

Deccan Chronicle
Date: 24 February, 2010
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Punching their way to glory

The painting of the solar system at the entrance of Parikrma may be weather-beaten and fading, but the children whose lives have been redefined here continue to reach out for the stars. The sparkle in their eyes, the combativeness in their spirit and the power of their achievements is getting bigger and brighter by the day.

Leaving behind lives marred by violence, poverty and domestic discomfort, these children have found solace in art, writing and more prominently sport, which for many has been a true healer.

It is an accepted fact that children from Parikrma turn out to be good athletes and footballers, but their latest achievement has been to break the taekwondo barrier. Barely seven months into the sport, the Parikrma lads have gone on to win laurels for Karnataka.

Most of the taekwondo athletes here come from the disturbed northern-eastern region of the country, where violence is an integral part of their lives. Burying their past, they have embraced the sport with enthusiasm, fuelled by a burning desire to excel. This passion has seen them pick up four gold, a silver and bronze at the Junior National taekwondo championship at Kakinada in December last year.

With over 40 athletes based in four Parikrma centres, it could well mark the beginning these youngsters' quest for excellence. Having said that, the youngsters owe their foray into the sport to the observant coaches of the Karnataka Taekwondo Association.

"We conduct classes near Amruthahalli, which is close to the Sahakarnagar centre of Parikrma. While we trained students, the Parikrma children would pass that way in their school bus in the morning. They would always look out of the window with great interest. Their curious looks made us approach Parikrma and we offered to train the students. Seven months down the line we have about 40 dedicated and determined wards," said Ashok, one of the coaches.

Vivek Raju, who heads the marketing at the foundation, and is also the inspiration behind the sporting activities, is overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and achievements of the young children.

"We have formed the United Parikrma Sports team to nurse talents. We treat sports at par with academics.

The achievement of the taekwondo team is very inspiring. The fact that they have taken such a big stride in seven months is commendable," said Raju.

Nehminlal Haopik, a 13-year-old who won medals in the state and national events, agreed the sport has been a great teacher.

"It was a very proud feeling to win medals. We have worked hard for it. The sport helps a lot because it teaches us discipline and self-defence. This being a contact sport, we have also learnt not to misuse the skills we learn here."

Haopik along with Meiraba Mangang Huidrom, Lamgoulal Kipgen and Amarjeet Singh have finished on the podium. The lone girl to join the team is Usha Kannaiha, who won a bronze at the state meet.

With the World junior championship slated to be held in Belarus in September this year, the young brigade is looking at making it to the national side.

With a passion to perform and the drive to excel, these youngsters will prepare to take on the best in the world, but one thing that they have been taught will remain in their minds. "Don't make the same mistakes every time. Winning or losing does not matter. But playing the sport with the true spirit of sportsmanship does."