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## Going the extra mile

On a wall at the entrance of Parikrma is a painting of the solar system, liberally littered with stars. Often, between classes and games, students reach up and touch the luminous points, a reminder of the direction this humanity foundation, a school for Bangalore's beautiful children, is headed in.

Last weekend, at the KPMG-Cadet inter-school athletics meet at the Sree Kanteerava stadium, Parikrma, a school for slum children, took its first step in that direction. The children, identified by social workers from 26 slums around the City, took the competition by storm. Now backed by the power of dreams, barefoot but strong willed, they raced and out-raced well-heeled opponents often staring them down in the heat of competition. As Pawan, the son of a cobbler, told his condescending rivals "just wait and watch."

In 2004, their first year in inter-school competition. Parikrma sent out a 40-member contingent. Only one child managed to go through to the second round. Last year, in their second year in the KPMG competition, they returned with one gold and two silver medals. Last weekend, at the Kanteerava, the green and blues bagged three gold, four silver and three bronze medals.

Shukla Bose, founder-CEO, who is living the dream alongside her students, said "the aim is to make them one of us, to integrate them into society, where they can compete with children from schools like Bishop Cottons and Baldwins and the fastest way to do that is through sports."

Parikrma with 730 students has four centres-Jayanagar, Koramangala, Sahakaranagar and Nadini layout. Unfortunately, for a school getting its first taste of the heat of competition it doesn't have a play ground of its own. Children are placed in classes according to their ability and not age and classes are named after planets. "In regular school, children go from class one to two, here they go from Mercury to Venus," Shukla explains. It is an institution pegged on creative drive where the children are taught to care more and go the extra mile.

For Paosanlal Kipgen, an orphan from Mizoram, there was no second thoughts last weekend when after winning his 400 m semi final heat he tossed aside a chance to run the finals. His primary goal was to guide his 4/100 m relay team to a podium finish. It was about 'we' there would always be time enough 'individual victories'.

For eight year old Pawan, who lost his father to alcoholism just days before the meet, the 8x50 m shuttle relay gold, which he later placed around his father's photo, was his first experience of a load he will always have to carry-fast feet and heavy heart.

Vivek Raju head of marketing and the heart behind Parikrma's gaint sporting, said "whatever they have achieved so far is because of their natural talent. They are all so gifted." The Mumbaikar, bright eyed and effervescent, who like Shukla is living a dream, also get support from star athlete Ashwini Nachappa, who besides being on the board, is also an idol to the children.

"Next year, we will be even better," Vivek said. "This time, we were able to train for seven week, next year, we are going to do it systematically and for four months before the meet."

The accent on sports can be seen by the fact that even though the school doesn't have its own ground they have four physical education instructors. The first of them, three years ago was an Nigerian called James who played the super division football league here for ITI before moving to Goa and Churchill brothers. He passed on his love for the game to the Parikrma children and in the Sunfeast inter-school football competition their under-fourteen side reached the semi finals.

For the future Vivek has indentified five sports the school will focus on in persuit of excellence- Atheletics, criket, football, table tennis and swimming. Professional coaching and regular competition is on the agenda. They are targeting district and state champion at this stage and anything beyond that is a bonus. The Pioneer class, the first batch of Parikrma students, who will be doing their board exams in two years, all want to be professional athelets when they grow up. This may have been unthinkable for them as recently as three years ago. But Parikrma has tought them to dream big.

Sheshadri, a slightly built girl from Earth class, standing upright with hands knotted across her chest asked if she could introduce herself. The minute long introduction ended with "you can do anything you want to do." To a raised eyebrow she replied, "If I want to bat like Sachin Tendulkar I can."