

# From roller skater in Andhra Pradesh to NU figure skating champion, Arun Rayudu proves that representation matters

**Sofia Garrett, news staff**

From growing up roller skating in southern India to becoming a pivotal member of the Northeastern Figure Skating Club, graduate student Arun Rayudu is proof that perseverance pays off. On Nov. 10, 2024, the 25-year-old Husky became the first Indian to place first at the USA Northeast Inter-Collegiate Figure Skating Championship.

Raised in Andhra Pradesh, India, Rayudu began skating at the age of 3. Born with asthma, doctors suggested to Rayudu's parents that he become involved in a sport or physical activity to improve his lung capacity. After noticing Rayudu's early fascination in the people rollerblading along the beaches of southern India, his parents signed him up for roller skating lessons.

Andhra Pradesh has minimal ice skating infrastructure due to the warm weather conditions, so figure skating wasn't part of the equation in Rayudu's childhood. After winning gold in his first roller skating district championship, a city-wide competition, and then tallying another win in his first national championship in the 6 to 8 age group category, Rayudu hasn't slowed down. His training and dedication to roller skating heightened in 2014, when he debuted for Team India at the Asian Roller Skating Championship — finishing fourth.

"When I wore the jersey and I could see India written on my back, it was a special feeling. It's an honor, and I can feel so much pride, and it's still one of the best moments in my life," Rayudu said. "That is where I decided, this is something ... I have to get serious right now."

Returning from the Asian Roller Skating Championship with a new sense of motivation, skating became Rayudu's main priority. By the 2017 World Roller Games, Rayudu ranked fifth in the world, he said. At the 2018 Asian Roller Skating Championship in South Korea, he earned the silver medal in the senior open category.

After completing his undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering at Vignan's Institute of Information Technology in Visakhapatnam, India, Rayudu was looking for a change — and the Northeastern Figure Skating Club offered him the opportunity to trade in his wheels for blades.



Arun Rayudu performs at the USA Northeast Inter-Collegiate Figure Skating Championship. Raised in Andhra Pradesh, India, Rayudu began roller skating at 3-years-old. Photo courtesy Talin Calikyan.

The 72-member group is unlike any other club sports team at Northeastern; with three different tracks — gold, silver and bronze — students can determine what difficulty is best for them. Rayudu participates in the gold track — the largest commitment of the three with multiple practices a week from either 6:30 to 8 a.m. or 9:45 to 11:30 p.m..

“As soon as I came to Northeastern, and before even coming to the U.S., I was talking with the Northeastern team. They were very welcoming,” he said. “Julie [Pondelli] and Jaclyn [Bozzetti], our coaches, are very great. They’re very supportive, and coming from a roller skating background, I didn’t know much of ice skating. But both my coaches were very helpful and kind to me. They advised me from step one.”

Now in his second season, Rayudu is proving himself to be an invaluable member of the team. The Husky won a gold medal at the USA Northeast Inter-Collegiate Figure Skating Championship — the first Indian to do so in the event’s history.

“I’m happy that I could get the gold medal for Northeastern University,” he said. “It is of high importance to me because being far from home, I thought I couldn’t compete here, and I couldn’t be skating as I was skating back in India. I’m very happy that I could contribute on my end before I graduate.”

But Rayudu’s contributions extend far beyond the ice. The Northeastern Figure Skating Club prioritizes creating a community for all its members, and Rayudu is a model of a great teammate.

“Our members know that the basis of being on the team is being collaborative and supportive and bonding with all of the team members at practices, at events,” said Kristina Ruiz, a fourth-year biochemistry major and president of the Northeastern Figure Skating Club. “I know that that’s what enables us to integrate all of these different people into our team, including Arun, who integrated so easily because he is so supportive. He’s just also such a great team member.”

Ruiz emphasized the value Rayudu brings to the team and the shared excitement surrounding his first-place finish at the USA Northeast Inter-Collegiate Figure Skating Championship.

“We were all ecstatic when the results came out, especially because that event is pretty big,” she said. “We think he has great energy. He supports everyone, as we expect for all of our competitive members. He’s a really valuable member on our team.”

---





Arun Rayudu poses after the Northeastern Figure Skating Club's Winter Skating Showcase. On Nov. 10, the 25-year-old Husky became the first Indian to place first at the USA Northeast Inter-Collegiate Figure Skating Championship. Photo courtesy Talin Calikyan.

Not only does Rayudu balance the workload of his graduate studies and skating training, but he equally excels in other facets of his life at Northeastern. In October 2024, the Husky began serving as Northeastern's club sports Carter Field supervisor, leading the management and operations of the facilities — a notable promotion after previously serving as the Carter Field assistant and club sports administrative assistant.

Coordinator of Club Sports Ari Dayan, involved with the scheduling, finances and management of Northeastern's club teams, previously served as Rayudu's direct supervisor. Dayan highlighted Rayudu's value in the office — a clear connection to the Husky's positive energy on the ice.

"I honestly could never have a bad thing to say about Arun ever," Dayan said. "He is one of the most positive people I've ever had the pleasure of meeting, and he's made my experience at Northeastern a lot better than it would have been without him. He's extremely dedicated to his work, and doesn't take anything for granted. Just the way he interacts with us, I can see that transitioning pretty seamlessly over to the team."

While Rayudu also balances serving as Northeastern's vice president of the Aspiring Product Managers Club and as a senator for the Graduate Student Government, figure skating remains a top priority.

With an intercollegiate competition slated for Jan. 31 to Feb. 2 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and another at Sacred Heart University March 7 to 9, Rayudu looks to leave his mark before graduating in December. Not only does he want to earn gold in his final events representing Northeastern University, but he hopes to continue raising awareness about figure skating in India — and the gold medal at the USA Northeast Inter-Collegiate Figure Skating Championship was a key step.

“I think this achievement will create some promotion with other people in India who are deciding what sport to take,” he said. “This gives me the opportunity to create more awareness of figure skating in the people ... and then inspire more people to join the sport.”

With figure skating remaining largely unknown in India — and considered by many to be predominantly feminine — Rayudu is breaking barriers for the sport’s rising athletes.

“When you’re working hard for something, no matter how many people pull you back, if you know that you’re doing the right thing, and if you’ve got passion for it, you just have to go for it,” Rayudu said. “And in the end, the people who have pointed fingers at you, with the same hands, they’re going to clap for you.”