

NILUKA Karunaratne OLY

Badminton Olympian – London 2012, Rio 2016, Tokyo 2020



nilukakarunaratne1



Niluka Karunaratne Oly



OFFICIAL

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Sri Lanka shuttle legend Niluka Karunaratne retires to focus on next generation



LAUSANNE, Switzerland, 1 October 2023: Sri Lanka's most accomplished shuttle star Niluka Karunaratne officially announced his retirement from international competitive badminton representing Sri Lanka today while representing the country at a forum in the International Olympic Committee (IOC) headquarters.

It heralds the end of an era that began more than two decades ago driven by an insatiable appetite for success at domestic and international level with a never-say-die attitude to attempt what seemed impossible in his quest to bring glory to Sri Lanka.

“I have represented my country very actively, consistently and continuously for 22 years. I have conducted myself with lot of discipline, lot of courage and lot of passion. My passion was to represent my country,” said Niluka who represented Sri Lanka National Team as a 15-year-

old in the Asian Badminton Championship in Jakarta, Indonesia in 2000.

His phenomenal achievements of being a 17-time national champion, three-time Olympian and winning 34 international medals is the legacy of his unwavering determination, dedication and discipline he adhered to like a religion during his magnificent career.

It is difficult for someone who has a passion and temperament for the sport of badminton to hang up his racquet for good. “I have been contemplating this for some time. There are lot of young athletes coming up. Even though I am eager and have the passion to continue, it's my responsibility and time to hand over to the next generation and following generations to prepare. If we can do that now, we can have better players than me in upcoming years,” said Niluka.

He had already quit playing local competitions after bagging his 17th national title two years ago. It was not because Father time was catching up on the 38-year-old who played his last international tournament in Lisbon, Portugal in February this year. It is his selfless desire to hand over the baton to the next generation of Sri Lankans that made his decision to retire not difficult.

“I will be very much involved in the development of badminton and also all sports in Sri Lanka. Having worked hard before as an athlete for myself to represent my country, I’m motivated and eager to serve my country in a different way to develop the next generation of athletes to represent the country to compete internationally, give them exposure and bring glory to Sri Lanka. That is my utmost aim and ambition,” said Niluka who is full of energy to begin a new journey after waging fierce battles on court.

Niluka had been playing since the age of eight but it was in the year 2000 that a 15-year-old showed great character and courage to become a future legend of the sport.

The defining moment of his career took place when he was undergoing residential training for two weeks at the Maitland Place headquarter of the Sri Lanka Badminton Association for a tournament in the Maldives. “Every day the coach was saying we can beat everyone but not India. I was at Royal and not living in Colombo but coming from Balapitiya. I was shocked because I was brought up in a surrounding where parents taught me nothing is impossible. I never heard the word I can’t. My father was not in the country to get advice,” recalled Niluka.

The girls in the squad chided him when they saw him in tears for several days after practice and brought it to the notice of SLBA officials. “If we can’t win, I’m not going to take part or go on the tour,” an emotionally charged Niluka told them. He was assured by then SLBA president Eraj Wijesinghe who gave him all encouragement while the coach was admonished for demotivating the players instead of training players to win.

Looking back with pride at his stance when he was just 15, Niluka said he became motivated by the positive approach of Eraj Wijesinghe. Niluka went on to win three gold medals on his international debut at the South Asian Junior (Under 16) tournament and the rest as they say is ‘history’.



The highlight of his career was leading Sri Lanka at the 2012 London Olympics, the first Royalist and only badminton player to do so. He beat Japan’s number one and world ranked number eight in the first round to be among the top 16 players. He has won five gold medals in all five continents.

His first international final was on November 6, 2003 on his father Louie Karunaratne’s birthday. “He has been my coach and my inspiration. I started because of him only,” said Niluka of his father who has played badminton, first class cricket and was also a swimmer.

“It’s been a hell of a journey. People think I have been there for a long time. It is because I achieved a lot at a very young age. Then you will be there for a long time,” he said.

Supporters, media personnel, family and friends will be invited for Niluka’s farewell after his return from Europe tour.

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Niluka Karunaratne's 22 years of service for Sri Lanka sports

GOLD MEDALS

- 1.) Puerto Rico international challenge 2011 - Men's singles GOLD MEDAL (my first international gold medal on my father's birthday November 6th)
- 2.) Miami international series 2011 - Men's singles GOLD MEDAL
- 3.) Welsh international series 2011 - Men's singles GOLD MEDAL
- 4.) Uganda international series 2012 - Men's singles GOLD MEDAL
- 5.) Iran international challenge 2012 - Men's singles GOLD MEDAL
- 6.) Uganda international series 2016 - Men's singles GOLD MEDAL
- 7.) Portuguese international series 2016 - Men's singles GOLD MEDAL
- 8.) Brazil international challenge 2017 - men's singles GOLD MEDAL
- 9.) Benin international series 2019 - Men's singles

BRONZE MEDALS

- 1.) My first international medal at the age of 17 - Bangladesh international series 2002 men's singles bronze medal
- 2.) New Zealand international series 2004 - Men's singles bronze medal
- 3.) New Zealand international series 2005 - Men's singles bronze medal
- 4.) Bahrain international series 2007 - Men's singles bronze medal
- 5.) Pakistan international challenge 2010 - Men's singles Bronze medal
- 6.) Maldives International challenge 2010 - Men's singles Bronze medal
- 7.) Estonia international series 2012 - Men's singles Bronze medal
- 8.) Dutch international series 2012 - Men's singles Bronze medal

SILVER MEDALS

- 1.) Welsh international series 2003 - Men's singles Silver medal (My first international final at the age of 18)
- 2.) Australian international series 2004 - Men's singles Silver medal
- 3.) Iran international series 2007 - Men's singles silver medal
- 4.) Uganda international 2008 silver - Men's singles Silver medal
- 5.) Bahrain international challenge 2012 - Men's singles silver medal
- 6.) Brazil international challenge 2012 - Men's singles silver medal
- 7.) Dutch international series 2014 - Men's singles silver medal
- 8.) Uganda international series 2020 - Men's singles silver medal

- 9.) Austrian international challenge 2013 - Men's singles Bronze medal
- 10.) Peru International challenge - Men's singles Bronze medal
- 11.) Iran International challenge 2015 - Men's singles Bronze medal
- 12.) Romanian international series 2016 - Men's singles Bronze medal
- 13.) Tahiti international challenge 2016 - Men's singles Bronze medal
- 14.) Egypt international series 2019 - Men's singles Bronze medal
- 15.) Sydney international series 2019 - Men's singles Bronze medal
- 16.) Ivory coast international series 2019- Men's singles Bronze medal
- 17.) Portuguese international championships 2021 - Bronze medal



Achievements in Sri Lanka:

- 1.) U-11 to U-19 all age groups all island junior national champion
- 2.) Captain of Royal college Badminton Team - 2003
- 3.) Up and coming sportsman of the year at Royal college - 1999
- 4.) Most outstanding sportsman at Royal college - 2000
- 5.) Royal crown at Royal college - 2001
- 6.) Member of the Royal college u-15 cricket team - year 2001 (won the all island trophy)
- 7.) 6 years colors man at Royal college
- 8.) Youngest national champion ever - Year 2001 at the age of 16
- 9.) One and only undisputed National Champion from year 2001 to 2021 and 17 national titles
- 10.) 9 time Men's doubles national champion
- 11.) Three time mix doubles champion
- 12.) - Won More than 40 local open titles apart from national championships since year 2000

Major Achievements in the International Arena:

- 1.) The only Sri Lankan player to gain international recognition in the history of Badminton in Sri Lanka achieving a World Ranking of 34
- 2.) Represented Sri Lanka in all leading championships since year 2000: Thomas Cup, Asian Championship, World Championship, Asian Games, Sudirman Cup, Commonwealth Games and Olympic Games
- 3.) Asian Badminton Championships 2003 – defeated Indonesian No. 6
- 4.) Australian Open 2004 – defeated Australian No. 1 (World Ranking 38)
- 5.) Australian Open 2004 – defeated New Zealand No. 1 (World Ranking 58)
- 6.) Asian Championships 2005 – defeated Malaysian No. 6
- 7.) Melbourne Commonwealth Games 2006 – defeated Canadian No. 1 (World Ranking 18)
- 8.) Bahrain International 2007 – defeated Japanese No.8
- 9.) Pakistan International 2007 – defeated Portuguese No. 1 (World Ranking 54)
- 10.) Uganda International 2008 – defeated Spanish No. 1 (World Ranking 44)
- 11.) Represented Sri Lanka at 2012 London Olympic Games – Captain of Sri Lankan Team
- 12.) London Olympics 2012 – defeated Japanese No.1 (World Ranking 8)
- 13.) London Olympics 2012 – qualified up to Pre- Quarter Finals (Best 16)
- 14.) Defeated Chan yan kit from hong kong china, world no 13 at the Ausrian international Challenge 2013
- 15.) Defeated Nan Wei(asian game bronze medalist) world no:9 from hong kong china at the Austrin international challenge 2014
- 16.) Two-time silver medalist and one-time bronze medalist at the South Asian Games
- 17.) Youngest player (19 years old) to achieve the highest BWF ranking (Rank 70) in 2004