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Poor girls prove their mettle on tracks

V Devanathan | TNN

Madurai: Although they hail from a remote village in Tirunelveli district, their confidence, patience and rigorous practice have started to fetch them what they aspire for. A group of girls, all aged below 14 years have one thing in common - determination to achieve in athletic meets. The girls hail from Naranammalpuram, a village with hardly 800 houses, where infrastructure for practice is far from reality. Above all, girls wearing shorts for sporting activities was considered as a taboo in the village till a few years ago, hence they were not allowed to participate in such events. Parents prefer giving away the girls in marriage upon completion of their class 10.

The girls were present for the state-level athletic meet organised by the State Athletic Association recently in Madurai. The girls narrated how they crossed all barriers to achieve their ambitions, thanks to the motivation and support they received from their coach I Sundaramoorthy.

K Ramalakshmi, one of the girls achieved a mark in a national-level inter-zonal junior athletic championship which took place in Pune last year. She won gold medal in the 100m



ON THE RIGHT TRACK: With support from their coach, these girls from poor backgrounds have made a mark for themselves in various competitions

sprint in the under-14 category. "It was a dream-come true moment for me. However, I have miles to go. I want to set a record in running, which cannot be broke by anyone in the world," said Ramalakshmi with full of confidence. Ramalakshmi, along with her classmates, E Sudha, R Subbulakshmi and M Manju from the same village have secured gold medal in 400m relay in the under-17 category at the state inter-school

competition held in Trichy. Ramalakshmi achieved another feat by securing silver medal in the junior-level athletic sports meet in 2012.

Other girls from the village, who trained along with Ramalakshmi have also achieved laurels in several state-level competitions. M Thanga Udaya finished first and secured gold medal in the under-14 category at the state-level school competition in Trichy. In the junior level athletic meet

organised by the Tamil Nadu Athletic Association in Coimbatore last year, P Subbulakshmi secured bronze medal in under-14 age category in 600m race, K Veni secured silver medal in under-18 category in 400m hurdles, M Magesh, another girl finished third and received bronze medal in the under-14 age category in long jump competition, while M Manju received bronze in the under-14 age category in high jump. "We are from poor backgrounds where consent from the families itself is the biggest support for us. We cannot expect any financial support from them for the practice and participate in state-level and national-level competitions. However, we are fortunate enough to find a coach like Sundaramoorthy, who not only motivates us and provide free coaching but also spends for us to practice and participate in the meets," said Thanga Udaya.

"The parents would restrain the girls if they ask for money for the sports activities. There are around 20 such girls being trained by me. Their fathers are coolies, washermen and undertakers. However, the girls are highly ambitious and enthusiastic in athletics," said Sundaramoorthy, a 28-year-old former kabaddi player and school coach from the same village.

K Antony Xavier