

How the CSP helped Sai Sarthak focus on his dream of becoming a pilot

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Inculcating sport in children's life in their formative years is crucial for their development, as it offers a range of benefits including physical fitness, greater confidence levels, better focus and self-esteem as well as enhanced communication, teamwork and leadership skills. Through these advantages, sports can help children set goals for themselves and harness their true potential. Sport makes dreaming big possible, as it offers the drive to chase one's dreams and aspirations. However, it is important to utilize sport in a purposeful manner, as it can go



Sai Sarthak Rout

completely the other way as well - it can become a source of extreme pressure for children if presented in non-inclusive and highly competitive moulds.

[The Community Sport Program \(CSP\)](#) led by [Pro Sport Development](#) in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, sets itself apart from any other conventional sport-based program. Through its multi-dimensional approach, it makes learning soft-skills easy and fun. Soft-skill development can help children to start thinking about their goals and aspirations. Sai Sarthak Rout, a class 9 student living in the Ghatikia region of Bhubaneswar in Odisha, had a similar experience after he joined the CSP in 2020.

Taking inspiration from the lives of fighter pilots, Sai decided when he was 11 years old that he wanted to become a

pilot when he grew up. However, Sai never thought of it as an actual possibility, as the environment around him was not very motivating. Children in his neighbourhood made fun of his physique, often making him question if he could become a pilot:

“Children in my neighbourhood made fun of my height and weight when I went out to play cricket. This made me doubt my capabilities – I thought I'd never be able to become a pilot as that needs physical strength.”

Getting on track

Sai started getting negatively affected by the notions and assumptions people had of him, and he stopped participating in the sport activities held in his school. As he faced more humiliation from his peers for sitting out the sport periods, he began to doubt himself even

more. In 2020, Sai joined the CSP, where he witnessed a different approach to sport. The focus on equal and fair participation intrigued him, and he was attracted to the inclusive nature of the program, where talent and capability were not prerequisites to participation.

Sai's father, Upendra Kumar Rout, has noticed how Sai's attitude towards sport has changed:

"I can see that his interest in sport has increased, which has also brought a positive change in his general mood. He has also started taking care of his health now."

After joining the CSP, Sai began to enjoy sports and his participation became more regular. Sai's routine now included participation in physical activities, which brought a change in his



Sai Sarthak during one of CSP's on-ground sessions

physical fitness. Due to the boost in Sai's stamina, his fitness and energy levels significantly improved. This also helped him let go of his insecurities about his height and weight.

The CSP allowed Sai to access sport with no burdens or judgements, contrary to his past experiences. He

now believes that he can play sport regardless of his physique or calibre, which has markedly uplifted his self-esteem and confidence. Another aspect of the CSP that changed his personality was the exposure to mixed-gender sports. Sai no longer feels shy to talk to girls, as this setting gave him a chance to interact with them and dispel stereotypes. Archana Pradhan, a Community Sports Trainer at PSD, observed the nature of growth experienced by Sai in the last year and a half:

"When Sai joined, he was a shy and quiet kid. Over the last one year, Sai started talking to his classmates, leading teams as well as getting more physically active. All these changes have contributed to his self-confidence, which has clearly improved."

Sai feels the growth experienced through the CSP has contributed to his physical and mental health, which he thinks is crucial to work towards his goal of becoming a pilot.

Let's fly high

The CSP enabled Sai to stay focused on his goals and dreams. Before joining the program, Sai was unsure of his capability to become a pilot, as he thought he lacked the required physical strength. The CSP strengthened his conviction to work towards his aspirations as he was able to gain physical fitness and strength being part of the program, making him more hopeful to pursue his goal. His improved confidence has also made him surer of achieving his professional goals. Flying now seems like an actual possibility for Sai Sarthak.

While being optimistic and confident is certainly important in the process of goal setting, it is equally important to recognise potential barriers and other important factors. Sai Sarthak understands that this is not going to be an easy journey – it will require determination, persistence as well as patience. Interestingly, Sai understood this by linking it to the changes brought by the CSP, which came about only after he started regularly participating in sports. Sai's learnings from the CSP have allowed him to not only set goals for himself, but also recognize the realities of the process.



Sai Sarthak in action at one of CSP's on-ground sessions