

MJAS Winter Camp

*Football Camp for Young Female Leaders in Rural
India*



December 2019 in Ajmer, Rajasthan

*Implemented by Pro Sport Development in collaboration with PRIA
International and Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti (MJAS)*

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Introduction

As part of the grant from PRIA International to support avenues of engaging youth through sports in South and South East Asia, Pro Sport Development (PSD) organized a 3-day football winter camp for 23 female youth leaders from the Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti's (MJAS) football programme in the north Indian city of Ajmer, Rajasthan.

MJAS is a women-led, rights-based organisation, which works towards emancipating women and adolescent girls from normative traditions as well as inhuman practices. MJAS' work for the last two decades has been focused in the state of Rajasthan, in particular the district of Ajmer. Since 2016, MJAS has been running a football programme for young girls from various villages across Ajmer district. The female youth leaders are a select number of girls who are a part of the larger MJAS football programme. These youth leaders have not only excelled and shown an interest in pursuing football in the future, but have been provided training and leadership opportunities in order to become coaches for other girls in their villages.



Held from the 27th- 29th of December 2019, the winter camp involved 23 female youth leaders of MJAS, ranging from ages 15 to 19 years, from the four villages of Chachiyawas, Hansiyawas, Sakariya and Meenon ka naya Gaon in the Ajmer district of Rajasthan. The camp was led by Akash Thapa (Sport and Development Coordinator) and Kabeer Arjun (Projects Officer), who are part of PSD's team in New Delhi. The indoor sessions part of the camp were conducted at MJAS' office whereas the outdoor training sessions were held at the Patel Stadium in Ajmer. PSD provided football equipment for the camp, which will be utilized by MJAS in their football programme thereafter. This included 25 footballs, 4 small sized foldable goals, air pumps as well as football shorts.

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Themes & Activities

The theme of the camp was to create ‘thinking players and coaches’, by helping participants gain a clear understanding of the drills and exercises that they were doing and the reasons behind doing them. This was important as it helped the participants understand how various drills and activities will improve them physically, technically and mentally as football players. More importantly, it provided the participants with insight on how to approach various drills and activities as coaches, when facilitating football sessions for other girls in their villages. This was a challenging and steep learning curve for the youth leaders as previously they were used to following instructions and being told exactly what to do. However, with this new approach, they would need to think for themselves and challenge ideas and notions that they thought were the norm.

Developing Technical & Mental Skills

The activities across the three days incorporated aspects of improving the technical skills of participants, including ball control, passing and body shape. Moreover, there was a lot of emphasis placed on the mental aspects of the game. Most of these youth leaders are prone to only looking at the ball and running after it. The activities of the camp helped them become more aware about not just the ball, but also where their teammates are, where their opponents are and where the free space is at all times during the game. Helping the participants improve the technical aspects of the game along with their mental awareness and thought process allowed them to stop chasing the ball around and instead keep possession and utilize space in order to progress up the pitch in an intelligent, coordinated and controlled fashion.



The idea of utilizing space effectively and keeping possession was introduced to these participants in a previous workshop in May 2019, both on the pitch and through several videos; however for the winter camp, the drills conducted were at a more advanced level. The drills included a number of different rondos, possession games with added neutral players and small-sided matches with certain rules and restrictions. All the drills involved putting players in close control situations and tight

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spaces, where they were required to quickly find solutions. Furthermore, players were encouraged to press with intensity and win the ball back as soon as possible after losing it.

Warm up, Fitness & Injury Prevention

Apart from the football activities, the participants were also introduced to a number of new warm-up and stretching routines. These were accompanied with explanations and discussions on how the stretching and the warm-up routines would help them develop as athletes and be used when coaching others within their communities. The warm-up routines included games where players got maximum touches of the football and exercises that are pertinent to the physical development of a football player (and not just general exercises). This was relayed to the participants as well, so that in the future they can spend their time conducting exercises that will help them, and others part of the programme, improve their performance on the pitch.



Players were also taken through intensive stretching routines. Again, each exercise and their specific benefits were discussed with participants. The point of this was for players to understand how they can improve their general fitness but also realise that they know their own bodies better than anyone else. Thus, it is key for them to learn when to do certain stretches and exercises and when not to do them (eg. when carrying an injury).

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Leadership

At the very beginning of the camp, a number of ‘non-negotiables’ were discussed with the participants. These non-negotiables were intensity, commitment, focus and effort. These four were presented from the facilitator’s end, and the players added some more non-negotiables from their end. The players were constantly reminded of these throughout the training camp and discussions held around these topics. It is hoped that the participants inculcate them in their future training sessions, coaching sessions and daily lives.

Impact

As mentioned previously, the theme of this workshop was to create ‘thinking players’. These are players who are able to fully understand what they are doing in training and how it can help them develop. Only when players are able to do this and have the ability to think for themselves, can they then go on and successfully coach and educate others within their own community.

These MJAS youth leaders lead sessions in their villages and inspire other girls to participate in football and physical activity. Thus, it is hoped that the lessons that they take from the camp will not only improve themselves individually but also influence others around them. These lessons include the technical and mental aspects of football, but also the non-negotiables such as intensity, focus, commitment and effort, that were discussed during the camp. The facilitators constantly reinforced these non-negotiables throughout the training camp, showing participants how these simple values and ideas can transform otherwise ordinary drills and exercises. As youth leaders and coaches, the girls from MJAS are role models in their villages. Other girls look to them to set the standard and thus it is key for them to maintain a certain level of intensity and quality at all times.

“The girls have a lot of potential, that is there for us all to see. However, they need to be more reflective about their own game and think about how they can go to the next level in terms of their development. That is the information that we tried to give them in this camp and we hope that they can use this to improve both as football players and as coaches,” said Akash Thapa, Sports and Development Coordinator at PSD.

All the drills conducted with the participants during the camp were very simple to implement and didn’t require a lot of equipment. Thus, they are easily replicable for the youth leaders when conducting their own training sessions in their communities. On a footballing level, the technical principles that they have learned in the camp when taught to others in the correct manner, could potentially help inspire another group of technically proficient young footballers within the MJAS programme.

Challenges & Way Forward

The female youth leaders part of MJAS’ football programme get access to trainings and camps very infrequently, possibly only twice a year for a few days. This leads to the challenge that the camps provide a very short amount of time to get learnings across to participants and most of the time is spent on recapping previous methodologies, ideas and learnings. During this camp, only a few girls from the group could be identified who had taken on board the ideas from previous trainings and camps, and were actually implementing and using them frequently, both as players and coaches. Many of the participants had clearly not been involved in regular trainings and only vaguely remembered certain concepts. These participants showed slow signs of improvement on the pitch and in some cases, it almost felt like they had regressed as footballers over the last six months. However, it can be said that a lot of players certainly showed signs of improvement in their communication and confidence, which would indicate that they have improved as youth leaders and coaches in their

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communities. It is clear, however, that these participants need regular access to quality and intensive coaching and training camps for them to improve, both as players and coaches.



The youth leaders part of the camp took in a lot of information during the camp and showed instantaneous signs of promise and improvement. However, to sustain their development, their progress as players and coaches needs to be monitored and continued regularly, with quality support and training, otherwise these short camps and workshops will not have the desired impact. Unless there is continuous process of development with a certain level of intensity, the participants tend to fall back into very relaxed habits and attitudes, both as players and coaches. In the future, it would be useful for PSD to conduct camps and trainings with the players on a much more regular basis. This could be in Ajmer or even within the local villages and communities. Additionally, a structure must be created with the appropriate personnel and capacity to sustain and progress the development of these youth leaders and the other participants within the larger football programme.

Lastly, it was noticed that there was a considerable difference in the ability amongst the participants in the group, and thus at times the participants had to be divided into different groups and some of these groups needed to be provided much more basic drills and activities. Going forward, future camps must be organized with this kept in mind. Different batches can be created or two separate camps can be conducted to ensure that the sessions and trainings are at the appropriate level in order to maximise impact and learning for each participant.