

## BOYS TO MEN

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**By: Mohammed Essam**

*Now that they have been promoted to the A Division, Parikrma dream of hitting the big league*

At Parikrma, football is religion and every game a joyous, yet solemn prayer. The fervour went up a few notches late last month when the team — an incongruous bunch of alumni, staff and students — earned promotion to the Bangalore District Football Association's A Division league. No small achievement this. Far more accomplished teams have languished in the lower tiers of BDFA's four-fold league structure for years. Yet, Parikrma, driven purely by heart and iron-clad discipline, have gotten there on their first attempt and on a shoestring budget.

Like the Sanskrit word that the humanity foundation takes its name from, football offers the children of the NGO a path to a better world, one they know exists and have seen but have never been to. Sport was introduced as an "economic leveller" by the NGO's

founder and CEO, Shukla Bose, to make the children — orphans or from broken homes from the plentiful slums of the city — "feel equal". After last month's flight to the A Division, the players are more than a little equal. In the Parikrma community, they are revered.

"We chose football, taekwondo and athletics," Bose told Mirror. "We didn't choose tennis or golf because we needed a game that could create a sense of fraternity through team work. There's nothing like football for that."

The team comprises players who, perhaps, would never have imagined plying their skills in a stadium, to a gallery or on the same pitch on which players from the country's top club, Bengaluru FC, train and sometimes play.

"We have got no outside players," Bose insists. "They're all my Parikrma students who have been with me since they were six, seven and eight years old. Now they have grown up. Some of them are studying engineering. Some of them are working. Some of them are entrepreneurs and they are also playing football. These are students who have come from difficult times and backgrounds (92 per cent of parents are alcohol addicts). They have never had any role models. But now they are looked up to in the community. They are absolutely adored and idolised in our schools."

The team has been forged by Ravi Babu, sports coordinator at Parikrma and a former HAL and ITI player. Babu is very aware of the nicks and pressures of top league football, but knows too that it offers a way out of poverty.

"After 11th and 12th standard, our students (from the early batches) found it hard because they could not find a team to play. They couldn't play at a club or their new school or college," Babu, who coaches and plays, said. "They were very disappointed and disheartened because they are talented players and they loved the game, but they had to let it go because they had no way of pursuing it. With the Parikrma football club we have watched them grow and enjoy life better."

Babu puts the team's success down to "teamwork and hard work". "Sheer determination got them through the B Division alone," he said. There was plenty of sacrifice and practice too, although the team does not have a dedicated ground to train at.

"There is a corporation ground with floodlights in Ashoknagar, near Vidyapeeta Circle" Babu said. "We practised there in the evenings as the players have either work or college to go to. We practised for about an hour to 90 minutes, going up to 9 pm sometimes. It was a little difficult since we had to share space with the locals and also ask the authorities for the lights. We worked on the defenders and strikers especially for this league. We also had a problem in getting ourselves a goalkeeper."

Now, Babu's dreams are a size bigger than his players and he believes the team can go right to the top with a little monetary support. "A small investment from sponsors would make this a better team," he mused. "It will give them an opportunity to receive offers from professional clubs. No one notices the B or C Division teams. They focus their attention on the A Division or Super League. With the exposure now, they can be scouted for the Santosh Trophy, the various state teams, some big clubs and even the national team for that matter."

### **'I LEARNT DISCIPLINE'**

**Prashanth P, midfielder** (A former student of Parikrma, now pursuing BCom at Al Ameen College. He's from Rajendranagar slums, Koramangala. His father passed away. He has an elder sister and mother)

### **Getting to the A Division**

I worked hard in practice on the field for C division. For B Division it was hard to get into the Starting 11. But it felt good after seeing where we reached. In the B Division league, I was in the Starting 11 but after an injury, I was benched. Even after I recovered I could not give my 100 per cent. So I had to practice hard to get back in form and return to the Starting 11.

### **Challenges faced**

We did not have a goalkeeper at the beginning. But Ravi sir managed to find one. Personally I was not fit to play on the team. And the injury didn't help my case. But I practised hard. The team supported me all along.

### **The impact football has had**

I wasn't on the team at all for the first six years in Parikrma. I was into athletics. I am a good runner. One day Ravi sir called me for trials and I made it through. I played PCL (Parikrma Champions League) for three years. In the second year I made a mistake that cost my team the title. I wanted to quit then. I felt I wasn't good for anything, but later on I became captain in my third year and in that year we placed third in the league. I learnt discipline and as a leader I learnt how to be a good guide to my teammates.



## **'I WAS THE NAUGHTIEST CHILD'**

### **Fayaz Kasim, winger**

(He has just finished his 12th board exams. He is from the Rajendranagar slums. His family comprises his mother and two brothers. His father has passed away)

### **On being B Division chamPs**

It was not easy. But since we had the support of the coach and the PE teachers we managed to get through. Ravi sir was the heart of the team. He played beautifully and expected us to do the same and more. We still have a long way to go. This year we will do much better than we have been doing.

### **On the challenges he faced**

It was very difficult to get onto the team in the first place. I was one of the younger players on the team. I played defence at first, but switched to the wing. I had a bit of difficulty in adjusting to the new position. But I proved my worth in practice and got into the Starting 11. I had my chances and even managed to score a few goals. The impact football has had Before taking up the game, I never really held any respect for anyone. I was the naughtiest child amongst the three brothers. But once I got into the sport, I realized my coaches chose people who were disciplined — be it on the field, in the class or outside. I had to change in order to be on the team. I had to be more disciplined. They also stressed on education. If we didn't study, our coaches said I would be benched for the year. We studied hard so that our coaches would not have to deal with angry teachers.

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