



## NSGA April 2018 Athlete of the Month

### Kamal Chaudhari, 83

Temple Terrace, Florida

#### Badminton- Straight from the Source

The game of badminton has been around for more than two thousand years, but it did not gain worldwide popularity as a competitive sport until 19<sup>th</sup> century British colonists found “Poona,” as it was called, in the city of Pune (pronounced the same) near Bombay, India. They brought it back to England and the modern sport grew from there.

Kamal Chaudhari, an accomplished senior badminton player who has been daunting opponents since the age of 16, knows this history well because he was born and raised in Pune. He was ranked #1 with his college team.

“I’ve never had a formal coach so to speak,” he says. “There was a badminton court behind our house and my mother taught me how to play. I didn’t even have a good backhand shot until about ten years ago. The president of our University of South Florida badminton club, John Obara, taught me how to do it right.”

Kamal came to America in 1959 on scholarship to gain a master’s degree in engineering at the University of Alabama. “I took a bus all the way from New York City to Tuscaloosa,” he recalls. “I didn’t realize their mascot was an elephant, which is revered in India, until I got there. That was cool.”

He got more than a degree; he met his future wife Ann while in school, and she picked up badminton too. The 83-year-old still expresses gratitude for having a successful marriage, his sporting activity, and to still be working five decades later as a full-time structural engineer in Tampa.



*Kamal Chaudhari competes in the 2015 Games (Nick Gandy)*

Through the years the 125-pound powerhouse has competed in countless local and international tournaments. He played his first Senior Games in Florida in 1997, followed by the National Senior Games in Orlando in 1999.

Kamal, who has overcome cancer twice, feels he is enjoying badminton more than ever. “I have been to probably 80 per cent of all of the state Senior Games,” he explains. “I like Senior Games even more than the international tournaments because there are many more senior players.”

The medals keep coming- he earned one gold and two silvers at the 2017 National Senior Games presented by Humana- but he has many other reasons to stay in the game.

“It’s very good exercise, and we have fun socializing when we do it,” he says. “And it really gets me going to know I’m going to meet elite players when I go to Nationals. It may be a year away, but I start to tell myself to get out and practice to be ready.”





## April Athlete of the Month- Page 2

“I take it very seriously. It’s important to have a good mindset,” he continues. “You have to think where to place the shuttlecock where the other player is not. And when you get older, you aren’t as fast and can’t hit it quite as hard, so you have to be a ‘placer’ and play smart.” He says his style depends on who he plays, and if with a partner. “I like to ‘shoot down.’ If the shuttlecock comes in high you have to finish it. When I get a shot like that, I say ‘Thank you’ because it is a gift!”

Kamal and Ann enjoy practicing with their club at the gym. “We take a class each semester, and that allows us to be members to use the gym. We audit the courses, so we learn new things and don’t have to take a test or worry about grades.”

Asked about his most interesting experience on court, he shares a story from his youth. “When I was a freshman at Pune University there was a beautiful girl I was interested in. Her parents were from a royal family and they wanted her to marry a king. She was not a good player, so my mother helped us practice together in the back yard. I don’t know whatever happened to that girl, or if she ever married royalty. But we both learned to play badminton!”

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