

## **Plucky Spirits and Ping-Pong Paddles**

*Kritika Gogte*

“It was 2012 and I was watching Natalia Partyka playing at the London Paralympics. I just remember thinking - that could be me,” she says. Ten years later, she’s close to realising those dreams.

Pruthvi Barve, a teenager from the Indian city of Pune, was affected by right-sided Hemiparesis i.e., partial paralysis at a very young age. Describing her brother and parents as ‘supportive influences’ in her life, Pruthvi says that the environment she was brought up in both encouraged as well as grounded her; and mentions that even as a child, she was never made to feel different. The 17-year-old always enjoyed playing table tennis even as a child; and after six years of deciding to opt for professional training, she succeeded in competing at two international paralympic tournaments in 2022 at Thailand and Jordan, through the International Table Tennis Federation.

With a spirited glint in her bespectacled eyes, she explains how this experience shaped her perspective on life. “I felt proud, seeing people like me and people who might even have it worse than me excelling at their sport,” says Pruthvi. “These are people who aren’t just cribbing about their conditions, they are proving that you can do so much with what you have.”

Following India’s gold medal win at the Paralympics in 2021, a marked increase has been noted in the funding and encouragement of paralympic sport in the country. As reported by the Indian Express, the Indian government spent nearly 8.2 million rupees as part of paralympic funding. However, from a sociological point of view, Pruthvi still believes there is room for improvement. “I’ve observed that people are still slightly unaware of what goes into it,” she says. “Contrary to what people assume, paralympic players are still sportspeople who need to work hard to get to where they are.”

For Pruthvi, the split-second decisions required of the player are the best part of the game. “Teaches you not to overthink things in life too, which is something I really need to learn,” she quips. Although she spends most of her time training to represent her country at the Paralympics in 2024, the bright student’s diverse interests seem to have her doubting its prospects as a full-time career in the future, which she admits might be spent pursuing other academic or professional engagements.

As with most students her age, her next few months will be fraught with Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations and university applications; but Pruthvi has another bullet point to add to her to do list. Paralympic regulations require her to have a certain ranking to qualify and this would mean competing in more international tournaments. Much like a game of table tennis, she’s expecting most of the year to be a tricky back-and-forth exchange between her educational and sporting ambitions. None of this, however, seems to dampen her spirit.

“Honestly, just forget the world, go out there and do what you love,” says the teen. She pauses before wryly adding, “Alright I have to go and study now.”

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