



From Playgrounds to Possibilities



How the Community Cricket Program helped Naitik build confidence, challenge stereotypes, and embrace holistic growth

Bhubaneswar, Odisha, April 2026

Traditional social norms often shape how young people interact with one another, especially in relation to gender roles, communication, and expectations around education. In many communities, boys and girls are discouraged from engaging freely with one another, while young people are often expected to prioritize academics over sports, personal interests, and physical well-being. These pressures can limit confidence, self-expression, and healthy development.

Sports can serve as a powerful platform to challenge these barriers. By creating inclusive environments where young people learn, play, and grow together, sports-based programs can build confidence, leadership, respect, and life skills.

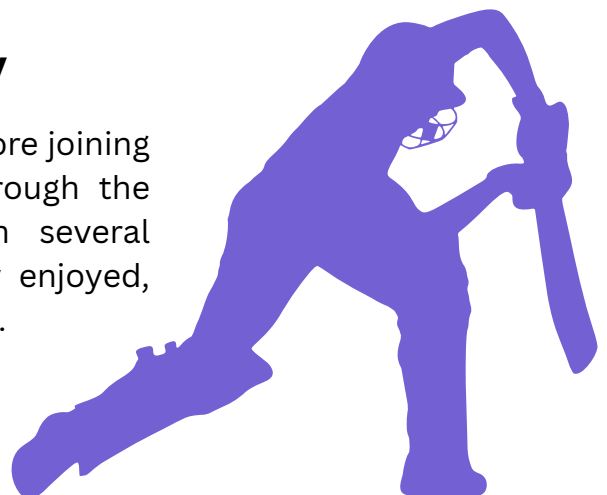
In this context, Pro Sport Development (PSD), with support from The Upamanyu Mallik Initiatives (TUMI), implements the Community Cricket Program (CCP), which works with adolescents from marginalized communities in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. The program provides a safe and supportive space for mixed-gender cricket while also building awareness around child rights, gender equality, leadership, and personal development.

Naitik Prasad Giri, a 15-year old from the Dumduma Community, has been part of CCP for the past year and will be continuing for a second year. His journey through the program reflects meaningful growth in confidence, communication, discipline, and perspective.

Turning passion into opportunity

Naitik always had a strong interest in cricket. Before joining the CCP, he had already played the sport through the Jaipur Cricket Academy and participated in several tournaments. Cricket was something he deeply enjoyed, and he was eager to continue developing his skills.

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He first learned about the CCP through a member of his community who was associated with the program. After being encouraged to join and told that it would be a productive and rewarding learning experience, Naitik decided to participate. What began as an opportunity to play cricket soon became a broader journey of personal growth.

Learning beyond the game

For Naitik, the CCP offered much more than athletic development. He especially valued the sessions on child rights and personal safety. Through the program, he learned that children have the right to express their concerns, share their problems freely, and seek support when needed.

He explains that one of the most important lessons he learned was that children should never remain silent about abuse, pressure, or difficulties they may be facing.



“They taught us that children have the right to speak about their problems and opinions freely. We should communicate rather than stay silent.”

The program created an environment where boys and girls were treated equally and encouraged to interact respectfully, helping participants feel more comfortable with one another.

Building confidence and finding his voice

One of the most significant changes in Naitik’s journey has been the growth of his confidence. Earlier, he described himself as someone who felt shy, especially when speaking to girls or unfamiliar peers. He often hesitated out of nervousness and fear of saying the wrong thing.

Through regular participation in the CCP, guided interactions, and supportive coaching, he gradually became more comfortable expressing himself and communicating openly.





“I wasn’t able to talk much before because of fear and nervousness.
Now I feel comfortable with the whole team.”

This growing confidence extended beyond the cricket field. Naitik now feels more empowered to speak up when something bothers him, whether at home or in school. He shares that he no longer hesitates to communicate with parents or teachers when he feels strongly about something.

Standing up for himself

Naitik’s increased confidence became especially clear during a disagreement at home. During school examinations, his parents wanted him to stop playing and focus entirely on academics. However, Naitik respectfully stood his ground and explained that physical fitness was important too, and that students should not be expected to spend all day studying without balance.

Although the conversation led to conflict, he chose to advocate for himself and continued attending practice sessions. This moment reflected a deeper shift in his ability to express his needs and stand up for what he believed was important.

Challenging gender stereotypes

Before joining the CCP, Naitik believed that girls did not play cricket. Over time, his perspective changed significantly. He came to realize that girls not only participate in cricket, but can perform just as well, and sometimes better, than boys.



“Earlier I thought girls did not play cricket. Later I understood that
they play, and they can even play better than boys.”

The program changed how he viewed mixed-gender interaction. In the past, community members and peers often questioned why boys and girls spoke with one another or played together. Through CCP, he learned that there is nothing wrong with boys and girls coming together in safe, respectful, and productive spaces.

Today, he says he views girls as teammates and peers rather than through the discomfort or distance he once felt.

Extending impact beyond the field

The CCP has helped Naitik grow as a leader. During one cricket match, he was given the responsibility of captaincy. Through this experience, he learned that leadership is not only about personal performance or winning, but also about motivating others, maintaining balance within the team, and helping everyone contribute.

He learnt that there is a difference between motivating yourself and motivating an entire team. In addition, Naitik credits the program with helping him become more focused in multiple areas of life.



“Coaches encouraged us to stay focused on sports, studies, and our responsibilities.”

This balanced mindset helped him improve both on and off the field.

Recognized growth by mentors

Naitik recalls feeling especially proud during one of his early matches in the CCP, when his team was close to losing but his focus and efforts helped secure a win. Another memorable milestone was being selected for an exposure visit to Delhi.

He shares that he never imagined he would be chosen for such an opportunity. Visiting new places, exploring the city, and experiencing something beyond his community left a lasting impression on him. The experience broadened his perspective and strengthened his belief in what young people can achieve when given opportunities.

Positive changes observed at home

Naitik’s father, Padmalochan Giri, has witnessed meaningful changes since his son joined the program.



“Naitik is very happy to participate in PSD’s cricket program. He always had a strong desire to play cricket, and PSD gave him the opportunity to fulfill that dream.”

He notes that Naitik has become far more active and responsible in daily life.



“Earlier, he was quite lazy. Now he takes responsibility for his own work. He studies on his own and has become more disciplined.”

He also highlights his son’s improved confidence in communicating with girls and others.



“Earlier, he used to hesitate to talk to girls, but after joining this program, he has become more confident and is able to communicate with them.”

His father strongly believes that participating in the program has helped him significantly.

Inspired to guide others

When asked what he would like to teach others, Naitik’s answer focused on communication and mutual respect. He says he would like to teach boys and girls how to speak freely with one another, communicate respectfully, and build understanding instead of distance. He strongly believes that physical fitness is just as important as academics, not only for a healthy body but also for a healthy and calm mind.

Looking ahead

Today, Naitik identifies his greatest “superpower” as confidence. He is more vocal, more focused, and more comfortable working with others. He has developed stronger leadership qualities, healthier attitudes toward gender equality, and a clearer understanding of his own rights and responsibilities.

His journey highlights how structured sports-based interventions like the Community Cricket Program can create meaningful change in the lives of young people. By combining cricket with life skills, awareness, and inclusive participation, such programs help adolescents grow into confident, responsible, and respectful individuals while building stronger communities around them.