

Sharmada Balu (9th August 1993) is an international tennis player from Bengaluru, India. She is the current National Doubles Champion [https://www.fenestaopentennis.com/images/pdf/Women's Doubles Draw 30.pdf](https://www.fenestaopentennis.com/images/pdf/Women's_Doubles_Draw_30.pdf) and Singles Runner-Up [https://www.fenestaopentennis.com/images/pdf/Women's Singles Main Draw 30.pdf](https://www.fenestaopentennis.com/images/pdf/Women's_Singles_Main_Draw_30.pdf). She won the Doubles Gold Medal for India at the 16th South Asian Federation Games (SAF), held at Guwahati, India during February 2016 [http://southasiangames2016.nic.in/includes/SAG Final Results.pdf](http://southasiangames2016.nic.in/includes/SAG_Final_Results.pdf). Sharmada has two Singles and 16 Doubles titles on the International Tennis Federation (ITF) Pro-Circuit <https://www.itftennis.com/en/players/sharmada-balu/800280322/ind/wt/s/>.

She is currently India No.7 and ranked 622 in WTA Rankings in Doubles and Indian No. 13 and ranked 1120 WTA Rankings in Singles

Personal Life:

Sharmada was born to Sumana Balu and S. G. Balu, as their first child on the 9th of August 1993 in Bengaluru. Her younger brother Vrushank Balu was an amateur golfer until recently and now enjoys his work at the Golf Studio. She was introduced to gymnastics at the age of 5 by her father who was keen on developing her fitness and flexibility before enrolling Sharmada for tennis lessons the following year.

She did her early schooling mostly in the southern part of Bengaluru. To accommodate tennis practice and fitness schedule, she was admitted to Poorna, an alternative school in Kodigehalli, Sahakarnagar, in the city where she received wholehearted support to play and study simultaneously.

She discontinued school from the age of 12 owing to her successful performance as a national junior tennis player. Since then, she studied on her own through secondary education from National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and graduated from Jain University - who extended support towards her competitive career.

Career:

Early career:

Having trained under Mr. Kamath at Jayanagar Sports Grounds for gymnastics for over a year as a 5-year-old, Sharmada started her tennis career at Mahila Seva Samaj, Basavanagudi under coach Kiran in 2000. Soon after, she moved to Tennis Advantage

at St. John's Medical College Grounds, under coach Dhyan Uthappa. After a short stint with him, she joined Nike-Bhupathi Tennis Village near Hebbal at the age of 7. This was when Sharmada won her first trophy as the 'Outstanding performer of the tournament' just before her 9th birthday, at the Hindu Inter School Championship.

Within 6 months after joining Mahila Seva Samaj, she started participating in State ranking tournaments and started performing considerably well. She started playing competitive tennis at the state-level from the age of 8 and won the Karnataka State Champion (Under-10) in the year 2003 and Karnataka State Champion (Under-12) in 2004. Then she moved to national level tournaments and played her first Under-14 National Championships in 2004 at the age of 11. Couple of weeks later she won the National Talent Series Under-18 Singles Title in New Delhi beating a more experienced 14-year-old opponent. The next year she became India No. 2 in Under-12 National Ranking List.

At the age of 12, apart from winning the National Champion Series at Madurai, she also won the Outstanding Player of the tournament. Apart from winning many National Talent and Super Series Titles in both singles and doubles as a junior, she also won the National Under-16 Singles Championship and National Under-16 Doubles Championship title partnering Aishwarya Agarwal in May 2009. Few months later she won the Prestigious MCC ADIDAS – National Junior Doubles Championship at Chennai in August 2009 partnering Aishwarya Agarwal of Indore. In the meantime she also won ITF GRADE-5 Doubles Championship in 2008 with Aishwarya Agarwal in Chennai, India. She ended the year 2009 as India Junior No.1 player in Singles in the National Ranking List. She was also Indian No. 2 in the Under-16 category the same year.

During early 2010 Sharmada represented India at the Australian Open Junior Championship.

Later in August 2010 she also won the prestigious MCC ADIDAS – National Junior Singles Championship in Chennai.

Two months later in November 2010 she also won another National Under-18 singles and doubles title at Jassowal as a wildcard entrant.

Professional career:

Even before Sharmada won the National Junior Singles Champion Title (in August 2010) she started participating in the National Women's Circuit and won 3 consecutive National (AITA) Ranking Women's Tournaments as a junior (on debut in Hyderabad followed by two more at Jassowal during July 2010).

Immediately after becoming the National Under-18 Singles champion, she competed at her debut ITF Pro-Circuit tournament at Mandya Open in November 2010. Being the current National Under-18 Champion she defeated World No. 986 Kei Sekine of Japan in the Qualifying round. Having qualified for the main draw as an unranked player she further caused a major upset beating the 4th seed of the tournament Ayumi Oka of Japan in the Main draw. As a junior and an unranked qualifier she reached the quarterfinals of the tournament at her debut ITF Pro – Circuit Tournament.

During February 2011, as a wild card entrant, the reigning National Junior Champion caused many upsets at the \$10000 ITF Pro-Circuit Tournament at Aurangabad. Sharmada entered the pre-quarterfinals by beating 5th seed of the tournament Ting li of China ranked 620 in the world then and reached the semifinals when she upset the top-seed Sung Hee Han of Korea, then ranked 396 in the world.

Sharmada tasted the first success of her pro-career as a junior during April 2011 when she won \$10,000 ITF Pro-Circuit title in Lucknow playing for the first time on grass courts beating Youvonne Neuwirth of Austria. In the run up to the title she again defeated top-seed of the tournament Anja Prislan of Slovenia in the Quarter Finals <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/lucknow/itf-tennis-balu-shocks-anja-in-quarter-finals/> and 4th seed Celine Cattaneo of France in the Semi Finals who had won a similar level tournament in Delhi the previous week. She is only the 2nd Indian woman tennis player to win \$10,000 ITF Pro-Circuit title as a junior after Sania Mirza who won \$10,000 Pro-Circuit Singles title as a junior apart from becoming the 6th Indian woman to win at any ITF Pro-Circuit title as a junior after Ankita Bhambri, Megha Vakaria, Sania Mirza, Shruti Dhawan and Radhika Tulpule who have all won \$5,000 ITF Pro-Circuit Singles title as juniors.

For her incredible achievements, soon after this victory she won the prestigious Kempegowda Award from the Government of Karnataka which is awarded to outstanding achievers of Karnataka in different fields.

Winning a pro-circuit title as a junior boosted her morale and motivated her to work harder and climb the ranking ladder. With that aim she left for Elite tennis Academy

in Barcelona, Spain for a two months training stint under Coach Enrique Guldberg. During her stint in Spain she made it to the semifinals of \$50,000 ITF Pro-Circuit Tournament in Pozoblanco, Spain in May 2011 and also won Circuit Absolut de la FCT, the Spanish National Championship in May 2011 which she also won again during 2013.

An injury during the Olympic Team Selection Camp kept her almost a year away from the competitive circuit. Having never been injured till then, this injury period frustrated her to a great extent as she was hungry for competing. But with her grit and conviction she was back on the circuit by March 2013 and in the same month reached the singles quarterfinals at \$25,000 ITF Pro-Circuit Tournament at Muzaffarnagar before winning the \$10,000 ITF Pro-Circuit Tournament Doubles title in Hyderabad partnering Sowjanya Bavisetti of India.

After winning her first singles title in 2011 apart from the ITF Pro-Circuit singles title at Bhopal in 2015, she has also been the Runner-up twice in Singles at \$10,000 ITF Pro-Circuit tournaments and a quarter-finalist at the 25,000 ITF Pro-Circuit Tournament in Navi Mumbai in December 2014 and reaching the last eight stage for nine times in singles in different \$10000 ITF Pro-Circuit Tournament across the globe. Her best WTA singles ranking was 582 in November 2015.

During February 2014, at the \$25,000 ITF Pro-Circuit Tournament in New Delhi Sharmada created the history for the longest 1st set tie break in any match in the history of ITF Pro-Circuit. In the pre-quarterfinals, she lost to Varatchaya Wongtenchai of Thailand in which the first set tie break of 6-7 was decided by 20-22 against Sharmada.

She has a better/impressive record in doubles at ITF Pro-Circuit events. She has won 16 ITF Pro-Circuit doubles titles with 10 different partners till date. She has been nine times Runner-up and 20 times semi-finalist in the ITF Pro-Circuit Tournaments at different levels in various countries.

Sharmada achieved her Career Best WTA Ranking of 335 in doubles during August 2015

Playing for India:

Having represented India as a junior at the international level from the age of 12, Sharmada got her first opportunity to compete at a major event at the Australian Open Junior Championship 2010 (by virtue of her World Junior Ranking).

With her impressive singles and doubles record, Sharmada cracked into the top-5 women players in the National Ranking list in January 2012 which fetched her a spot in the Indian Fed-Cup team to play at the Asia-Oceania Group-II League at Schenzen China, in February 2012 <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=79813>.

And the best opportunity of her career came during June 2012 when she was selected as one of the 4 probables to play doubles with Sania Mirza at the 2012 London Olympics. Unfortunately, just a week before the team for Olympics was to be announced Sharmada was injured during a fitness session at the selection camp and tore a ligament to miss the opportunity to play with Sania Mirza and represent the country at highest Multi-National Sporting event.

Later, during 2016 she was selected for the Indian team at the 12th South Asian Federation (SAF) Games held at Guwahati, India during February 2012. Partnering Prarthana Thombare of India, she won the Gold medal for India in the Doubles category.

Playing Style:

Sharmada is an aggressive right handed player with a big serve and a strong forehand. She is good at the net and loves to volley and intercept at the net.

Training:

After joining Nike-Bhupathi Tennis Village under Mr. Krishna Bhupathi's guidance she trained there until November 2005 when she was personally handpicked by Mahesh Bhupathi to be a part of MBTA Elite Programme funded by Foundation for Indian Sporting Talent (FIST). Later in December 2006 she was also selected as the youngest of the 10 players from all over India for the Apollo Tyres' Mission 2018 to produce India's First Grand Slam Champion. With its unfortunate closure in 2010, after a short stint at Tennis Academy of Asia, Bangkok with Coach Mr. Paul Dale, she

joined Tennis Excellence, Bangalore & trained under Coach Arjun Gowtham till April 2011. Later she trained with Coach Enrique Guldborg of Elitennis Academy, Barcelona, Spain during 2011 & 2012. She practiced and played tournaments for major part of 2013 without a coach and by the end of 2013 & early 2014 she had short stints with former Ace Indian player Zeeshan Ali and also at Sania Mirza Tennis Academy, Hyderabad between 2014 & 2015. She trained for a year at the Shuttler – Waske Tennis University in Frankfurt, Germany from January 2015. After which she struggled to participate at International tournaments with no sponsor and lack of funds despite winning the Doubles Gold Medal for the country. An injury by the end of 2016 and also severe financial crunch distressed her so much that she decided to call it quits by 2017. Totally dejected, she chose not to do anything related to tennis after that. But fortunately, certain favourable circumstances and efforts by family, friends and her long time coach Balachandran Manikkhat, persuaded her to think again about making a comeback to the competitive circuit. Finally she started her second innings in tennis career in October 2020 when she joined Rohan Bopanna Tennis Academy (RBTA) at the Sports School, near Kanakapura as a trainee and coach.

2nd innings

She started competing at national circuit from January 2021 and with no ranking in National Ranking List, she won the doubles title partnering Sravya Sivani Chilakalapudi in Bengaluru in her very first tournament after her comeback and followed it up with another doubles title at the same level with the same partner the next week

This boosted her confidence and very soon she started her professional campaign in March 2021 and won her first doubles title post return and an overall 16th career title in September 2021 at the \$15,000 ITF Pro-Circuit Tournament at Monastir Tunisia, partnering Sravya Sivani of India.

Returning home after that she won the prestigious Fenesta Open National Doubles Championship 2021 partnering Sravya Sivani and was also the Singles Runner-Up at the same event.

She also finished two other tournaments of the same level held at Solapur, India in December 2021 and February 2022, as Runners -Up partnering Sowjanya Bavisetti and Sravya Sivani of India respectively. Besides she had made it to the semifinals at

the same level tournament in Bengaluru with Sravya Sivani of India in December 2021. These performances aided her to get a ranking in the ITF and WTA ranking List.

The best performance of her Professional career in doubles so far came during May 2022 when she reached the semifinals at the \$60,000 ITF Pro-Circuit Tournament at Pelham, USA partnering Maria Mononova of Russia. This helped her jump the WTA ranking ladder by more than 200 points and also crack into Top 10 in the National Ranking List.

She is currently participating in the Chennai Open 2022 -\$250 WTA Tournament as a Wild-Card entrant into the doubles fray partnering Riya Bhatia of India. She will also be representing Karnataka State in the National Games 2022 to be held at Ahmedabad from 27th September 2022.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

For her incredible achievements, soon after winning her Professional title as a junior, she was awarded Kempegowda Award during April 2011 from the Government of Karnataka which is awarded to outstanding achievers of Bengaluru.

In the same year she also won the Young Achiever Award 2011 (Special Mention) instituted by Rotary Midtown, Bengaluru and the Brigade Group jointly during May 2011.

Ekalavya Award 2014 from the Government of Karnataka - the highest award for Sporting Excellence given by any State Government that is awarded to outstanding sportspersons of the state.

Woman Achiever of the Year 2015 - by Vidyarana, a non-profit NGO for empowering women & children.

Karnataka Olympic Association Award 2017 - for outstanding achievement in tennis.

References:

