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Vaishali to be India's first visually impaired player at World Chess Olympiad

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Blind chess player Vaishali Narendra Salavkar will become the first Indian female to be part of the International Braille Chess Association (IBCA) team at the world chess Olympiad, starting September 23 at Batumi in Georgia, a top IBCA official said.

The IBCA, affiliated to FIDE, sends its teams - open and women - to compete at the chess Olympiad. "Vaishali will be the first Indian blind chess player to participate in the World Chess Olympiad," IBCA President Jadhav Charudatta told IANS on phone from London on Saturday.

Charudatta is also the President of All India Chess Federation for the Blind (AICFB). "Forty-five-year-old Vaishali from Maharashtra has been playing chess for the past 20-25 years. She is an eight-time national champion," AICFB Treasurer Swapnil Shah told IANS. Vaishali has an Elo rating of 1,357 points. An Elo rating is a system which calculates the skills of chess players.

Shah said two Spanish women chess players were not able to play in the Olympiad and hence the chance came to Vaishali. As per the Olympiad official website, the other Indian female chess player who will be playing in the Olympiad is Malika Handa (ELO rating 1,334) as part of the International Chess Committee of Deaf (ICCD) team.

With these two players, the total number of Indian women chess players including the normal women`s team at the Batumi Olympiad will be seven. The Indian women`s chess Olympiad team consists of Koneru Humpy, Harika Dronavalli, Tania Sachdev, Karavade Esha, and Padmini Rout.

Meanwhile, Charudatta requested FIDE - the global chess body- to extend its cooperation in developing chess for the blind. "For instance, FIDE has specific programmes like chess in schools. It can be extended to blind school students. The blind school students could be allowed to attend the chess classes held in normal schools," Charudatta said.

He said the three chess federations for differently abled - IBCA, ICCD, and International Physically Disabled Chess Association (IPDCA) - could first look forming a common platform to address the problems faced by their players.