

Young woman making waves in her boat

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SHE had seven capsizes the first time she went out on water, but now Yamini Singh says she is determined not to fall or fail. A hot favourite to win in women's single sculls, the 19-year-old sparkling young talent of Indian rowing had two early races where she wasn't tested and is gunning to repeat her Nationals-winning performance from Bhopal.

Her father is a serving officer who was posted at Pune in 2014, when the 5'11 girl decided to start rowing at the Army Rowing Node - India's only Olympic-level course. Having trained with some of India's elite rowers at the country's best facilities available, the teenager is hoping her handy arm-span, that comes with the good height, will guide her to an encore.

"I used to be a basketball player, but dad came to CME, and wanted me to take up an individual sport. I was blessed to find the country's best facility and decided to give it a shot," Yamini says. She's benefitted from India's top coaches who've all raced for the Army, the country's traditional powerhouse that contributes a bulk of the national squad.

Her first row, she claims, packed in all the "very stupid" things that a beginner could be guilty of. "I started in a doubles boat, and couldn't understand any of the technical in-



Yamini Singh was a basketball player before moving to rowing in 2014.

structions that were coming my way. I tumbled off seven times on my first day in single sculls and have learnt every mistake," she laughs even as she aims for a national record,

depending on the wind and water conditions on Friday.

Yamini had realised that her event had possibly the narrowest boat an individual

could squeeze into, and she's worked her way gaining experience in perfecting her technique which sees her **dominate** the Nationals scene now. She's learnt from the masters in the Army, and jokes that making new mistakes every time has chiselled her stroke and mental strength.

At the Bhopal Nationals, she was two boat lengths behind the leader, but pushed hard on the last stretch to win what was a phenomenal race. "I'm very lucky to train with elite Army rowers here, but I have great respect for Punjab's Navneet Kaur and Orissa's Sanjukta di who are experienced rowers," she says mapping out her competition.

Navneet holds India's best timings on the ergometer currently (7:22 min) while Yamini is close behind on 7:48. "Indian men have a glorious tradition of international medals, while women have just started winning and we had a pairs bronze at the 2010 Asian Games. But we obviously want to do much better," she says with an eye on next year's Asian Games. Romanian coach Nicolae Gioga, who brought his country's women's team the 1996-2000 double golds, has fetched up at the right time for the budding Indian rowers.

"Rowing is 70 per cent quadricep strength, 20 per cent upper body and 10 per cent arms. But more than anything, it's the technique and psyche," says the girl, whose square-blade rowing technique is a sight to watch. And to be amazed.

