

## How the CSP transformed Ankit from an under-confident person into a gender-sensitive leader



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The physical and mental health benefits of participating in sport and physical activity are widely known as it has the potential to effectively improve the quality of life of people and their communities. The pervasive impact it can have in shaping a person's character, facilitating personal growth, and instilling core values is undoubtedly profound.

Moreover, the challenges and successes encountered by a person during sustained participation in sport can contribute to building their confidence and self-efficacy and fostering a sense of belief in oneself. Additionally, extensive practice and purposeful sport and skill development, including sport-specific and life skills, can bolster one's competence, which may further reflect on their self-esteem. It can also enable them to interact with their peers constructively, as they learn to motivate and support their friends, further honing their teamwork skills and leadership abilities. The discipline and perseverance that is embedded in the practice of many forms of sport can also help inculcate resilience and patience, leading to positive changes in temperament.



Ankit Basantara

Talking about the transformative power of sport is one thing, and watching it materialize in front of you is another - where a child goes from being a shy and withdrawn individual into a confident and competent leader, who knows how to take their team forward. We bring to you the story of Ankit Basantara from [Pro Sport Development's](#) (PSD) flagship [Community Sports Program](#) (CSP).

### **Exposure to organized sport**

Ankit Basantara, a class 8 student of Vivekananda Sikhya Kendra in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, joined PSD's CSP in class 7. His engagement with PSD was an immensely rewarding experience, and over the course of a year, he noticed positive changes in and around him as he began to realize the importance of sport and physical activity in ensuring physical and mental fitness, as well as the necessity to maintain a healthy balance of sport and studies.

Tracing his journey from the very beginning, he always had an interest in sport but the lack of adequate facilities and infrastructure meant that his means were limited and thus, he never got to truly engage with it. Ankit's mother mentioned:

“Sport always appealed to him and he was a natural at it. However, he never got the right help or services to encourage that interest.”

Through the CSP’s consistent, multi-sport sessions delivered by trained facilitators in a structured and age-appropriate manner, Ankit’s interest in sport deepened, allowing him to partake in it more meaningfully. As sport captured more and more of his interest, his mother noticed a positive change in terms of the energy and vigor, which she attributes fully to the culture of sport that PSD instilled in his school. She was pleased to see how excited sport made him where he would wait for the facilitator’s message and rush out at the first call for a game. It also reflected in his zeal for practice and the amount of effort he expended in mastering his skills in sports such as cricket, netball, football and basketball.

Ankit also felt a significant difference in his health and energy levels, with a sharp improvement in his concentration. His mother, too, concurred:

“He is so much more active now and there is a new freshness of mind with which he wakes up every day, focused on bettering himself. He is always raring to go and would happily stay out for 24 hours to play. He has also become more conscious of his diet and what he eats and drinks in a day.”



Ankit participating in a CSP session

#### **Shaping an inclusive and compassionate leader**

The biggest obstacle that the CSP helped Ankit overcome was his hesitancy to socialize with his peers and interact in large groups. Initial fears gave way to curiosity and excitement as he began to engage more and more with his classmates by virtue of the collaborative spaces created by PSD, resulting in increased opportunities for collaboration and rapport-building. This inevitably boosted his confidence in peer group interactions to the point where he started enjoying taking on leadership roles and blossomed into a more confident and sociable version of himself.

“The first time I came to a PSD session, I was worried about getting along with other people since there were so many other students. But now, I feel more confident in interacting with my peers as we have spent more time together in the PSD program.”

Ankit also viewed himself as someone who was quick to lose his temper. However, he understood that each person is unique and brings their own strengths and experiences into the functioning of

a team. Moreover, as a leader, he imbibed an inclusive approach in extending more support to his peers, especially girls, by encouraging and guiding them, and ensuring that they feel just as respected as others

“I always make it a point to support others like they [peers] do for me. Respect is a two-way street and I ensure that I never raise my voice.”

Furthermore, Ankit’s priorities as a leader also shifted from an exclusive focus on winning and individual performance to a greater emphasis on teamwork and collaboration. He began playing for the joy of playing together with his teammates rather than having a singular focus of winning. Accepting victory and defeat as a natural part of life, he afforded greater consideration to the fact that everyone worked together and gave it their best as a team.

“I used to get upset when we lost which led me to focus more on winning. Now, I believe that teamwork is most important. I ensure that whichever team I work with, I do my best in leading them, ensuring we work together – beyond that it does not matter whether we win or lose.”



Ankit leading a team in a tournament

Ankit’s transformation into a compassionate and competent leader was also noticed by PSD’s Community Sports Coordinator, Pragatee Sethy, who shared:

“He not only plays well himself but also helps his friends a lot. If someone is not able to understand something in the game, he explains it to them and his team very well.”

### Enhancing gender sensitivity

By virtue of the CSP’s mixed-gender approach and gender sessions, Ankit found himself questioning many of the gender-based stereotypes he had grown up with. As he witnessed girls occupying and thriving in roles and spaces similar to boys, his conviction in gender equality grew and he realized that if boys can do it, so can girls. Ankit shared that the CSP gender sessions helped him develop a strong moral compass, reinforcing a belief in respect, rights and opportunities for young people of all genders. Moreover, this prompted him to approach girls on an equal footing rather than only asking boys to play with him:

“Earlier, when I used to play in mixed gender groups in [the sessions], I did not give many chances to girls [to ensure their involvement in the activities]. But now, as I have spent more time playing with them, I have seen that they are just as good as us [boys], when it comes to running, batting or bowling. Now, when I am made a leader, I give the girls more chances to play than before. Because I feel that they should also get a chance like us.”

Ankit’s awareness on gender expanded beyond the sports field as he reflected on the challenges and discrimination faced by girls and women in his community. He felt strongly against the differential treatment meted out to girls in Indian households, where there are more restrictions on their freedom as opposed to boys:

“When boys go out to play, their parents do not bother with questions. But when a girl asks for the same, they say ‘you are a girl, why are you playing?’ It stems from a fear of society and what people will say.”

### **Creating a gender-just future**

Ankit’s future appears bright. He aspires to become a cricketer, a dream that even his parents see the merit in. His aspiration extends beyond himself where he wants to ensure that he is able to inspire and help others from a similar background like him once he becomes a cricketer. Ankit shares:

“If a child from an impoverished background becomes a cricketer then that will inspire other kids like me to also strive for the same. I will also be in a better position to help them out. That is why I want to be a cricketer.”

Moreover, he is passionate about taking on gender issues plaguing the society, and wants to educate himself more on this to change the world. By doing so we envision creating more equitable spaces for all genders, one more girl on the team at a time. PSD’s Community Sports Coordinator, Pragatee Sethy, believes he is on the right path:

“His understanding about gender has increased a lot. Along with that, he has also started knowing about the discrimination happening in his society and school. He also thinks about how to solve it.”

Keeping in mind the prevailing gender issues that plague the society, the CSP’s attempt to tackle gender-based stereotypes in a bid to shape more inclusive and sensitive leaders has proven to be successful in the case of Ankit. His participation in the CSP program has elevated his confidence and leadership capacities, enabling him to adopt a more team-oriented approach focused on collaboration and mutual respect.

As he begins to question and challenge the existing status-quo with an aim to bring about a change in the world, the sense of competence and sensitivity in leading others he has honed through the CSP will surely go a long way in shaping him into an effective leader with a gender-just vision for the future.

*Started in 2015, [Pro Sport Development's Community Sports Program](#) has been active in working with young people aged 5-16 years from underserved slum communities in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, leveraging sport, physical activity and play to empower them as confident, competent and gender-sensitive leaders. PSD's sport, physical activity and play-based curricula has been purposefully designed to improve young people's health and wellbeing, facilitate their socio-emotional development, and sensitize them on issues of gender, adolescent health and hygiene and child rights.*