

'Dream come true' for table tennis player

MYRON NAICKER

CHETAN Nathoo sprays the ball across the table with grace and precision.

Equally at home on attack and defence, Nathoo emerged as one of South Africa's best table tennis players in recent years.

Last month the 29-year-old found himself in the company of the continent's top players at the All Africa Games in Morocco and held his own with a string of encouraging performances.

"It was a dream come true and an experience I will never forget," said Nathoo who hails from Lenasia, south of Johannesburg.

"The effort and organisation of the games was remarkable. Touching shoulders with the continent's superstars was inspirational and I am grateful to have had the opportunity."

While this was his first major games, Nathoo is no stranger to the big stage – in 2015 he earned his first national cap at the Senior African Championships in Egypt.

Nathoo works tirelessly and has reaped the rewards for putting in countless hours into his craft.

With no professional league in the country, Nathoo earns his living as a mechanical engineer and pursues his sporting dreams at daily evening training sessions and weekend tournaments.

"Ever since I made it into the Gauteng provincial team, the vision was always to make it into the national team," said Nathoo.

"After years of hard work and determination, I can proudly say I made it."

He recalled stumbling upon the sport as a 6-year-old.

"I was at a family function many years ago and my cousins had a table tennis board set up," he said.

"They taught me the basics and I was interested in learning more about the sport. I started playing table tennis in grade 6, while I attended Progress Primary School."

In Morocco, Nathoo admits that the competition was tough, especially given South Africa's lack of high level competition.

"Table tennis is not recognised as a major sport in South Africa and we are not always exposed to such a high level of play. This made matches very hard and challenging but also



CHETAN Nathoo, 29, said it was a dream come true to play at the All Africa Games in Morocco last month.

made me realise I have a lot to learn," Nathoo explained.

"The most memorable encounter was when Byrone Abrahams and I played doubles against Aruna Quadri, Africa's number one, also ranked as world number 18. The match was a one-sided affair, but we played our best and a lot was learnt."

Nathoo is grateful to have made major strides in the game but beyond his own progress, he wants to see young and upcoming players shine as well.

"I would love for one of my juniors to make the national team," said Nathoo, who coaches youngsters at the Recreation Centre in Lenasia.