

How the Community Table Tennis program helped Abdul explore his potential in the game of table tennis



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Restricted access to sport

Participation in sport in India is particularly challenging for young people living at the margins of society. These young people encounter significant barriers when it comes to engaging in sport, essentially stemming from limited financial resources and a lack of opportunities, which restricts access to sports infrastructure, equipment, and/or coaching. Furthermore, the lack of positive attitudes of parents and teachers towards sports participation presents additional obstacles for young people.

Often, young people coming from marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds are denied opportunities to access their fundamental right to play. The absence of equal access to sport not only deprives them of an engaging and healthy medium to express themselves, but also perpetuates social inequality by denying a level playing field. However, the right to play is a universal right and every young person should have the opportunity to play whichever sport they desire, regardless of their financial situation or socio-economic background.

This is where the [Community Table Tennis \(CTT\)](#) program enters the fray. The program has provided pathways for young people to access the sport on an equal footing through the introduction of table tennis in four community schools in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

Abdul Jayaudin, currently a class 9 student at Vivekananda Sikshya Kendra in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, has been a part of the CTT program since 2021. Abdul had never been interested in playing sports, until he saw his older brothers and sisters get involved with PSD:



Abdul Jayaudin

“At first, we were not very interested in playing. I started playing with my friends when I was studying in class 5 while my older brothers and sisters of class 7,8 & 9 used to play through PSD-led programs in our school. When I saw them, I also got interested in playing. I did not know anything about table tennis before I participated in the CTT program.”

Although his siblings’ participation in PSD’s programs motivated him to start playing with his friends in the neighbourhood, he felt it

was without the required guidance and support. This changed when he joined the CTT program, as for the first ever time in his life, Abdul had the chance to play a game with proper equipment, facilities, and coaching support.

Unveiling Abdul’s journey

Abdul, who had never played table tennis prior to being a part of the CTT program, has now started loving the game. Before joining the CTT program, he was not even aware about table tennis being an

actual sport! His participation in the program has not only familiarized him with the sport, but also provided him with an opportunity to excel in it. This is a significant change from his previous situation, where his access to sport was restricted, thereby limiting his scope for growth and development.

Abdul has grown exponentially in his journey within the CTT program. As part of it, PSD had organized two table tennis tournaments in July 2022 and January 2023. Abdul participated in both tournaments, finishing second and first respectively. He values the exposure received from the tournaments as they allowed him to interact with other young people and gain new insights into the game. The tournaments also enabled Abdul to learn and build various TT skills such as service, backhand, forehand, counter, and smash. With the help of meaningful feedback sessions post tournaments, he has also been able to learn about the execution of each skill during the game, as he says:

“The first time when the tournament was held, my counter was not as good. In the recent tournament, I learned how to counter properly and was able to win the tournament.”

Abdul’s progress was tracked by the coaches involved in the CTT program as well, who mentioned that he has been on an upward trajectory ever since he joined the program. According to



Abdul playing with his TT racket during one of CTT’s program sessions

Bhaktamohan Swain, PSD’s Community Sports Trainer, through regular participation in the program, Abdul has been able to achieve remarkable success in his journey of playing table tennis:

“When Abdul joined the CTT program, he did not know anything about table tennis, he said- ‘sir, I was very scared because this game was completely new to me.’ After he played table tennis, his passion for the game gradually increased. He was the singles champion in the recent table tennis tournament.”

Inspiring personal change through table tennis

Having gained such exposure through the CTT program, Abdul has been able to make great strides in his personal growth as well. Excelling in table tennis has also helped him transform physically as he now feels more active and energetic, which has led to an increase in his contribution to domestic chores. His mother, Shainaj Begum, has also observed this change and attributes it to the gender sensitivity sessions conducted as a part of CTT. She notes:

“He is very active now and helps me with the household responsibilities as well.”

His mother further shared how he has become more outgoing, which has led to a positive change in his entire personality:

“I have seen a lot of changes in him [Abdul]. Earlier, he never left the house and stayed at home. He is now more friendly with his peers than before, even with girls. I have full faith that it [CTT] will help him a lot in the future.’

Abdul personally felt that his attitude towards girls changed for the better, as he found himself being more open with them and converse more freely as opposed to the situation prior, when interaction between boys and girls was minimal. The program sessions on gender allowed him to understand that

there is no difference between boys and girls, further realising that discrimination stemming from this difference is a mere social construct. This newfound awareness prompted Abdul to view his female peers as equals, fostering a genuine anticipation of daily interactions and activities with them. Notably, Abdul not only recognized this change in himself but also identified a similar inclusive shift among his peers, with their attitudes becoming more accepting and accommodating than ever before.

Having discovered the transformative powers of sport, Abdul aspires to impart the knowledge of table tennis to other young people like him, hoping that they get to benefit similarly. He hopes to continue playing with his peers in the community for some time and gradually move on to helping them build knowledge on the game of table tennis.

Abdul desires to see the impact sport has had on him replicated in others. He wants to pass the baton to the young people living in his community to further bring a difference in society.

The Community Table Tennis program is a collaborative effort between [Pro Sport Development \(PSD\)](#) and the [ITTF Foundation](#) to increase access to sport for young people and utilize table tennis as a tool to promote gender equality by supporting the holistic development of boys and girls from marginalized sections in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. The two-year program, which took place from 2021-23 was supported by ITTF Foundation.