

## **SAAP's Role In Sania's Success**

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Much before the career managers and big sponsorship deals came along, Sania Mirza's march to glory was well on its way. From 2001 to date, the Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh's (SAAP) financial support alone has come close to a crore " Rs. 99.25 lakhs to be precise.

The latest instalment of SAAP assistance was a Rs. 20 lakh grant, on her return from the U.S. Open, released by its vice-chairman and managing director, G. Kamal Vardhana Rao. "Sania has effected a paradigm shift in sports perspective and I'm confident SAAP's support will take her to greater heights," Rao said.

Not many government organisations have backed their wards to such an extent and certainly not those as cash-strapped as SAAP. Even when reeling under huge bills for setting up 2002 National Games and 2003 Afro Asian Games infrastructure, it didn't tighten the purse strings when extending encouragement to the Hyderabad lass. G. Asok Kumar was VC & MD, SAAP in those trying times but in his stint alone, between 60 to 65 lakhs was handed over.

Support was not in cash alone. A 'pay and play' scheme costing Rs. 100 an hour for using SAAP's tennis facilities was in operation then. She got to use them for however long and whenever she wanted, for free. So also was the grant of a 500 square yard housing site at Bharani layout, an upmarket locality of Hyderabad.

What does SAAP expect in return ? "Acknowledgement of its support by displaying SAAP's logo in her attire was one request made to her," recalls Asok Kumar.

"SAAP's financial support has been staggered, barely making a ripple in the media for a day or two. When seen collectively, it is a sizeable contribution to the teen sensation's success," he added.