

“THINK SPORTS....”

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A Train starts from a Station, and then goes through many Junctions where the Engine either directs or re-directs it after necessary fuelling to make it reach its destination. My Journey too has always been JUNCTIONED at Sports and was fuelled by Passion for it.

THINK SPORTS

When I grew up in a village, the highest level of Sport I could play was a Cricket match among friends with a bet on it. We played the game with a hard cork ball donning neither Helmet nor Gloves, all we had was a single pad only on the facing leg. This taught me to hit the ball with no fear, field in the thorny shrubs, and fight with the odds to lead a bunch of players to Glory. The wins used to get the entire team of kids and seniors come together for a wonderful lime soda cheers moment and a “pepsi” ice celebration.

At the first junction of my journey, while I was on my summer vacation, I went around the city of Hyderabad. One day as I glanced through the window of an Auto Rickshaw, my heart skipped a beat when I saw a big ground of the City’s Public School. It drove me to qualify an entrance into the school which had Sports in the DNA of its curriculum. This was the first time when I learnt to wear a fully equipped gear to face a leather ball, to hold a Tennis Racquet, to feel a Football penalty shootout besides my first nervous meal with a Spoon & a Fork.

Just like every mother who wants her child to primarily get into academics, my passion too had to accept the command and await for the next Junction - University to arrive. That was the moment when my consecutive match-winning knocks in front of a full house College crowd brought back the “Think Sports” spirit in me.

The spirit of Sports led me to captain not just sporting teams but also lead International B-School Festivals during my Masters Juncture. All those long planning nights in the event den with various functional teams, to the numerous calls asking for sponsorships, to getting the event marketed across the world, and then finally to make it happen was a LIFE of an event one should experience. This Management Juncture made me learn the art of living the “THINK” while controlling the Game with the right Spirit.

The next major Junction fuelled a Student into an Administrator who fortunately had the opportunity to create a lush green field for the many journeys to start and drive the spirit of the passionate.

THINK SPORTS THINK RAILWAYS

NATIONAL BOXING CHAMPIONSHIP 2017

As an Assistant Sports Officer of Waltair Division of Indian Railways, My First “Think Sports” moment was when our former DRM, Sri Mukul Saran Mathur called for a meeting of only young officers to discuss an opportunity to host The National Elite Boxing Championship 2017 at a short notice of 20 days. We took it as a challenge and planned it out.

I led the Event Control & Command team which coordinated all the functional teams including Technical, Accreditation, Food, Venue, Equipment, Medical, Transport, and the Stay of a total contingent of 500 which included Players, Coaches & Referees. We identified capable team leaders, assigned them specific works, and followed it with targeted reviews. I pitched in to bridge the gaps among the various management teams and we had to take quick decisions that continued to stand during the event too.

This Juncture made me come across my Boss and Guide of many Journeys to come. Sri Sakkeer Hussain is one of the Best Sports Officer of not just Indian Railways but the country could get the services of. I learnt from him how smart planning along with tough decision making helps an administrator ease the process. On the night before the D day, a trial run by the local Boxers suggested that the ring mat was slippery. This made our entire ECoRSA team come together to arrange and re-fix a new mat before India’s East coast witnessed the Sunrise in the City of Destiny.

The event went on for three days which included moments of Glory to Despair, both involving outbursts of players emotions. I remember we had to get a Boxer admitted to a hospital as he broke the corridor’s window glass with his punch after a loss on a split decision. Overcoming such unexpected incidents and challenges eventually led us to a sweet success of the event which was also attributed as the Best ever Nationals. This had given the best LIFE moment to the entire organizing team who never had any experience of conducting an event of this scale and at such short notice. All it needed was passion, tapping the experience of the veteran players, and quick decision making.



*Organising Team ECoRSA/WAT at Nat. Boxing 2017 Celebrations



*Mirabai Chanu won the National title in the 49kg class in Visakhapatnam

NATIONAL WEIGHTLIFTING CHAMPIONSHIPS 2018-19

At this Junction, I was fortunate to get associated directly with the entire team of Railway Sports Promotion Board led by Mrs Rekha Yadav, Fmr Secretary. She has been a consistent guiding force in my journey and also an inspirational woman to many success stories in Indian Sports. There was no hesitation in her mind to give us the second opportunity when the conduct of National Weightlifting was discussed at Delhi. This was Bigger (with both Men and Women Athletes participating), Longer (as it was scheduled for a week), but was Smaller in Finances. This event made us look inward and guided us to utilize our own resources. We made our own Stadium as the venue, used our in-house technical equipment, identified volunteers and most importantly made us "Think Different".

The Weightlifting contingent, unlike other individual sports, stay as a team and stay throughout the event and hence, Food had to be continuous at high supply with fine quality. Hence this time we decided to have three different caterers for two days each to make it taste different for the participants. As we used our own event space, I decided if we were to utilize any finances it has to create an asset for us. Hence no rentals were done as procuring items would almost cost the same as the rent for a week. Now I went back to my college experience of roping in the sponsors and thereby we could bridge the budget gap to a large extent.

Eventually the Championships sailed so smoothly that we didn't realize how an event of such large scale comprising of 1000 participants could be conducted as a never before event. In fact I was told by the Weightlifting Federation that it would be tough to beat this standard of conduct done by our team. This exhibited our Team's true mettle thus emphasizing the significance of hard work, optimal utilization of resources and the smart use of Finances.

THINK SPORTS THINK WALT AIR

RANJI TROPHY 2019-20 at the Beautiful Waltair Railway Stadium

A seed for this long journey was planted with a dream of conducting a first class match on a park like field which was daily circled with walkers and various other children playing in the open.

The Mission was set and we kick started the process, all thanks & credit to one man, Sri Mukul Saran Mathur. This was a journey to remember with many breaks but I never let the spirit go down.

The work got assigned to an agency that only had experience to construct a high rise building but this was all to be on the ground. This made me study the preparation manuals of BCCI, ECB and various other Boards to guide the contractor. A Finance graduate like me got an opportunity to revise old school basics of Chemistry, Botany & Physics.

The process involves you to know the right mixture of soil, the type of grass, sprinkler & irrigation system & the drainage gradient layout etc. In addition, the dimensions of the sight screens, camera stands & score board were to be true to the standards of the game. In fact, all I knew about the specification of the boundary was that to hit the ball over it to score a six, but here I also had to know the admissible distance beyond it for allowing a billboard to be displayed during a telecast.

One Magician who directed us to this beautiful reality was Sri Sakkeer Hussain. He was a scientist at PUSA when he left for Railways. His attention to detail was immaculate. He virtually made me and my curator live the life cycle of the grass. On the basis of its growth and color, he suggested us the perfect mix of macro and micro nutrients required, ordered the removal of unwanted plants and advised us the right Pesticides too. If this were to be a planet called Cricket, the amount of exploration with attention to detail he must have done on this ground over a period of two years would have made him its best explorer. I would be honored if he accepts me to be his permanent copilot in his future sporting expeditions too.



"Labor of Love"- captioned by Mrs Rekha Yadav, Fmr Secy, RSPB. Photo by Mr Prasad



**image source: www.waltairrailwaystadium.com. photo by Mr.Varun.*

Meanwhile, RSPB had identified this ground as the home ground for four matches in the Ranji Season 2018-19. The Countdown was ticking with 100 days to go, displayed on our newly designed score board. With all the technical help of our in house cricketers and technical crew, we could take off with the first ball bowled in a local district league match, which witnessed some wonderful carry and bounce on our freshly made wicket with the “Labor of Love” . Now with only 7 days to go, we were getting ready with all equipment in readiness, the standards and preparations in place to host the first class match. That evening, an email was received that the venue was shifted to Delhi by BCCI with no particular reason mentioned. This news broke all our hearts as the grass turned grey for a moment.

Time passed by as we continued to breathe green while destiny knew the grey lining would turn gold soon. Famous cricketing personalities like West Indies Legend Sir Alvin Kalicharan, Team India Coach Ravi Shastri, Chief Selector MSK Prasad, Batting Coach Sanjay Bangar etc. visited and have taken heartfelt memories of this picturesque ground and were kind enough to spread its beauty to the cricketing world. Now we had associations coming to us for their matches & camps as we successfully hosted BCCI’s Sir Vizzy One Day trophy, Cricket association of Mizoram’s camp & Andhra Cricket’s matches etc.

With the support of one of the finest and game changing sports administrators, Sri PC Lochab, Secretary RSPB, The Indian Railways Team made this their true Home as we enabled some wonderful stay and practice facilities. We continued to put in all our “Labour of love” on this ground and “The tryst with Destiny” had to happen.

On 17 Dec 2019, History was created under the leadership of Sri Chetan Kumar Srivastava, a truly sport loving and a passionate DRM & the President of our cricket association, as we could host the 1st Ranji Trophy match: Railways v Saurashtra on this renovated stadium after a gap of 2 decades.

The ground which witnessed Pujara play his cover drive as the hills on the backdrop rose and Unadkat hit the stumps as the breeze cut across, eventually turned out to be the Destiny for them too as Saurashtra won the Ranji Championship 2019-20.

Hence, Sports to Life is what Passion is to Destiny!

(The Author has also led teams which hosted National Road Cycling 2019 & World Railway Cycling 2018 at Bikaner and was also the Head of the Delegation of Indian Team to World Railway Football Championship 2019 at St Mandrier France.

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He further led the construction of a World Class Indoor Badminton Stadium, a Flood Lit Football & Athletics Stadium, and a Multi Sports outdoor Sporting Arena at Visakhapatnam)

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**Siva Harsha IRTS, HOD India at USC World Rly Football 2019, St Mandrier France*