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The king in the battle of pawns

IF you thought that brawn is mightier than brain, then checkmate. For in the battle of pawns we know who the king is—it's not a Singh or even a Khan this time. It's Vishy. Full name: Vishwanathan Anand.

The defending world chess champion, Vishy, was in the capital recently to play live chess across seven cities with the winners of a competition, cleverly christened 'Vish come True'. "Vish come True is a national chess competition organised by NIIT (IT training and services giant), wherein the winners get a chance to play with me in the grand finale. School students are encouraged to come forward and play chess, as the game helps improve concentration and decision making abilities, thereby enhancing academic performance among children."

Novelty is the most important thing in chess and who knows that better than the master himself. "I generally first see what kind of player I am facing. It is important to get your opponent to a position he least expects. Then you try and establish patterns as to what he does. If the opponent needs a win at all costs then he may adopt a very risky approach and my job would be not to allow it. Important thing is to remember all

Defending world chess champion feels that India has made a name as an established chess nation

nuances in the position and be prepared for a long battle," said Anand when SundayET caught up with him over a cup of coffee.

Devising a strategy requires thorough preparation, which can be a gruelling task more often than not. Ask him his strategy and pat comes the reply, "My ability to experiment. I like to try different openings. Like in Bonn, I played the king-pawn opening which was actually

my opponent's forte. It was a calculated risk but it paid off. I like playing new opponents and new formats. This is important to keep the passion alive and learn constantly." Anand has been playing chess for a long time and with each game his knowledge pool and theory evolve constantly. However, in the age of machines, the whole approach towards the game has changed. "My game has evolved in a very structured manner. Since computers have become an intrinsic tool, the ap-

proach to chess has changed. We use programmes to store games and filter searches. Since most players have access to the same information, how they prepare and use a computer efficiently is the key. Using these tools and knowing when to use human discretion rather than sheer computing power is very important," he says citing the importance of computers.

**games people
PLAY**

The new breed of players is very promising and it augurs well for India to endorse the game. Not only would it help in tapping fresh talent it will also put India on the international radar of active chess playing nations. "We have a very vibrant chess scene with 2 junior world champions. There are many promising players who are making progress in the international scene. Actually, India now has an organised chess circuit and there are two-three big open events, which attract strong foreign

participation and encourage local talent to play in strong events," he says.

Supporting the government's initiative to promote the game, he said that some states have shown tremendous interest in harnessing the talent. "The government has been a very able partner and facilitator. States like Assam and Tripura have shown a lot of interest and in fact, we are seeing a lot of talent coming from these states. The Bihar, Chattisgarh and, now, Andhra Pradesh governments are giving us a lot of support in getting the initiative rolled out in many schools," he says.

Needless to say, chess has the potential to be the national game of India. And why not? "We are now an established chess nation. In 2006, we were in fact second highest rated team based on ELO at the Olympiad. We have been adding grandmasters every year. And what is most heartening is that we have strong players both in mens and womens segments. This is very rare for a sport," he says gleefully with big a smile stretching across his face. Vishy will be traveling to Germany and will play in Mainz end July.

ABHIMANYU CHAKRAVORTY

