



Guiding force: Grandmaster R.B. Ramesh (right) gave up a lucrative job and his own playing career to help promising talents find success at the highest level in the sport. ■ R. RAGU

A nursery where champions blossom

Wards from player-turned-coach R.B. Ramesh's Chess Gurukul have won laurels across age-group competitions and international events

P.K. AJITH KUMAR

In a game of chess, one is constantly forced to make choices. For every promising move, there is an alternative that looks as good.

R.B. Ramesh had made a living out of taking countless decisions over the chessboard. But in 2008, the Chennai-based Grandmaster took more time over a move than he had ever done before. For, that decision would impact not just one game.

Momentous decision

Finally, he made up his mind. He decided to give up his job at Indian Oil Corporation and take up a coaching career.

A job with a public sector petroleum company is every Indian chess player's dream. Not only do such companies pay very well, but also take care of the expenses of a player's career.

At 32, Ramesh could have gone on playing for many more years (when he became a Grandmaster in 2004, he was only the 10th Indian to get the title). But, he felt he would be more comfortable as a coach.

"My first assignment as a coach - though a temporary one - was in 1998, when I was asked by the All India Chess Federation to accompany the National team for the Asian junior championship," he recalls. "I was just a couple of years older

We need more Grandmasters as coaches. So it is nice to see somebody like Ramesh becoming a full-time coach

PRAVIN THIPSAY
India's third Grandmaster

than the winners, Tejas Bakre and S. Vijayalakshmi."

Mentor to life-partner

A year later, his ward, Aarthie Ramaswamy, won the World Under-18 championship. That was the first World title for India after Viswanathan Anand's World juniors in 1987.

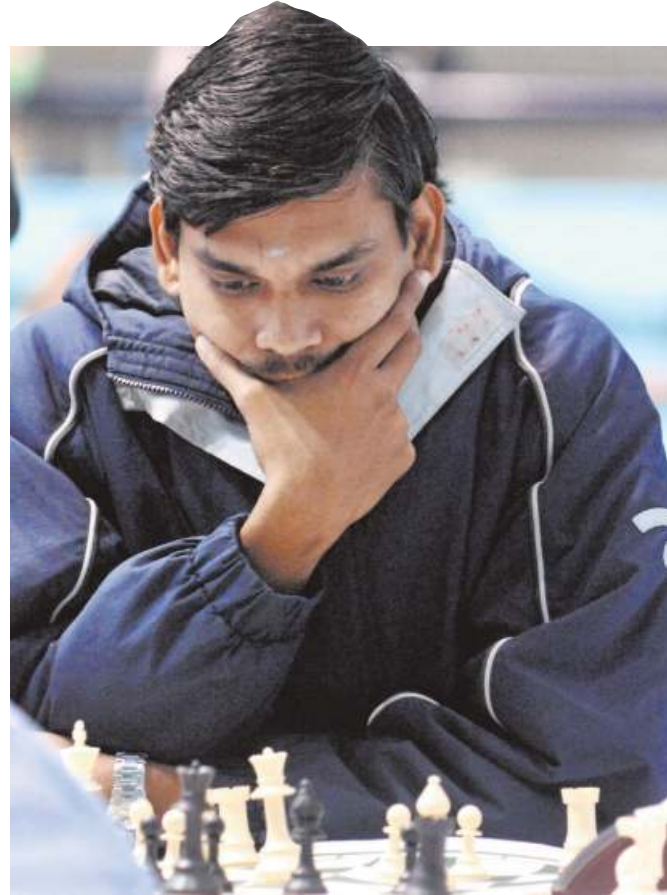
"Aarthie's parents had asked me to train her," he says. "Her success made me feel that I could make a difference to a player."

In Aarthie's case, the difference he made went beyond the chessboard. He married her in 2003 and they became India's first Grandmaster couple. She now helps him run his academy 'Chess Gurukul' in Chennai.

It has become a nursery for Indian chess. Some of the country's brightest prospects like R. Praggnanandhaa and Aravindh Chithambaram are its products.

Ramesh has trainees from overseas, too. Players from countries like Spain, the Netherlands and South Africa work with him, not to mention the NRIs from across the globe.

His wards have so far won



Ramesh ponders a move during his playing days. ■ FILE PHOTO

35 medals at World age-group championships, 40 at Asian championships and 35 National titles. He has also been the coach of the Indian senior team.

He had helped India win its first ever team medal at the 2014 Chess Olympiad. He was the coach at the last Olympiad as well, though the team couldn't

reach the podium, in spite of the presence of Anand, who usually stays away from the biennial tournament.

Inspired by Anand

It was the genial genius from his hometown that inspired Ramesh to take up chess in the first place, at the age of 12, seven-

al years later than most. Though his elder brother G.B. Prakash was already an excellent player, it was Anand becoming India's first Grandmaster in 1987 that made Ramesh think seriously about chess.

Some three decades later, India has 65 Grandmasters. But among them, Ramesh is one of the very few to take up full-time coaching.

"We need more Grandmasters as coaches," says Pravin Thipsay, India's third Grandmaster. "Most of India's coaches are weak players. While they can be good with beginners, they can hardly be effective when they work with strong players. So it is nice to see somebody like Ramesh becoming a full-time coach."

Ramesh is glad that he has. "Sometimes I feel I should have taken that plunge much earlier," he says.

Missing the joy

He is concerned that today's kids do not enjoy chess as much as those from a previous generation. "That is because of the parental pressure," he says. "The kids are scared of losing, so they try to draw when they should be going for a win."

Still, sometimes you would come across someone like Praggnanandhaa, who is not bothered by defeats at all. Such players could not have hoped for a better mentor than Ramesh.

Round 19: USA GP

CIRCUIT OF THE AMERICAS

NUMBER OF LAPS 56
CIRCUIT LENGTH 5.513 KM
RACE DISTANCE 308.405 KM

RACE NOTES

- The Circuit of the Americas was the first purpose-built facility for Formula One in the United States.
- The layout of the circuit, which was opened in 2012, is inspired by some of the classic European tracks.
- Run anti-clockwise, the opening sequence of snaking corners is similar to Silverstone's.
- The medium-downforce circuit has other twisty turns. Its fast sections include two long straights that allow for overtaking.
- The tyres experience slightly higher lateral loads than average but degradation hasn't been a major issue.

Hamilton on the cusp of a sixth crown

Lewis Hamilton is set to clinch his sixth drivers' World Championship this weekend when he leads Mercedes into what promises to be a close scrap with Ferrari at the United States Grand Prix in Austin, Texas.

Just days after his unexpected, but perfectly-conceived, strategic victory in Mexico, the 34-year-old Briton is in the luxurious position of knowing that only a wildly-extraordinary result at the Circuit of the Americas can frustrate him again.

His only title rival, teammate Valtteri Bottas, has to overcome a 74-point deficit in the final three rounds of the championship to create what would be the biggest upset in the sport's history.

It is a scenario that requires the Finn, whose previous best finish in Texas is fifth, to win all three remaining races, at the very least, with Hamilton out of the points. Given that Hamilton has scored in his last 30 consecutive outings and needs only four points to retain his crown, Bottas' hopes are some way beyond slim.

Both Mercedes men have targets, not least Hamilton for whom a place in the top eight would be enough for the title.

He may be keen also to register something better as he seeks another Texas triumph, his sixth in eight outings in Austin and his seventh win in the American event and, at the very least, his



150th podium finish.

Ironically, Hamilton can take the title without scoring a point if rivals Ferrari can translate its speed in qualifying into a race victory.

After a recent revival in form, Sebastian Vettel will seek to show he remains worthy of top status at the Italian team while Red Bull's Max Verstappen, making his 100th Grand Prix start, will hope for a less controversial weekend than his last.

The Dutchman was stripped of pole position in Mexico and, in the race, banged wheels with Hamilton, picked up a puncture in a clash with Bottas and stormed from last to finish sixth in the race.

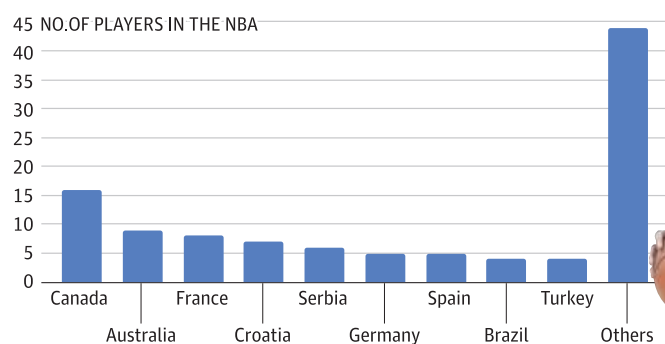
Vettel finished second and demonstrated his maturity afterwards when he side-stepped invitations to say he felt jealous or envious of Hamilton's feats, instead choosing to praise his long-time rival. "I appreciate his efforts, his performances, his success a lot," said Vettel. "I think you have to because it's the obvious. If not then it wouldn't be me." AFP

GAME THEORY

International domination

The 2018-19 season of the NBA saw two players born outside the U.S. - Greece's Giannis Antetokounmpo (in picture) and Slovenia's Luca Doncic - win the Most Valuable Player and Rookie of the Year award respectively. Naresh Singaravelu analyses the "international" contingent in the 2019-20 season

CANADIANS GALORE The most foreign-born players (excluding U.S.) in the NBA hail from Canada, followed by Australia



SEASON STATS: 2019-20

HIGHEST POINTS

Player	Country*	Team	Points	Field goals (%)
Kyrie Irving	Australia	Brooklyn Nets	33.7	24.8
Pascal Siakam	Cameroon	Toronto Raptors	33.6	20
Luka Doncic	Slovenia	Dallas Mavericks	35.3	18

MOST ASSISTS

Player	Country*	Team	Assists per game
Ricky Rubio	Spain	Phoenix Suns	8.8
Ben Simmons	Australia	Philadelphia 76ers	8
Giannis Antetokounmpo	Greece	Milwaukee Bucks	8

MOST REBOUNDS

PLAYER	Country*	Team	Rebounds	Blocks
Giannis Antetokounmpo	Greece	Milwaukee Bucks	12.3	1.3
Nikola Jokic	Serbia	Denver Nuggets	9.5	1.5
Steven Adams	New Zealand	Oklahoma City Thunder	8.3	0.5

*Country of birth
Stats updated until 31st October

STACKING UP

ATP Men's Top 15

#	PLAYER	AGE	POINTS	EVENTS
1	Novak Djokovic	32	9,545	17
2	Rafael Nadal	33	9,225	16
3	Roger Federer	38	6,950	17
4	Daniil Medvedev	23	5,740	23
5	Dominic Thiem	26	5,495	22
6	Alexander Zverev	22	4,335	24
7	Stefanos Tsitsipas	21	3,830	26
8	Karen Khachanov	23	2,830	26
9	Matteo Berrettini	23	2,705	24
10	Roberto Bautista Agut	31	2,575	23
11	Kei Nishikori	29	2,560	18
12	Fabio Fognini	32	2,370	24
13	Gael Monfils	33	2,350	20
14	David Goffin	28	2,325	27
15	Diego Schwartzman	27	2,205	25

Top Indians

Prajesh Gunneswaran Rank 92 ▲ 2 spots	Sumit Nagal Rank 129 ▼ No move
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WTA Women's Top 15

#	PLAYER	AGE	POINTS	EVENTS
1	Ashleigh Barty	23	6,476	14
2	Karolina Pliskova	27	5,315	18
3	Naomi Osaka	22	5,246	16
4	Bianca Andreescu	19	5,041	17
5	Simona Halep	28	4,962	16
6	Petra Kvitova	29	4,401	16
7	Belinda Bencic	22	4,120	25
8	Elina Svitolina	25	3,995	21
9	Serena Williams	38	3,935	10
10	Kiki Bertens	27	3,870	26
11	Johanna Konta	28	2,879	17
12	Sofia Kenin	20	2,615	23
13	Madison Keys	24	2,607	14
14	Aryna Sabalenka	21	2,520	23
15	Petra Martic	28	2,458	17

Top Indians

Ankita Raina Rank 181 ▲ 9 spots	Rutuja Bhosle Rank 459 ▲ 21 spots
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English Premier League Standings

#	TEAM	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Liverpool	10	9	1	0	23	8	15	28
2	Man. City	10	7	2	3	22	9	23	22
3	Leicester	10	6	2	2	25	8	17	20
4	Chelsea	10	6	2	2	23	16	7	20
5	Arsenal	10	4	4	2	15	14	1	16
6	Crystal Palace	10	4	3	3	12	12	-2	15
7	Man. United	10	3	4	3	13	10	3	13
8	Sheffield	10	3	4	3	9	8	1	13
9	Bournemouth	10	3	4	3	13	13	0	13
10	West Ham	10	3	4	3	12	14	-2	13
11	Tottenham	10	3	3	4	16	15	1	12
12	Wolves	10	2	6	2	13	13	0	12
13	Burnley	10	3	3	4	14	15	-1	12
14	Brighton	10	3	3	4	12	14	-2	12
15	Aston Villa	10	3	2	5	15	16	-1	11
16	Everton	10	3	1	6	10	16	-6	10
17	Newcastle	10	2	3	5	6	15	-9	9
18	Southampton	10	2	2	6	9	25	-16	8
19	Norwich	10	2	1	7	11	24	-13	7
20	Watford	10	0	5	5	5	21	-16	5

Italian Serie A Standings

#	TEAM	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Juventus	10	8	2	0	18	9	9	26
2	Inter Milan	10	8	1	1	22	10	12	25
3	Atalanta	10	6	3	1	30	16	14	21
4	Roma	10	5	4	1	18	11	7	19
5	Lazio	10	5	3	2	22	10	12	18
6	Napoli	10	5	3	2	20	13	7	18
7	Agliari	10	5	3	2	16	10	6	18
8	Fiorentina	10	4	3	3	15	13	2	15
9	Parma	10	4	1	5	15	14	1	13
10	AC Milan	10	4	1	5	10	13	-3	13
11	Bologna	10	3	3	4	14	15	-1	12
12	Verona	10	3	3	4	7	8	-1	12
13	Torino	10	3	2	5	11	16	-5	11
14	Udinese	10	3	1	6	5	17	-12	10
15	Sassuolo	9	3	0	6	16	18	-2	9
16	Lecce	10	2	3	5	11	19	-8	9
17	Genoa	10	2	2	6	13	23	-10	8
18	Brescia	9	2	1	6	9	14	-5	7
19	Spal	10	2	1	7	7	17	-10	7
20	Sampdoria	10	1	2	7	6	19	-13	5

Spanish La Liga Standings

#	TEAM	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Barcelona	10	7	1	2	28	11	17	22
2	Real Madrid	10	6	3	1	21	9	12	21
3	Granada	11	6	2	3	18	13	5	20
4	Atletico Madrid	11	5	5	1	11	6	5	20
5	Sevilla	11	6	2	3	14	12	2	20
6	Real Sociedad	11	6	1	4	18	12	6	19
7	Villarreal	11	5	2	4	25	16	9	17
8	Athletic Bilbao	11	4	4	3	11	7	4	16
9	Getafe	11	4	4	3	17	15	2	16
10	Osasuna	11	3	6	2	12	11	1	15
11	Levante	11	4	2	5	12	13	-1	14
12	Valencia	11	3	5	3	15	17	-2	14
13	Real Valladolid	11	3	5	3	11	14	-3	14
14	Eibar	11	3	3	5	12	16	-4	12
15	Alaves	11	3	3	5	9	14	-5	12
16	Real Betis	11	3	3	5	14	21	-7	12
17	Real Mallorca	11	3	2	6	9	15	-6	11
18	Celta Vigo	11	2	3	6	6	14	-8	9
19	Espanyol	11	2	2	7	5	18	-13	8
20	Leganes	11	1	2	8	5	19	-14	5

German Bundesliga Standings

#	TEAM	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	M'gladbach	9	6	1	2	19	9	10	19
2	Bayern Munich	9	5	3	1	24	11	13	18
3	SC Freiburg	9	5	2	2	17	10	7	17
4	Wolfsburg	9	4	5	0	11	5	6	17
4	Dortmund	9	4	4	1	20	11	9	16
6	RB Leipzig	9	4	3	2	17	10	7	15
7	Schalke	9	4	3	2	14	9	5	15
8	Leverkusen	9	4	3	2	14	13	1	15
9	Frankfurt	9	4	2	3	16	14	2	14
10									