

Rajitha dares to dream big

Will be running 4x400m relay at the Nairobi World juniors

ATHLETICS

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HYDERABAD

K. Rajitha has had a remarkable journey so far.

The 18-year-old athlete, groomed by SAI athletics coach N. Ramesh and sponsored by Gopi Chand-Mytrah Foundation, will be running the 4x400m relay at the Nairobi World junior athletics meet to be held from August 17.

Rajitha lost her father, a daily-wage labourer in Ramachandrapuram of Kunavaram mandal (East Godavari), when she was very young.

Even today she helps her mother, who makes a living gathering and selling firewood, whenever she is in her village.

Rajitha, picked by a selection panel headed by P.T. Usha, has reset her goals now.

"I wasn't expecting to be selected. I was just keen to give my best," Rajitha told *The Hindu* from Patiala.

"Some of her major results are 400m silver at the South Zone meet and the Khelo India Games. For someone who is so short (just



Fire in the belly: Despite the harsh realities of life, Rajitha has set high goals for herself. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

over 5 feet), she has a remarkable burst of speed and like many of those who come from such a background, she is a spirited athlete willing to go the extra length in training," says coach Ramesh.

The talented athlete's journey started in 2018 when she joined the Tenvic Sports Academy in Nellore with Vamsi Sai Kiran as the first coach and then trained under Krishna Mohan before moving to SAAP Centre of Excellence in Guntur to be trained by Mike Russell.

During the lockdown Ramesh, at the behest of Krishna Mohan, decided to take her under his wing among other athletes sponsored by the Gopi-Mytrah

Foundation.

Rajitha is also beholden to her Mathematics teacher Nagerender who provides her with a monthly assistance of ₹10,000. "Recently, Gopi (Chand) presented ₹25,000 to each of the 10 girl athletes being groomed by us," Ramesh said.

Rajitha is inspired by Neeraj Chopra's gold at the Tokyo Olympics.

"When I heard the National Anthem played when Neeraj was presented the gold, I was excited and left wondering whether I can ever reach that level," she said.

Her role model is Hima Das, for the simple reason that she too "has come up the hard way".