

Bringing a leader out of his shell: A case study of Sambit Maharana

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Situated in the heart of Bhubaneswar's Dum Duma slum is Vivekananda Siksha Kendra, an NGO school that Pro Sport Development (PSD) has been working with as part of the Community Sports Program (CSP) since



2016. The school was founded in 1989 by Prakash Chandra Swain to provide education for the underprivileged children from Dum Duma slum. The school has 260 students and 14 teachers. Most parents of the children are skilled or unskilled labourers, while others run small businesses within the community.

Sambit Maharana (left) is a 12-year-old boy from class 7 at the school. A tall boy for his age, Sambit somewhat towers over his classmates. He does not do so in an

intimidating way; instead he seems more awkward and shy about his size. However, when he gets out on the playground he uses it to his advantage, as he allies speed and sporting intelligence to his size. He is a solid student, with an average exam score of 70%, and he says he likes studying, but where he really excels is in the games, which he says have taught him a lot already.

“I was very nervous when I started playing these games, but now I am more confident,” says Sambit. “The games have helped me learn how to be a leader among my classmates and they have encouraged me to become more physically fit and active”. Sambit says these changes have helped him in the classroom as well, as he feels his concentration is now better during classes and he has more confidence to answer questions from his teachers, in part thanks to getting practice answering recap questions at the end of CSP sessions. Sambit is a natural leader, and his explanation for why Continuous Cricket is his favourite game reveals much about his character, as he says “because it is a game about teamwork and about cooperating as a team to win”.



His teacher, Monas Kumar Mohanty, thinks very highly of Sambit's ability both inside and outside of the classroom. He says, “Sambit is always trying to learn new things, and as a teacher I really enjoy his interest and

willingness to learn”. Mr Mohanty (see right) says this willingness to learn has seen Sambit really enjoy and learn from the CSP games, and helps to explain why he often masters those games before his classmates. The teacher says Sambit needs to try to study more to improve his marks, though he has seen some small improvements in this regard since the start of the sessions. However, it is through his athletic ability that Sambit really stands out, with Mr Mohanty stating matter-of-factly that “I think he has the ability to be a sports person in the future”.



Sambit’s father, Sanantan, works in an area of Dum Duma slum named Subash Nagar as a carpenter, and the influence of this career, of the ability to make things with your hands, is likely behind Sambit’s ambition to follow the mechanical line of further education and become an engineer. Sanantan Maharana emphasises that his son should spend more time studying and concentrating on his schooling, reflecting a desire for his son to succeed and move away from the cramped confines of his Dum Duma home. But Sanantan still sees the benefits the CSP has delivered for his son on an academic level. He says Sambit has been more consistently attending school since the program began, which has made him pleased because it means his son is spending more time studying.



PSD coach Bhaktamohan Swain says Sambit’s ability means that “if he is given a chance to play he could be a good player in any sport”. He says Sambit’s leadership qualities, which have emerged from the previously shy boy in the course of the CSP games, make him well-liked among his peers and makes him one of the stand-out participants on the program. His athletic ability and his willingness to learn could see him excel in any sport he chooses. But Sambit himself, when asked about his future, makes no mention of sports.



The need to find a stable career to escape the confines of his slum upbringing looks likely to prevent him pursuing a sporting career, which would be a riskier choice. This is unfortunately a story that regularly plays out across India. But the CSP sessions have clearly inspired Sambit to be more active and it is hoped he will continue to play, even if it is not professionally.