind Savur for over a decade in

Bangalore, Pankaj is the only player to have achieved a 'grand double' of winning both the points and timed formats at the IBSF World Billiards Championships in 2005. He went on to repeat the same feat at the 2008 championships held in Bangalore. Last year, Pankaj won the Professional World Billiards title. In its 139-year history, he is only the second Indian, to have won this title.

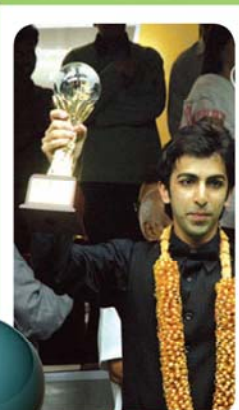
This multi-world champion sounds wistful when he talks of his college days or its lack thereof. "I missed the smaller things of being a student. I never really had a hangout. Neither did I do anything like other normal college kids would regularly do. I didn't even have time for a college romance."

Quiz him on his championships, the ace cueist notes, "There is a time and place for everything; focus on your education while studying and the sport while practising. Only then you can pass out with flying colours in whatever you aspire to do."

Among his favourites, he likes Peter Gilchrist for his sportsmanship. He says Mike Russell is "one of the greatest billiards players in the world". He is busy practising for Asian Games slated for November in China. ■

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The noisemaker in college

"Though I was hardly in college, I loved being a student. Sitting at the back of the class, I used to make funny noises of cars and other things. I was caught once while doing this and made to stand outside class. Later, my principal took pity on me and rescued me."

Pankaj Advani graduated with a B Com degree in 2006 from Jain College, Bangalore. He says he was so busy honing his gaming skills in college that he barely has time for romance.

If there was one thing he could change about his college life, what would it be? "I would like to attend college like a normal student. I wish I could go back to college and do all those things that I missed out on."

For a cause

Geet Sethi is promoting a venture called Olympic Gold Quest, committed to supporting Indian sportspersons with Olympic medal-winning potential. He is the six-time winner of the professional-level and a three-time winner of the amateur World Championships in English Billiards.