

OTHER SPORTS

## Greatly relieved: Srinath



**K. Keerthivasan**

## Becomes a GM at 23 after having got the title of IM at 14

Touted as a child prodigy in chess – he became an International Master at the age of 14 – Srinath Narayanan hasn't been able to forge ahead in keeping up with his exalted reputation.

So, at 23 years, when he became a Grand Master defeating David Guijarro of Spain in the sixth round of the ongoing Sharjah Masters, Srinath felt a huge burden off his shoulders.

“Greatly relieved,” said Srinath in a chat with his father Narayanan, on Wednesday.

By defeating Guijarro, Srinath got past the Elo rating of 2500 – the minimum points needed to go with three norms for the GM title.

Srinath completed his first three norms by winning the Asian junior championship in 2012, '13 & '14.

Short on points, he gained two more norms in the Palic Open in Serbia last year, followed by the Aeroflat Open early this year.

As R.B. Ramesh, a Grand Master and a famous coach, said: “Given the fact that he became an IM at 14, he should have become a GM much earlier.”

Narayanan agreed. “I think he should have got the GM five years earlier. There were times in several tournaments when he came close to winning, but faltered in the end.

He kept working hard, but the results didn't come. Obviously he was disappointed, but we as parents kept egging him on. We are happy now.”

He further said, during his first two years at Vivekananda College, Srinath used to frequent Pune to get coaching tips from Abhijit Kunte, which helped him polish his skills.

But after that, it was a struggle, his father insisted. “To get the last 50 points was tough,” he said.

To take care of his own travel and tournament expenses, Srinath gave lessons online, to both Indians and foreigners aged between 12 and 14, for four years.

“He had very little time for his own preparations, which contributed to the delay in becoming GM,” admitted Narayanan, an Assistant Manager at United India Insurance.

Andrey Deviatkin of Russia helped him gain confidence and Srinath credited the Russian for his recent success.

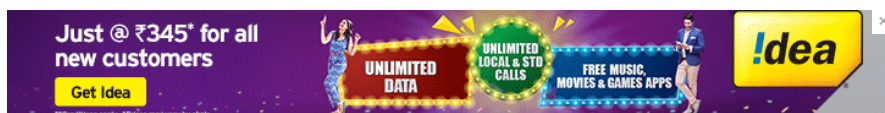
To a question recently on *chess base* website as to why, despite having five GM norms he hasn't become one yet, Srinath said “Probably, I don't win games like this at the end.” He was referring to the draw against Armenia's Gabriel Sargissian in the fifth round of the Sharjah Masters.

Srinath was pitchforked into the limelight when he became India's youngest FIDE rated chess player in 2002 at eight years.

Three years later, he emerged joint-winner in the under-12 world championship in Belfort, France.

Supported by Air India, which takes care of his travel expenses to tournaments in India, Srinath had to pay out of his own pocket for tournaments abroad, with generous help from his father.

With the GM title, the monkey is finally off Srinath's back. As he said in the interview, “then I can start playing.”



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