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Title : Parikrma's bold journey in the Beautiful Game

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Seven years ago when Shukla Bose rang up a couple of elite schools in Bengaluru to ask them allow to Parikrma Hu manity Foundation -a free school for underprivileged children -to participate in their inter-school tournaments, she was left stunned by their response.

“They didn't want my kids,” Shukla recalled, speaking about her wards, some orphans and others born into homes of labourers, cobblers and maids. “That's when I decided, enough is enough. I'm going to start my own football tournament.” T h e f o l l o w i n g y e a r, S h u k l a l a u n c h e d P a r i k r m a C h a m p i o n s L e a g u e, an inter-school football tournament and aptly named the trophy the ‘Equality Cup’. This week, the nonprofit organization will host the sixth edition of the annual tournament, which will feature some of the city's top schools such as DPS, Vidyashilp Academy, Indus International and Inventure Academy among others.

“People don't expect quality from the marginalized and we wanted to prove we are also capable of hosting tournaments. And we've shown we can do it,” the Parikrma CEO said. Parikrma's success isn't limited to its annual league. Seeing the growing love for football among the youngsters at the foundation, Shukla helped Parikrma form a football team to compete in the Bangalore District Football Association (BDFA) ‘C’ Division league.

Young boys who, until then, had never played in a stadium before, showed great tenacity by winning the 2014-15 ‘C’ Division title and earning promotion to the ‘B’ Division league. And in May this year, Parikrma added a glorious chapter to their dream run by winning the B' Division title as well.

For Shukla, seeing her wards, from broken homes and slums in the city, rising as champions both in football and their personal lives is her biggest victory. “I look at football not just as a game, it is an expression of self-esteem and confidence. For their families and people in their community, these boys are heroes who can inspire many more,” she said.

CHANGING CORPORATE LIVES

The Parikrma Champions League also serves as a life-changing experience for leading corporates. CGI, a Canadian IT company that is sponsoring the tournament, is using the event as a leadership platform for their own employees.

“We assign 25 of our top-performing, first-line managers to run the tournament for a week. The opportunity to go and meet these children and their families in slums and know their stories is a life-changing experience for them,” CGI vice president (human resources) Pradipta Banerjee said.

“By exposing them to such a sce nario, they learn to take ownership of their responsibilities. How to delegate work effectively, the ability to think on your feet... this in turn helps their professional and personal development,” he added.

COACHES ACROSS CONTINENTS

This year, Parikrma has signed up with Coaches Across Continents (CAC), an international organization that uses football as a social impact tool to give underprivileged kids life lessons and develop leaders.

“Through some of the football drills that we do, we teach these kids about issues such as conflict resolution, child rights, woman empowerment and other problems that are prevalent in their community ,“ CAC chief executive strategist Brian Suskiewicz explained.

A drill named after Cristiano Ronaldo, for example, sees the youngsters execute slick stepovers like the Real Madrid star, all while shouting out the name of the move. “This makes the kids comfortable in using their voice. When you give a child a voice, you give them a choice in their future,” Brian said.

Over the course of the next three years, CAC will educate Parikrma coaches and educators with their social impact methodology and eventually hope that the latter will take over and train future coaches and create their own curriculum games.

“This training has been really unique compared to all other football training I've had,” Rajesh, a Parikrma footballer said. “Everything we learnt was related to making a change in the society through football drills. They focused a lot on equality for girls in football. One of my favorite drills was when we had to act like Brazilian footballer Marta De Silva and dribble like her and score goals like her. They made us imagine we were in her shoes. I can use these drills when I play football with my friends,” he added.



WINNING MOVES: The Parikrma team celebrates after winning the 'B' Division title