

“Two sides of the same coin”: How a slum school in Odisha has embraced sport with education

Bhubaneswar, Odisha, September 2017



Entrance to the School

shops, tea stalls and autorickshaws, along with others who are informal service workers with the city. After leaving BBVM, some of the brightest of the school children can expect to go on to further education at college, usually on the technical line.

Pro Sport Development has been working with the school since April 2016 and it is now one of the seven schools in the Community Sports Program (CSP), supported by Tata Trusts. The support from Tata Trusts, one of India's oldest non-sectarian philanthropic organisations, from April 2017 has allowed the CSP to reach 618 children, providing sports equipment, infrastructure and kits, as well as the regular coaching sessions, all in the service of aiding the holistic development of the children.

Founded in 2001 by Haribandu Samantary to provide much-needed access to education for underprivileged children from the slum of Bharatpur in Bhubaneswar, Beena Bharati Vidya Mandira (BBVM) school is nestled right in the heart of the slum.

The parents of the children attending the school are mostly skilled and semi-skilled category wage earners, such as carpenters, whereas others are unskilled workers doing manual physical labour. Some of the parents run small businesses within the community including



Students and teachers celebrate with their new sports equipment



“Sport is a part of education, they are two sides of the same coin”

Laxman Jena, BBVM Principal



BBVM school currently teaches 540 children, of which 117 are participating in the CSP this year, from classes 6 to 8. While the school's dropout rate of 6% is higher than the national average, it must be placed in the context of Bharatpur slum, in which average school dropout rates tend to be much higher, particularly when it comes to girls and young women. The average exam score for the children, taking into account Maths, Hindi, Oriya, English and Social Sciences, is 57%, which puts BBVM in the middle of the pack among the schools on the Community Sports Program.

The school has an extremely positive view on the benefits of sport and exercise for the holistic development of children. This view is championed by its principal, Laxman Jena, who affirms that “sport is a part of education, they are two sides of the same coin”, an inspiring outlook that has permeated through to the teachers and children as well. Mr Jena, a formidable presence who likes to occupy a small table in the school’s main hallway, from which he directs his charges, is a firm believer in the benefits that sport can bring to schools. “Since the program started I have seen the children always discussing the games,” says Mr Jena. “They have been more active and it has improved their confidence. Since the sessions have started the children are more competent in the classroom.”



Laxman Jena, Principal, BBVM



Ranjit Sahoo Teacher, classes 6-10

This improvement has in turn made the teachers happy, as the children have been more likely to be active when answering questions in classroom as well. Ranjit Sahoo, who has been a teacher at the school for 4 years, has been thrilled by the transformation of the children thanks to regular sport. He says the children are always talking about the games, particularly what they have learned from them, and that the children have become more active and are increasingly likely to play games themselves during breaks.

When talking to the school’s children, the overriding impression is one of young people growing in confidence through being active. For 12-year-old Prabhustatba Panda, from class 7, school has always come easily and his grades are near the top of the school. But he says the games have helped him to also become more active and helped his relationships with his classmates, particularly those of the opposite gender. He explains, “Last month I had less confidence but now after the different games I feel that has improved and I am now much more confident”.



Prabhustatba Panda, Class 7



Supriya Routray Class 7

And for 11-year old Supriya Routray, from class 7, the games have been not just a benefit for her physically (“I do not feel tired in class any more”), but also mentally and socially. She says, “I play with confidence now because I believe in myself”.

The improvements in the children’s attitude and activity has not gone unnoticed by the coaches. As PSD trainer Subhasarita Rout says, “When I

started taking the sessions, at that time the children were very dull, not active, not interested, but slowly there has been a change in their behaviour. They are now more active, they have learned how to communicate between teammates and how to lead a group. Their confidence has also improved and they are enjoying the sessions.” The school itself, the teachers and the principals, have played a huge part in this, with Subhrasarita noting that they have been extremely welcoming and helpful throughout the program.



Protin Kumar Senapati Class 8; Age 13 years

Protin, the son of a shopkeeper who lives in Bharatpur slum, has always been active; in addition to his studies, he also pursues dancing and singing. But even he has seen the benefits from regular structured sport on his physical, mental and social wellbeing. Protin says, “First when I played the games I felt really tired. But now I have been playing more, I am always active in class and in the sessions.”

Protin’s father, Bijay Kumar Senapati, has also noticed a change in his son. He says Protin often talks about the games as well as his studies, and that he has been attending school more frequently. “Yes, I have seen some changes in his behaviour,” adds Bijay. “He has been more respectful to his younger and older brothers, and to the neighbours.”

The positive attitude from the teachers and students has rubbed off on the coaches as well. PSD trainer Bhaktamohan Swain says, “When I take sessions in BBVM, I am happy because all the children enjoy the games and are interested to play”. He adds that he enjoys the sessions with BBVM because the children are now always active, interested in the games and willing to ask questions. They are also more responsive to the feedback questions, when the coaches look to recap the lessons learned from the different sessions. He also notes that, while boys and girls were hesitant to mix and to play together when the sessions started, there is always now a mix of genders and both boys and girls happily play together.

