



Ygor Coelho (left) with Davi Silva, Viktor Axelsen and Jonathan Matias

GENERATION THAT YGOR COELHO INSPIRED HAS ARRIVED

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Jonathan Matias and **Davi Silva** were knee-high to **Ygor Coelho** when they started playing badminton at the Miratus Center, a badminton academy started by Coelho's father Sebastiao in a Rio favela.

Now Matias and Silva are bigger than Coelho – Silva towers over 6 ft 6 in – and both are at their first BWF World Championships, playing alongside their inspiration.

It couldn't get more special for Coelho, who has been a singular role model for Brazil badminton over the last decade. And while he's still Brazil's top men's singles player at No.56, he's thrilled that the next generation has arrived when he's still around, and that they're competing at the same World Championships.



"I've seen them from when they were very young," said Coelho. "They've seen me participate in the Youth Olympics, and then at the Olympics in Rio and Tokyo, and now they're trying for the Olympics, so I feel happy and proud. Davi is No.53 (mixed doubles), Jonathan is No.65, and I'm very proud of them, to see how they've grown and where they've come.

"I get goosebumps to see them. I look at pictures of them when they were 5, 6, 7 years old, and now they're all taller than me, and they're competing with the best in the world! I think they've the level to compete, and that makes me even more proud of them."

Both Matias and Silva were among the group of children from Miratus who were courtside at the Rio Olympics when Coelho competed. That first experience, of watching a home hero perform creditably on the world's biggest stage, stoked the fire in them.



"I was in the audience at the Rio Olympics, watching badminton," said 20-year-old Silva, who's No.53 in mixed doubles with Sania Lima. "I felt a big energy being there, it was a unique and special moment, and I hoped one day I would achieve this dream and be in the Olympics.

"When I started playing badminton, Ygor was under-13 champion and I grew up watching him play and he was my role model. Ygor's father guided me to where I am now. Since the beginning I dreamed about playing the World Championships. Being here, among the best in the world, is a dream come true."

Jonathan Matias, No.65 in men's singles, says getting to the World Championships has been the realisation of a dream after a roller-coaster journey which saw him give up the sport and become a sky diver with the army.

Like Silva, Matias was among the kids courtside witnessing first hand Coelho's Olympic debut on home soil.



"Before, I was playing only for fun," said Matias. "I didn't think I could be a professional player. And then watching Ygor playing the Olympic Games, seeing that we have a chance against the top players, I thought if you work hard you can get there. That made me feel I can get to that level – changing a young mind to a professional mind."

The dream that his father planted and nurtured continues to produce fruits, and Ygor Coelho can scarcely believe what has come to pass.

"For me this World Championships is very special, to see that everything has come together so well. My wife is coming to watch. We married in 2020 and then we moved to Denmark, and now the World Championships is here," said Coelho.

"Now it's not just about me; it's about the whole state, the whole favela and the whole country. It's about building a culture of badminton. Many players are coming up. Earlier it was only me. Slowly I feel it's growing."

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