

How the Community Sports Program empowered Rudra to overcome obstacles

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Engaging in sports can have a transformative impact on one's life. Sports provide a platform for people to overcome obstacles in their lives and maintain their health and well-being. It can have a positive impact on physical as well as mental health. Therefore, it is important for children and youth to understand these benefits and engage in sports.

Sports teach one to be disciplined, foster personal development and help in character development. In addition to positively affecting well-being, involvement in sports builds the ability to deal with challenges in life, through the development of various skills such as self-esteem, confidence and leadership.

[Pro Sport Development \(PSD\)](#) focuses on leveraging the benefits of sports through its flagship program - the [Community Sports Program \(CSP\)](#). Since 2015, the CSP has provided children and youth from marginalized communities in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, with access to sport and play, while helping them develop soft skills.

Promoting a holistic approach to sports, the program provides well-structured and age-appropriate curricula that include fun games with interesting tweaks to traditional sports, delivered by trained facilitators. With the help of adaptations to regular games, the CSP strives to foster an inclusive environment that embraces diversity. This feature of the program enables the provision of equal opportunities for all children to participate, learn, and grow through sports.



Building resilience

Rudra Narayan is a class 7 student studying at St. Joseph's High School in Bhubaneswar, Odisha and has been a part of the CSP for a year now. When Rudra was 4 months old, his family discovered that he suffers from a heart condition, for which he had to undergo surgery. Undeterred by his health restrictions, Rudra was interested in sports, and wanted to be a part of the program, just like his other peers. With proper measures such as vigilant coaches and peers, and advice from healthcare professionals and his parents, his journey in the CSP began.

The CSP played a crucial role in facilitating Rudra's participation in sports, taking into careful consideration his prevailing health condition. This ensured a seamless experience for Rudra, while avoiding any health complications. Rubi Rautaray, PSD's Community Sports Trainer, shares how she ensured Rudra's safety during the program sessions:

"Rudra comes for the sessions, but then he needs to rest midway through the sessions. I would tell him to rest, and then after 30 minutes, I would make sure he is doing okay. I would give him water to keep him hydrated."

Harnessing the recreational aspect of the CSP

As Rudra's participation in sports got more frequent through the CSP, he was able to realize how much he enjoys the sport. Earlier, his health condition hindered his participation in sports, which led to a

gradual decline in his interest in it. However, the approach to sports used in the CSP caught his attention and got him interested in it.

Rudra has particularly found the adapted and modified fun games enjoyable, realizing a newfound passion for sports and a remarkable surge of energy in his participation in sports, as he notes:

“Whenever we have the CSP program sessions, I come to school with full energy and excitement, which was not the case earlier, as I was a bit lazy.”

Rudra’s school also did not have many provisions for sports and games before PSD’s partnership and there was no dedicated sports or physical education teacher available as well. This further limited Rudra’s abilities to engage in appropriate games and sport. Thus, participating in the CSP has enabled Rudra and his peers to learn various games, their rules, how they work, and how to play them, as he mentions:

“Earlier, we didn't have a sports teacher, so we would play whatever we wanted and could think of. We used to play common games like tennis, football and cricket. But now we know a lot of different types of games, which has increased our interest in games and sports, and we enjoy playing these games.”

Noting his enthusiasm for playing and understanding different games, Rubi shares:

“He understands the games quite fast. He would learn everything step by step - and then we would go to play. Sometimes, he would not be able to come to play, but he was able to recall games very well. Even if he would only play for 10 minutes sometimes, he would understand the game so well, so he would be able to answer a lot about the game.”

10 passes handball, a fun game part of the CSP curriculum, happens to be Rudra’s favorite game. He is fond of this game because it requires a high degree of individual focus as well as communication and collaboration between teammates. The program as a whole has played an important role in aiding Rudra’s communication skills and has made him become more comfortable in interacting with his peers, something he had previously struggled with.

Breaking barriers of communication and gender

Given Rudra’s health history, he had struggled with confidence, which impacted his communication skills. He feels that the program has helped him learn to communicate his thoughts confidently, with all his peers - boys as well as girls. He found comfort in his peers and was able to become more confident in himself.

The CSP’s mixed-gender approach allowed Rudra to play with girls, fostering a mutual understanding, comfortable coexistence, and effective communication within a shared space. Due to an increase in his interactions with girls, Rudra also started letting go of his personal gender biases and notions, realizing that any game that boys can play, girls can play just as well. Reflecting on his own gender prejudices allowed him to bridge the communication gap he had with girls in his class, as he always felt shy interacting with girls and never felt confident enough to talk to them.

Consistent guidance

An important reason for Rudra to be able to overcome the obstacles he did was the constant guidance provided by the coaches in the CSP. He explained that the coaches always kept the participants motivated and would help them in evaluating their performances and recognize areas of improvement. Rudra learned that rather than dwelling on losses, he should constructively analyse his performance and focus on improving his game-specific as well as soft skills:



Rudra at a CSP session

“Ma'am used to explain our mistakes to us and make sure that we knew what to keep in mind for the next time. We would also work to build our team's confidence for the next time, and belief that we can win; and we would also build on our self-confidence, that I can do this.”

Rudra's evolution

With the help of the CSP, Rudra has been able to redefine himself and learn how to fight obstacles, whether it is dealing with his health issues, being more energetic, or being more comfortable with his peers. His experience with the CSP has been immensely fulfilling,

and he has undergone massive personality changes - he now likes to get involved in sports, be active and lively, and is comfortable talking to his peers.

His parents were initially unsure of his participation in the program, but have been supportive of his interest in sports after watching him play, as Rubi notes:

“In the netball event, his parents also came to watch him; they used to not allow him to play, because of his health conditions. But he plays very well.”

Now, his parents have a changed attitude about his participation in sports - they are happy about his engagement with the program, noting the changes brought to his physical and mental health:

“There were no sports in school before and Rudra was not very active in any work, but after playing with PSD, he has become more active than before. Sports are very good and necessary for our bodies. If someone plays well then it is very good for their future.”

Rudra's journey is a testament to the power of sports, and the need to ensure that all children are able to exercise their fundamental right to sport. From being shy and hesitant, and unsure of his ability to participate in sports, Rudra has become a confident and self-assured person, who is happy to discuss how the CSP has changed his life for the better.

The Community Sports Program (CSP), in existence since 2015, aids the holistic development of young people between the ages of 5-16 years from marginalized communities in Bhubaneswar, Odisha through a specially-designed sports program, by teaching soft skills, imbibing sporting values and changing gender perceptions.