

**T**WENTY-five-year-old Kajal Dhawan is the pretty girl next door. Tall and slim with an innate grace. Like any girl of her age she wears the ubiquitous jeans and printed top while her finger flies over her mobile phone as she sends SMS. But, don't expect her to answer her phone. Kajal is hearing impaired.

The drawback though has not stopped Kajal from becoming an accomplished badminton player with several international awards and medals. An ace in softball, swimming, cycling and basketball too, her energy is focused on helping the hearing impaired live a normal, interactive life.

## THE QUIET CHAMP

A medal-winning sportsperson, Kajal Dhawan has not let her hearing disability hold her back.

By Purabi Shridhar

### A Silent World

The youngest of three sisters, Kajal was born deaf. Unbelievable as it sounds, she was 12 years old when she realised that she was different from the rest. The credit clearly goes to her parents, especially her father Major General (Retired) S K Dhawan who ensured not just a normal upbringing but saw to it that she excelled in every field. "My father made sure that I learnt everything, played every game. My parents are totally encouraging, I was never made to feel that I lacked anywhere," she says through her interpreter, young K Priyanka, a Class XI commerce student of Bhandari College, Bangalore. Priyanka, whose parents are deaf, was the 'unofficial' interpreter at the First National Sports Championship of Deaf Women hosted by the Delhi Foundation of Deaf Women (DFDW).



Participating in games, even at the international level, is nothing new for Kajal, who has won silver and bronze medals in badminton at the 2002 Asia Pacific Games for the Deaf at Kuala Lumpur and Taiwan (November 2000). At home she has captained the Delhi University Softball Team for Inter College Softball Championship 2000-2001 as a student of Jesus and Mary College, Delhi, and netted gold, silver and bronze medals at the National Badminton Championships too.

It's both play and work for Kajal. With business data processing as one of her graduation subjects and a diploma from the National Institute of Information Technology (NIIT), she works with Quadrant InfoTech Private Limited. And she'll proudly have



you know that her management is all praise for her interactive quality!

### Tackling Problems

Getting the job was not so easy. A secure family life and education in regular institutions insulated her to some extent, but Kajal faced the bitter truth that not many are willing to employ the hearing impaired. "People can be cruel, they'd tell me you're deaf you can't work. Initially it pained me, but later, I'd tell them to give me a job and then talk to me," she conveys agitatedly. That's why Kajal is keen "to help the deaf, to encourage them to prove that they're just as good or even better than normal people. Many times, parents themselves are reluctant to educate them, especially if they're girls. I'm angry too with the government for doing nothing for us. I want to change all these."