

Press Release

Mizo lifters Zakhuma and Jacob Vanlaltluanga serve a delightful treat

Pune, Jan 10: Mizoram weightlifters Zakhuma and Jacob Vanlaltluanga served a delightful treat, improving a spate of records, in securing a one-two finish for the North-Eastern State in the men's under-21 61kg class competition here today.

The duo is a great example of how fierce competitors can be friends too, while taking pride in one another's progress.

"The two of us and (Youth Olympic Games gold medallist) Jeremy Lalrinnunga have been thick friends from before we came to the Army Sports Institute in Pune some years ago," Zakhuma explained after trading records with his team-mate.

He added, "We are training partners and compete in the same weight class, but we do not let that come in the way of our friendship. He is my kid brother."

Zakhuma won the 56kg silver behind Jeremy Lalrinnunga in the Commonwealth Youth Championship in 2017 while Jacob Vanlaltluanga picked up a bronze in the Asian Youth Championship last year. They are both eager to keep improving and join Jeremy Lalrinnunga in the National camp in Patiala.

It was clear that Zakhuma wanted to win gold here, having lost to Jacob Vanlaltluanga in the National Junior Championship in Nagpur last month. The 18-year-old, who returns with his team-mates to Aizawl once a year, knew that he had to get everything right to be able to win the top prize ahead of his younger team-mate. He won with a record total of 254kg.

"Jacob would have the records in the Youth category in any case. And I was keen to show that I am hungry," Zakhuma said. "In our sport, it is all about giving off one's best on a given day. Of course, there is strategy involved in deciding how much weight to attempt lifting. I was focused on what I needed to do, even if I am competing with my friend," Zakhuma said.

Jacob Vanlaltluanga was happy to take silver, one kg behind his senior, but he had assured himself of gold medal in the junior (under-17) division. "I was only focusing on clearing the lifts that my coach wanted me to," he said. "Besides, I know that we have our good days and bad days. I am glad we both had a good day today."

The two lads met the Mizoram chef-de-mission and other officials for a photograph. It was interesting to watch Jacob Vanlaltluanga remove the colourful head band he was wearing after the competition beneath a fashionable hair-cut.

With Jeremy Lalrinnunga warming up for the 67kg class competition, they went to watch their more illustrious team-mate perform. Their bonding is what sport is all about.