

## How the Community Sports Program enhanced Lopamudra's leadership skills and sensitized her on issues of gender



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Sport and physical activity are powerful tools in shaping the lives of young people, not only for their physical well-being but also for developing crucial life skills such as communication, leadership, and teamwork. Purposeful engagement in sports can break down gender barriers, promote inclusivity, and build a sense of community. These activities teach young people to lead, collaborate, and respect diverse perspectives, qualities essential for personal and professional success.

[Pro Sport Development \(PSD\)](#), through its flagship [Community Sports Program](#) (CSP), leverages sport, physical activity, and play to foster the holistic development of young people, especially from marginalized communities. Since its inception in 2015, CSP has transformed the lives of young people in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, improving health, developing life skills, and promoting inclusivity. By offering mixed-gender programming, CSP provides a safe space for young people to reflect on gender-based stereotypes prevalent in their communities. This approach empowers participants to communicate openly, assume leadership roles, and thrive both on and off the field, helping them become well-rounded individuals.

### Understanding the powerful and positive impact of sport



Lopamudra Champati

Lopamudra Champati, a student in class 7 grade at Saraswati Sishu Vidya Mandir in Bhubaneswar, was a participant in CSP's 2023-24 cohort. Her favourite activity is hand hockey, a game that is part of our CSP curriculum, which she initially struggled with but got adept at over time. Learning to handle the ball with a cricket stump during the game improved her technical skills and motivated her to engage in regular physical activity, positively affecting her health and fitness.

Before joining the program, Lopamudra focused solely on academics and often felt lethargic due to the lack of physical activity. CSP changed her perspective, teaching her the importance of balancing academics with staying active. She now feels more energized, which has improved her focus in studies.

"I used to struggle with handling the stick and ball, but with practice, I got better. Now, I have so much more energy, and I can concentrate better on my studies too"

## **Building life skills – communication, leadership and teamwork**

Lopamudra's involvement in the program, which featured activities like hand hockey and other play-based learning games, offered her much more than just physical fitness. The sport helped her develop effective communication and teamwork skills. Initially, she missed key plays, but as she learned the game, she started noticing opportunities to contribute to her team's success. By improving her communication on the field, she could better coordinate strategies with her teammates.

CSP also gave Lopamudra the confidence to speak up, overcoming her initial hesitations about communicating with others. She learned to express her ideas and made new friends from different schools.

“I used to be afraid to speak up, always worrying about what others might think. Now, I feel confident sharing my thoughts and have made many new friends from different schools through participating in CSP’s events and tournaments.”

Leadership was another key skill Lopamudra honed during CSP. Through team discussions and decision-making processes, she learned how to lead by listening to everyone’s opinions and working together to achieve common goals.



Lopamudra representing her class

“Being a leader isn't just about making decisions. I learned how important it is to listen to others, value their opinions, and work together to reach our goals”

CSP’s sessions provided Lopamudra with valuable leadership insights. She learned the importance of facilitating team discussions, gathering input from all members, and making decisions collaboratively. The sessions emphasized maintaining team unity and showing respect to every teammate. These lessons played a key role in her personal growth and strengthened her confidence as a leader.

## **Shifting perspectives on gender roles**

CSP was pivotal in transforming Lopamudra’s views on gender roles. Initially reluctant to play with boys and believing certain sports were only for them, her participation in the program challenged these stereotypes. She soon realized that girls are equally capable and began confidently joining mixed-gender games like cricket. Her involvement helped her recognize that

her hesitation to play with boys was rooted in the misconception that they were inherently better at sport. By engaging in a variety of games with boys, Lopamudra came to understand that sport, including cricket, is for everyone, regardless of gender.

"I used to think cricket was only for boys and that I wouldn't be good at it. But through CSP, I learned that girls can be just as skilled. Now, I love playing cricket with everyone and know that sport is for everyone, not just boys."

This new perspective extended beyond sport, as Lopamudra grew more comfortable interacting with boys in both her classroom and community. Previously, she avoided engaging with boys due to societal judgments around opposite-gender interactions. However, through CSP's gender-focused sessions and mixed-gender games, she became more confident in responding to boys in various settings. These activities helped her challenge traditional gender norms and build healthier, more open relationships with boys, including her brothers at home.

"Before, I hesitated to answer questions from boys, but now I confidently respond after understanding the question. I'm also comfortable playing different sports with my brothers at home. I'm able to build friendship with boys too and this is made possible mostly after being able to communicate with others with confidence."



Lopamudra during a session

### **Physical health and personal growth**

Through PSD's sessions on physical literacy, adolescent health, and hygiene, Lopamudra learned about the changes that occur during adolescence, how to maintain hygiene during her periods, and how to eat healthily. These lessons helped her become more knowledgeable about her body and feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics.

"I never knew how important it was to take care of my body during adolescence. Now, I understand how to maintain personal hygiene during periods and what foods to avoid, which has made me feel more informed and confident about my health."

### **A transformative journey**

Lopamudra's experience with the CSP has been transformative, enhancing not only her physical health and life skills but also expanding her understanding of gender roles and leadership. By overcoming her initial hesitations around sports and gender interactions, she has developed key skills in communication, teamwork, and leadership.

Her growth mirrors the broader impact of the program. As she aspires to become a doctor, her motivation goes beyond personal success – she envisions helping the elderly and providing economic support for her family, aligning her ambitions with the empathy and leadership skills that she has cultivated.

*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.*