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A study on people's perception of golf in India

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Abstract

India is the first country outside Great Britain to take up the game of golf. The Royal Calcutta Golf Club, established in 1829, is the oldest golf club in India and the first outside the Great Britain. Due to the British rule, the eighteenth century saw a mushrooming of new golf clubs in India. The setting up of the Royal Golf Club of Calcutta was followed by the now-defunct Royal Bombay Golf Club in 1842 and the Bangalore Golf Club in 1876. The Shillong Golf Club incorporated a golf course in 1886. Golf had already been played in India for 59 years before the first major course was opened in the USA and Europe in 1888. By the end of the 19th Century, India had a dozen golf clubs.

The main objective of the study was to find the perception of people about golf from various perspectives such as awareness, popularity, general knowledge, status, expenditure, comparison with other sports etc. A self-made questionnaire, validated by three professionals of sports management, was used to receive feedbacks from the respondents. Information was collected from 100 respondents using google docs.

The conclusion of the study is that the game of golf is not popular among the common mass and thus the general participation is very poor. Although there is a specific golf channel, there is no comprehensive awareness of golf. Most of the respondents perceived that golf is technically tough sports and the cost of equipment is very high. As per the responses, it is evident that Mr. Jeev Milkha Singh is the most popular Indian golfer. The study also reveals that the game of golf is the least attractive sports among common people in comparison with the other sports selected by the researchers for the purpose of study.

Keywords: Golf, perception, course, players, perspective, popularity, brand, market, professional sports, traditional sports

1. Introduction

India premiered in national level golf championship in 1892. This was an occasion when the Royal Calcutta Golf Club played the host to the all new Amateur Golf Championship. In the history of golf, this tournament turned out to be the second oldest tournament in the world after the famous British Open. Until the 1950s, all the golf clubs in India worked under the prestigious affiliation of the Royal Calcutta Golf Club. The December of 1955 saw another major transition in the history of golf in India. That year a group of skilled golf players in the country constituted the Indian Golf Union (IGU). This organization became the integral body solely responsible for the management and promotion of the sport in the country. Over the years, the IGU has taken several steps to improve the standard of the sport in the country.

The year 1958, also became a landmark year in the history of golf in India. From this year onwards, the Amateur Golf Championship started to be conducted alternatively in three different cities, Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi. Then there was the inauguration of the Indian Open tournaments in 1964 and since then there was no looking back for the sport. This tournament is now held annually and has contributed significantly to the development of golf in India.

Golfing in India has come a long way, and a large number of Indian players now compete on the international circuit. Golf enthusiasts continue to grow in numbers, and new courses are added almost every year. And what could be a better feather in India's golfing cap than the fact that Delhi was chosen to host the first ever golf competition for the Asian Games in 1982. Four talented gentlemen, "Bunny" Laxman Singh, Rajeev Mohta, Rishi Narain and Amit Luthra, represented India. The team seized home-course advantage and ran with it all the way to the top of the podium. They won team gold, Singh won individual gold and Mohta won individual silver. It is fair to say that the history of golf at the Asian Games began in India because 1982 was the first time when the sport was featured in the multi-sport event.

Despite this rich legacy, the country's vast population of 1.2 billion, a rapidly growing middle class and an economy that barrels along with an annual high growth rate, golf remains a highly marginal, elitist activity. At present, there are approximately 1, 50,000 active golfers in India, which is only 0.0125% of the population (Source: Golf Digest).

1.1 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were

- To found out people’s perception on golf
- To found out people’s awareness about the golfing scenario in India.
- To compare the popularity of golf with the other sports in India.
- Finding the cost associated to start up playing golf compared to other popular sports.
- Finding whether golf only associated with elitism or not.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Primary data collection

Primary data is the first hand data collected by the researcher through various methods and are generally considered to be more reliable than secondary data. Also the level of accuracy towards the research problem is higher. Primary data for this research was carried out by using questionnaires, to realise primary objectives of research.

2.2 Important aspects of the questionnaire

- 1) The questionnaire was made using Google docs form and it was filled online by the respondents.
- 2) Questionnaire was of “structured” Nature and the purpose of research was disclosed.
- 3) 100 individuals were considered through Judgmental sampling as the subjects of the study.

2.3 Secondary data collection

Secondary data was collected through news articles, websites, journals, previous research works etc.

2.4 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study are stated below:

- a. Due to lack of time and resources, this research was carried out on a sample size of 100.
- b. Respondents’ could have replied in a socially desirable manner.
- c. Questionnaires were filled online so if the respondents had difficulty in grasping the question, there was no one to direct them.

3. Results, analysis and interpretation

Table 1: Accessibility to a golf course have you ever been to a golf course?

Option	Number	Percent
A	46	46%
B	54	54%

Response A. Yes B. No

From our questionnaire, it was found that 46% of the respondents have been to a golf course. The important question here is whether the rest of the 54% didn’t go to a golf course because of their dislike towards the game of golf or whether the golf courses were not accessible to them. In Kolkata, the two major golf courses, The Royal Calcutta Golf Club and Tollygunj Golf Club, are not accessible to

common public. This is the situation in most parts of the country. Most of the private golf courses require huge membership fees. India has more than 100 golf courses which belong to the military lands and again it is just accessible to military people and people who are associated with them.

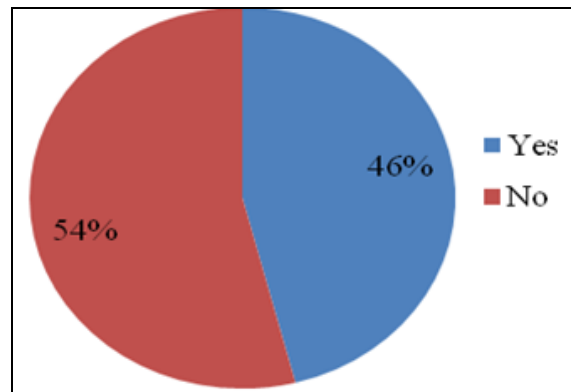


Fig 1: Graphical representation of Accessibility to a golf course

Table 2: Playing golf have you ever played golf?

Option	Number	Percent
A	24	24%
B	76	76%

Response A. Yes B. No

Only 24% of our respondents have ever played golf. The problem here is again whether the people didn’t play golf for their dislike towards the game or whether they didn’t have a chance to play the game.

As mentioned above, most of the golf courses require huge membership fees and most of them are inaccessible to common public as they belong to the military so there is a high chance that people who didn’t play golf didn’t get an opportunity to play the game.

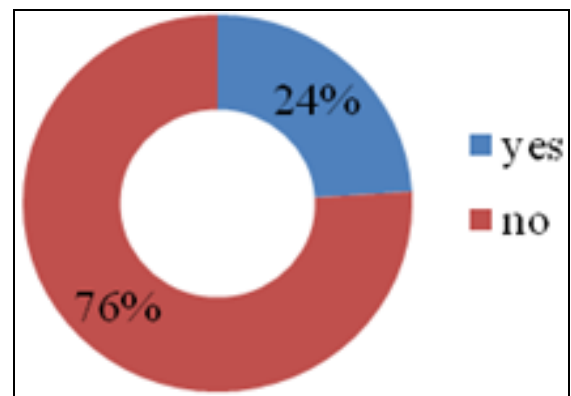


Fig 2: Graphical representation of playing golf

Table 3: Popularity of Golf among peers Do you know someone who plays golf or used to play golf?

Option	Number	Percent
A	38	38%
B	62	62%

Response A. Yes B. No

From our questionnaire, we found that 62% of the respondents didn’t know anyone who is associated with playing golf. This is an important question as the influence of the perrs and friends can cause one to pick up certain sport. But as seen from the response, only 38% of the respondents knew someone who has played golf.

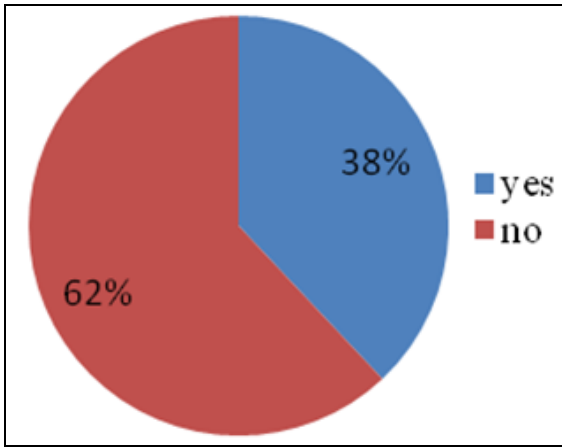


Fig 3: Graphical representation of Popularity of Golf among peers

Table 4: Golf on TV Have you ever watched golf on TV?

Option	Number	Percent
A	87	87%
B	13	13%

Response A. Yes B. No

From our questionnaire, it is evident that 87% of our respondents have watched golf on television at some point of time. It is also clear that golf is broadcasted on TV in India and there is also a dedicated golf channel called TEN GOLF. Though the research didn't take into account how long or how frequently do they watch golf.

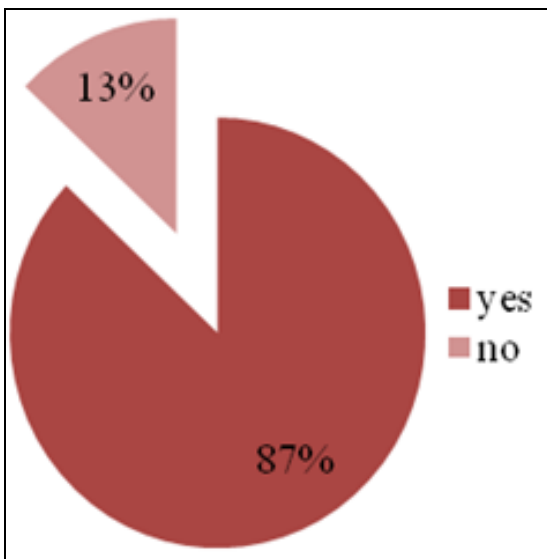


Fig 4: Graphical representation of golf on TV

Table 5: Golf: A rich man's sport Do you consider golf as a rich person's sport? A. Yes B. No C. May be

Options	Number	Percent
A	67	67%
B	7	7%
C	26	26%

Response

The common notion is that golf is a rich man's sport. From our questionnaire, it is clear that most of the respondents think the same. The key question here is why this notion has persisted over the years. Golf was brought in India by the British during their rule and was played only by the elite people. That mindset seems to have remained even now with

67% of the respondents claiming that golf is a rich man's sport and only 7% clearly denied that fact.

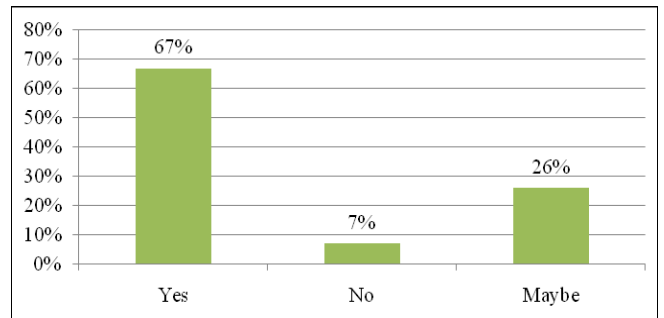


Fig 5: Graphical representation about golf as rich man sports

Table 6: Golf at Olympics Were you aware golf was a part of Rio Olympic, 2016?

Option	Number	Percent
A	59	59%
B	41	41%

Response A. Yes B. No

Golf made a comeback at the Olympics after more than a century. Olympics are considered to be the epitome of sports events and golf being a part of it, was supposed to make the game more popular and prominent in the public eye. But only 59% of the respondents were aware that golf was part of the Olympics even though the likes of Aditi Ashok, the 19 year old, did India proud with her performance. She was in the top 8 after the first two rounds and was in with a chance for a podium finish. But eventually she drifted away and finished 41st. Nevertheless she is being held as the next big thing in Indian golf as she is just 19 and has a big future ahead of her. It was sorry to see that 41% of the respondents were not aware that golf was part of the Rio Olympics.

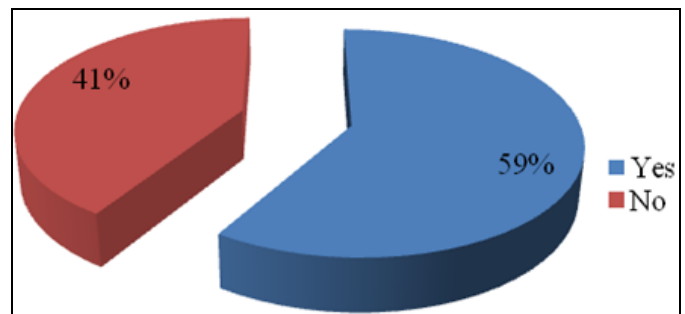


Fig 6: Graphical representation of awareness of golf as an Olympic event

Table 7: Number of golf courses around the country

How many golf courses would there be in India according to you? A. 5-50 B. 50-100 C. 100-150 D. 150-200 E. 200-250 F. 250 or more

Options	Number	Percent
A	22	22%
B	38	38%
C	20	20%
D	5	5%
E	7	7%
F	8	8%

80% of the respondents believe that India does not have more than 150 golf courses. However, the actual figure is quite different. India has 291 golf courses (9 holes and 18 hole

included), out of which 231 courses are affiliated to IGU (Indian Golf Union) which is the apex body of golf in the country and is responsible for the promotion and development of golf in India.

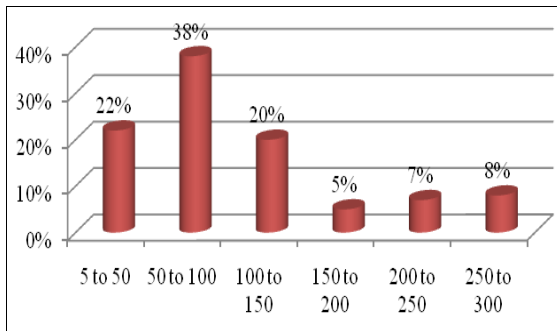


Fig 7: Graphical representation of Number of golf courses in India

Table 8: Golf- A tough sport to master On the basis of skills required and toughness, how tough is golf according to you in the rank of 1 to 10? (1 being the easiest and 10 being the toughest)

Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Frequency	0	2	6	6	7	7	18	30	19	5

Response

On a scale of 10, 54% of the respondents rated golf 8 or above on the level of difficulty involved in the game. Golf is generally considered as a tough sport to master because even a played course never plays the same. Another reason why it's a tough sport to master is that a golfer competes with 50-60 odd players at the same time in a particular tournament.

'A professional golfer has to combine the power of a powerful batsman to drive the ball 300 yards with the deft touch of a billiards player and the skill of a dart player all at once'- Rishi Narain, 1982, Asian Games Gold medallist.

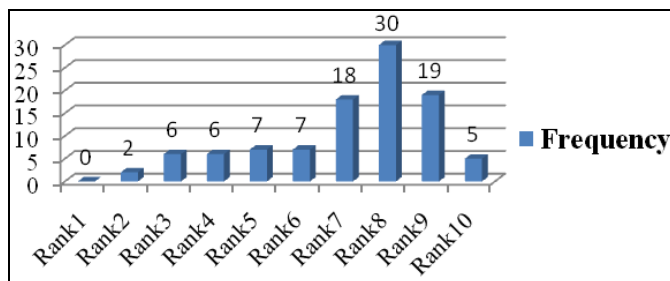


Fig 8: Graphical representation of about the toughness of playing golf

A. Rs. 5000-10000 B. Rs. 10,000-20000 C. Rs. 20,000-30,000 D. Rs. 30,000-40,000 E. Rs. 40,000-50,000 F. Rs. 50,000 and above

Table 9: Equipment cost on an average, how much does a beginner's level golf kit costs?

Options	Number	Percent
A	10	10%
B	23	23%
C	36	36%
D	15	15%
E	10	10%
F	6	6%

69% of the respondents believe that a beginner's level golf kit will cost below Rs.30,000. Contrary to popular belief, the golf

kits are not terribly expensive. A beginner's set can be purchased at a price of Rs.20,000 which is good for first couple of years. One can spend anywhere from Rs.30,000 to 1.5 lakhs or more for a good set of clubs which can last upto 10 years depending on the usage pattern. One can even rent golf clubs at a nominal fee of Rs.50/- per club at various clubs and golf courses. (Source- Golf Digest).

As mentioned above, a beginner's level golf kit can be purchased for somewhere around Rs.20,000. In comparison with other sports, we may say that the beginning level golf kit is the costliest as a cricket kit, at that level, with all equipment, will cost around Rs.10,000, whereas a basic football kit will cost around Rs.1500, a badminton kit will cost around Rs.1000 and a hockey kit will cost around Rs.4500 (Source: Amazon.com).

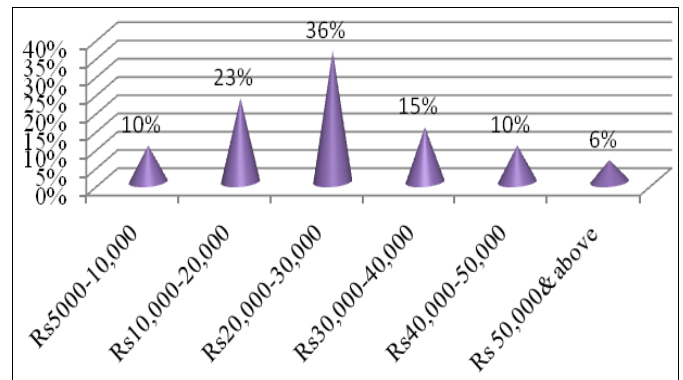


Fig 9: Graphical representation of the cost of the equipment

Table 10: What word comes to mind when hear the word 'golf'?

Most Common Words used	Percentage
Tiger woods	24%
Rich/Posh/Elite/Classy etc	36%
Greenry/Scenic beauty etc	9%
Boring	9%
Other	22%

Some of the most common words which the respondents came up with were Rich man's sport, Extravagant, Classy, Posh, Elite, Luxury, and Royal etc. The second most common word used to describe golf was Tiger Woods. We may clearly say that even at this stage of his career he is the face of Golf around the globe.

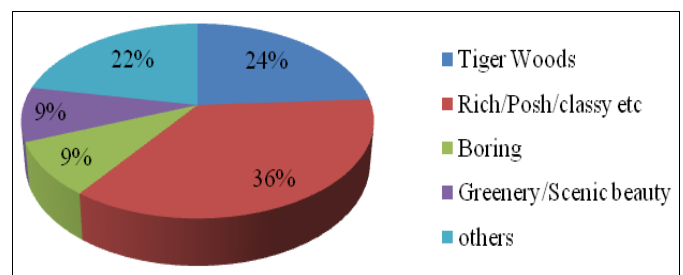


Fig 10: Graphical representation of the reply about the sports golf

Below is a list of 10 games and sports. Rank the sports which you like to play the most. If you haven't played a certain sport, rank in accordance of how likely you want to play that sport. (Rank 1 means you are most likely to play that sport, rank 10 being you are least likely to play that sport) Cricket - Football - Hockey - Tennis - Badminton - Snooker - Kabaddi - Golf - Basketball - Table Tennis

Table 11: Likelihood of playing golf over other sports and games

Games & Sports	Average Rank
Snooker	7.09
Basketball	6.37
Golf	7.29
Table tennis	5.24
Cricket	3.16
Kabaddi	6.61
Badminton	4.28
Hockey	5.88
Football	2.64
Tennis	5.74

The respondents were asked to rank 10 sports on how they like the sport or how likely they want to play that sport if they haven't played till date. From the above table, it is evident that most of the respondents prefer to play sports like football and cricket.

It is also evident from the table that the respondents are least likely to play golf over other sports. We may say that most of the respondents either did not get the chance to play golf or may consider golf as one of the toughest sports to adopt.

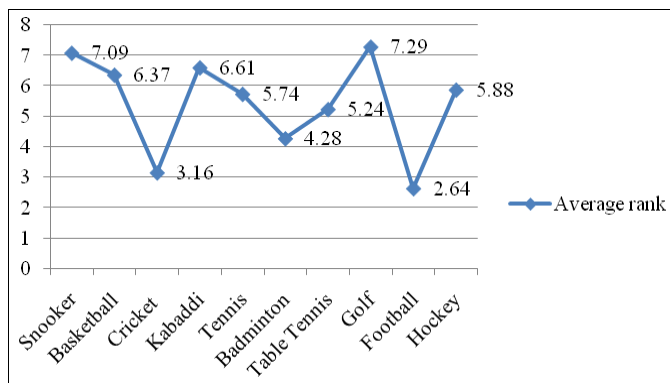


Fig 11: Graphical representation of Likelihood of playing golf over other sports and games

Can you name any Indian professional Golfer? If any, Name them, otherwise write can't say.

Table 12: Face of Indian Golf

Name	Percent
Jeev Milkha Singh	21%
Arjun Atwal	9%
Anirban Lahiri	10%
Jyoti Randhawa	9%
Others	15%
Can't Say	32%

Response

Jeev Milkha Singh seemed to be the most popular Indian professional golfer among the respondents with 21% of the votes going to him. The highest ranked Indian player at present, Anirban Lahiri, could manage to get only 10% votes. But most importantly 36% of the respondents could not name a professional Indian Golfer with some even mentioning former Indian Cricket Team captain Kapil Dev as a professional golfer.

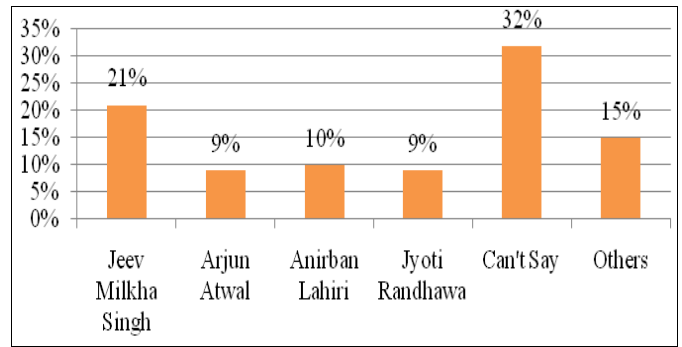


Fig 12: Graphical representation of the face of Indian Golf

It can, therefore, be said that Jeev Milkha Singh is the most known face among the Indian golfers followed by the likes of Anirban Lahiri, Jyoti Randhawa and Arjun Atwal. Though the number of people who could not name a professional Indian Golfer is relatively high (32%).

4. Conclusions

- The accessibility of the golf courses in India is extremely limited for the general mass.
- The participation of people in playing golf is poor.
- Golf is not a popular game among peers and friends.
- Golf is still considered as an elite sport which is played by the rich in India.
- There is no such awareness that golf is an Olympic sport.
- Golf is technically a very tough sports.
- Cost of equipment of golf is very high in comparison to other sports such as football, cricket, badminton etc.
- When it comes to the level of interest and participation, golf is the least attractive sports for common people in comparison with other sports.
- Jeev Milkha Singh is the most popular Indian golfer, although a great number of respondents could not name a single golfer.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Making the sport more accessible: The first and foremost work to do is to popularise the game of golf by making it more accessible to the common public. The USA has 15,500 golf courses across the country of which 11,581 are accessible to the common public (Source: National Golf Foundation 2012).

The concept of 'Pay & Play' has not been common in golf in India, where one pays a nominal fee to play the sport. Most of the courses are restricted to the members only. The Kharghar Valley Golf Course (KVGCC) and Delhi Development Authority's (DDA) Qutab Golf Club are the ones of the few courses which provide the facility for anyone who wants to pick up the elite sport at a nominal fee of Rs 500 for a round on weekdays and Rs 750 on weekends, which includes green fees and a golf bag.

5.2 Bringing in shorter formats: A standard game of golf is played over 18 holes and it can be tedious for a beginner to stick to that long at a golf course to complete all the holes. Golf's traditional 18-hole format seems to be less adaptable and less scalable than other sports.

5.3 Affordable guest passes for friends: Young people rarely play golf by them and so the ability to invite friends to join them will be a welcoming suggestion and something clubs might consider facilitating. Typically, junior golfers may only have one or two friends at a golf club, as well as a parent or family member.

5.4 Making it more fun: Young people will be interested in different formats including mini golf and golf skill activities, which could potentially be set up on practice ranges.

5.5 Affordable Rentals: The perception that golf is expensive and you need to buy all the equipment and/or join a golf club could be overcome with affordable equipment hire or free rental. It may also offer an additional revenue stream to courses. Having professional coaches; learning to pick up golf and its nuances can be slightly trickier than other sports. Golf is considered as a technical sport as well as a sport which requires mental strength. A professional coach will be able to guide the youngsters better and will be able to bring out the best in him.

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