

# Splendid effort by Sri Lanka Women Karatekas

10<sup>th</sup> South Asian Games

Chris Dhambarage.



Meet  
Sri  
Lankan  
Gold  
Medallists



**KARATE:** The Sri Lanka women's karate team put up a splendid performance to clinch the gold medal at the recently concluded 10th South Asian Games worked off at the Sugathadasa indoor stadium in Colombo. Their performance was even more significant considering the fact that they won a total of 13 medals from the 14 events which were worked off at the Games. Incidentally their tally of four gold medals, six silver medals and three bronze medals is probably the best effort overall by any Sri Lankan team event.

Their performance was quite unique as they achieved this goal under trying circumstances and without any kind of international exposure. They went through a series of hardships during their preparations for the South Asian Games but their courage and determination brought them glory and honour at the end.



The Sri Lanka women's karate team which won a gold medal at the South Asian Games.  
(Picture by Chaminda Hittatiyage).

The team even lacked the basic requirements for their training sessions and also failed in their attempt to find a sponsor for the South Asian Games. However the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports came to their assistance even at the eleventh hour which certainly lifted their morale to a great extent.

Even then the Sri Lanka team went into the competition with several doubts hanging over their capabilities and the pressure really mounting on them. In addition their task became even tougher with the last moment inclusion of the Indian team.

But the biggest challenge for the Sri Lankan team came from Nepal whom they defeated by hoisting four out of the five flags in the final encounter of the kata

event. The Sri Lankan women's team comprised Durga Harshani Ileperuma, Chamindi Asanthi Mala, **Sanjeevani Lakmali Ranasinghe and Vivekha Anuruddi Kathriarachchi.**

This team of course was a combination of youth and experience with two schoolgirls from St. Paul's College Milagiriya making their debut in an international and South Asian Games karate event. But for Harshani Ileperuma and Chamindi Asanthi, this event turned out to be a historic moment as they touched gold for the first time in their career.

Both Ileperuma and Asanthi Mala do have something in common apart from being grade 13 students of St. Paul's College Milagiriya. Both made it to the same school through a scholarship and launched their career in karate at the same time under the guidance of one coach.

Ileperuma was earlier a student of Sri Sumangala Balika Maha Vidyalaya in Panadura where she excelled in swimming events. She decided to follow karate as a sport while in grade eight at St. Paul's College after having seen a demonstration during their inter-house sports meet.

She is the eldest in a family of two with her parents Saman and Dakshina both retired from the Mahaweli Authority. Their main source of income comes through Saman Ileperuma who is involved in a school service.

Asanthi Mala is also a grade 13 student of St. Paul's College and had her earlier education at Pitabeddara

Maha Vidyalaya in Matara. She is presently residing in Horana and had participated in hockey and swimming events at inter-school tournaments.

Her mother Malani Weerappuli of course was not in favour of following a martial art sport but Asanthi Mala had some encouragement from her father A. B. K. Ajith who had followed few basic lessons on karate during his days.

She had earlier emerged victorious in a number of all island and Western Province tournaments and National School Games events. Both Harshani and Asanthi Mala have sacrificed a lot and even had neglected their studies to some extent in achieving this goal.

They are grateful to their coach **Anura Kathriarachchi**, Principal Mrs. Geetha Abeygunawardena and their teachers in charge Nihal Wedage, Hema Withana, Mrs. Sriyani and all those who helped them.

The other major contribution for the Sri Lanka women's karate team came from **Sanjeewani Lakmali Ranasinghe**. The 29 year old law student lived upto expectations as the most experienced player in the squad with another magnificent performance. She had earlier won the bronze medal at the 1999 Katmandu South Asian Games.

Sanjeewani a former schoolgirl of Ferguson College Ratnapura also took the silver medal in the individual kata event having earlier represented the country at the Asian Games, University Games and Asian championships in Singapore.

The Sri Lanka team was coached by Nandasiri Lokukaluge who is a dojo kai chief instructor of the Japan Branch and a international fifth dan black belt national referee. He was assisted by **Anura Kathriarachchi** who is also the President of the Sri Lanka Karate Association.

**Anura Kathriarachchi** is the only qualified referee and judge of the World Body and the Asian Karate Federation and is also a fifth dan black belt holder of the Japanese Karate Federation and 7th dan black belt holder of the Genseiryu Karate-do International Federation, JAPAN.

The Sri Lanka karate team also had the privilege of being coached and trained by Shihan Naomi Kono from Japan who is a seventh Black Belt holder and a reputed coach during the past one year. The twenty member Sri Lanka karate team for the South Asian Games was managed by T. N. K. Perera.