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Driven by a passion to excel

In the summer of 2004, a bunch of athletes in green shirts and denim skirts entered the Sree Kanteerava stadium for their first- ever competition, in the KMPG inter- school athletics meet.

Expectedly, they came nowhere close to winning, but the barefooted youngsters tugged at the hearts with their determined strides and infectious smiles. Competing alongside children from 150 schools across Bengaluru, they left without a podium finish, but their enthusiasm clearly showed they were ones to watch out for.

Indeed, the green and blue brigand from Parikrma Humanity Foundation has been on a roll ever since, making heads turn with their performance, over the last five years.

A considerable number of athletes among them are girls, for whom the education is a big incentive.

Shukla Bose, founder-CEO of Parikrma said, "Many of them are the first generation of children who are being educated. So being a part of sporting activity by itself is an achievement for them. Former athletes like Ashwini Nachappa have offered their services. We are constantly exploring opportunities to boost the physical activities for these children."

What strikes about these young girls is their burning desire to excel.

"They always wait for opportunities.

There have a great drive and interest in sports, which is very encouraging," said Shukla.

Not having the best of facilities is not a concern for these girls. "We practice at the small playground at school and when we have a competition coming up, we are taken to the Jayanagar stadium for practice. We also go to the Mico ground and attend summer camps. The amount of space we have for training does not matter. What matters is the opportunity we get to bring our talent to the fore- front," said 13-year-old Anuradha.

The teenagers come from various slums in the city, but share a common dream of representing the country at the highest level.

"We are working hard. Our main aim is to represent our country at the Olympics, just like P.T Usha," said Ashwini, whose father's measly income as a car driver is the only source of income for the family.

Though they compete with students from the top schools, there is not an iota of inferiority complex in them because they are trained to believe they are no less than the others.

"We have made a conscious effort to ensure these children believe that they are at par with those from affluent families. This is one of the reasons we do not take part in events meant for NGO's. Since we are not invited to events conducted by many international schools, we are planning to host events and invite them," said Vivek Raju, who heads marketing at the foundation.

With the KPMG inter-school athletics championship scheduled for later this year, these young talents are getting ready to prove, they are second to none.