

# Children find warmth under the wings of Albatross

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THE ALBATROSS Junior Tour was conceived by a few enterprising parents as an "independent outlet" for children disadvantaged by handicap restrictions of the Indian Golf Union (IGU), limited field size, rigours of inter-city travel and four-day tournaments. A demanding academic curriculum compounded the situation.

It has now metamorphosed into a nursery of excellence. "It is an excellent feeder tour and we are encouraging it," IGU secretary-general, Wing Commander (retd) Satish Aparajit, said. The IGU's support is good news but questions on the body's efforts to develop feeder tours are but natural corollaries. "We are too tied up with a lot of things," was all Aparajit offered by way of explanation.

Driven by the goal of producing a world champion by 2018, Albatross has 30 players, from among 280 on the roster, who figure prominently in various categories of the IGU. The outcome of allowing "frequent" competition in unshackled environs is for all to see. Names like Ankur Chadha, Gurbani Singh and Piyush Sangwan are beginning to carry weight on the junior tour. Aged 10, Piyush finished ninth in the recent US Kids World Championship.

The intent of creating a structure sans "strict guidelines" crystallised during the Southern India

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Coimbatore Golf Club, their fingers curled around tumblers of fine liquor as they watched their children compete. Disenchantment with the existing order had got them together, making the setting go perfectly with the Irish proverb, "What whisky will not cure, there is no cure for."

The idea in place, it was down to brass tacks for Akash Barthakur, Rajiv Talwar, Rakesh Chadha and Sunny Takkar, the brains behind the project. Notwithstanding their sound resource base and the support from golf clubs, manpower was an issue. The parents came up with an answer themselves to ensure smooth conduct of the seven tournaments organised so far. This unique combine had guardians doubling as sponsors, scorers, marshals, front office staff and doctors on

dren's craft in a "fun-filled but professionally run" atmosphere.

"We now have 41 shareholders and six chapters across the country and parents in a particular city take the lead in organising tournaments. The movement got a fillip when Addas and Taylor Made came on board to sponsor the prizes in the form of equipment. Money is a strict no-no as we feel children should be kept away from it for as long as possible," says Barthakur.

Notions of the tour catering to the privileged are quickly dispelled with Barthakur pointing to the support extended to talented caddy players.

Aiding the endeavour is its website ([www.albatross.co.in](http://www.albatross.co.in)) which allows online submission of entry forms and payment of entry fees. While its pupils have competed in Thailand and Indonesia, on the anvil is the Albatross International Junior Championship late next year.

In the midst of the enthusiasm to surge ahead, care is being taken that the underlying spirit is left untouched -- the personal touch lent by the parents and their motto, "It's not my child or yours. It's about our children."

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