

The Role of CSR in the Olympics & Paralympic Games – Summary

Sattva Consulting hosted a roundtable discussion on 'The Role of CSR in the Olympics & Paralympic Games' on **Monday, 8-Nov-2021**.

Context:

India's historic performance in the Tokyo Olympics is cause for celebration, but it is important to note that many of our athletes have already resumed training for the next challenge. With the 2024 Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games on the horizon, it is imperative for us to focus on preparing India for Paris 2024 and beyond.

As per the data from Sattva's India Data Insights, (data from the MCA), during the period 2014-2020, only a meagre sum of Rs 1163 Crores was cumulatively spent by corporates as CSR towards "Training to promote sports". This is a miniscule **1.25%** of the total CSR spend during this period.

Sattva hosted a virtual roundtable, bringing corporates and sporting organisations together, in order to shine a light on the importance that Corporates should accord to supporting sports and specifically the Olympics.

The speakers for the panel discussion:

- **Arun Karna**, MD & CEO, AT&T Global Network Services, India
- **Deepthi Bopaiah**, CEO, GoSports Foundation
- **Mustafa Ghouse**, CEO, JSW Sports
- **Roopa Satish**, Head of CSR & Sustainability, IndusInd Bank
- **Srikrishna Sridhar Murthy**, Co-Founder & CEO, Sattva Consulting (Moderator)

The event began with Ayesha Sayed from Sattva introducing the event, Sattva, and the speakers in the panel. This was followed by a short video as a background for the discussion.

Srikrishna Sridhar Murthy (Krishna), Co-founder and CEO of Sattva, then kicked off the discussion. He began by setting some context about the fantastic opportunity that corporate philanthropy and corporate CSR in sports presents. And its significance, even if it's a small part of a corporate's portfolio.

“What we will focus on is getting to the mindset of corporates that support sport.”

Krishna asked Mustafa Ghouse about his role and about the initial days when JSW decided to start something to support sport.

Mustafa recollected a phone call he received back in 2012 from JSW. For a sports person like him it was an opportunity to do something. He went back and took a few months to make a full-fledged presentation of what they could do. He took another 6 months to travel all over the world to understand how this was done in other countries, to understand the challenges of multi-sport facilities. Needless to say, it’s been an interesting journey, with a bullish corporate group on one hand, like minded corporates with them, and then the high of the recent gold at Tokyo.

“One JSW is not going to be enough to change the landscape of sport in India. We’re happy that we now have 25 like-minded corporates who believe in our vision.”

Krishna then asked Roopa Satish – as the favourite of everyone working in sports excellence in the country - about when IndusInd Bank started, where did that vision come from and how important it is for IndusInd Bank to continue doing what it’s doing.

Roopa talked about how although they started because one of their management members is extremely passionate about sports, it was a unanimous response. What appealed to all of them was that they saw impact at 3 levels – employees, clients, and society as a whole. Sports emerged as a powerful medium to drive values among their employees – team work, sportsmanship, to aim for the stars, to bring out the best, to find inspiration from within, and so on. Partnerships are very integral to how IndusInd Bank works. And from a community point of view, they took a pledge that they will only sponsor the ‘non glamorous’ ones. ***“Some stories, even today, don’t make the headlines. But we have faith that sooner or later people will start talking about those stories.”*** So of course, they’re thrilled that they are one of the changemakers, in Tokyo 2020.

“The obsession with sport. When you do this with your employees, you drive emotion.”

The discussion turned to Arun Karna, for AT&T’s perspective - was there someone obsessed with sports? How did the association with sports begin?

Arun elaborated that AT&T as a corporation has always been supportive of sports as a vehicle. He looked back on the day that Deepthi Bopaiah from GoSports Foundation went to his office and talked about the various programmes that GoSports runs. That is how it began – with a feeling of trust. They began about 4 years ago by supporting the Parachampion programme at first. Then the relationship deepened with the ongoing trust, and has deepened to include support for other programmes.

Deepthi Bopaiah shared her perspective on GoSports' incredible journey – The initial years at GoSports were very tough because they had to depend on friends and family. But what CSR has really done for sports – even though it's a long way to go - but we're able to see the impact. ***"There's years and years of effort that goes into that one moment that the whole country waits for."*** It's not easy to get there without a team, without experts, physios, nutritionists, sending them to where they can train... All of this is now possible under the CSR mandate. ***"The introduction of this law meant that GoSports Foundation had a starting point for conversations with corporates."*** And they were able to move from around 50 athletes to 100 + athletes because of the CSR mandate. They have been able to have conversations at multiple levels – so that we see results. This is not a 1-year plan. This is a long-haul process – of procedures and reporting - so that we can all see impact. Sport is a vehicle... but without corporate support the Foundation would not have been able to get to where they are.

Mustafa elaborated on an earlier comment on the change seen from corporates now – 1) a little more responsive 2) on how they are engaging and what are the opportunities (is it more than just writing a cheque). Initially organisations like JSW and GoSports did need a champion in every corporate to back them. Slowly the reliance on that one individual has changed. Those relationships are needed to get the foot in the door, but thereafter those relationships have grown. Proposals too have changed – the ask in 2014 was different from what it is now. The involvement has also changed – JSW has a facility, so they have a whole host of things that corporates would like to engage with them for (experts, but also contributions such as mattresses and beds for the campus and eggs for all the people there!). So from their perspective, it's a blank slate and they are happy to customise programmes so that it's a win-win for all sides.

Deepthi provided GoSports' perspective on the changing nature of the engagement with corporates – they have an athlete education programme, where they seek expertise. By 'education' – it is how to live a professional life – how to write emails, financial planning, wealth management. A lot of partners have come on board to help these athletes. Sports is brutal as a career and once their sporting career ends, or even professionalism during their performing years, is something that GoSports' partners can extend to their athletes. They have 2 teams – partnerships and programmes to manage this exclusively. It's a very curated set of requirements based on the corporate, and the athlete.

Krishna asked Arun and Roopa how we can get other corporates to get involved, how can they nudge their fellow board members to support sport.

Roopa responded that if we need to look at sport as achieving a larger objective – to become more inclusive. ***We are delivering/ financing more than sports. We are changing values.*** And she would urge corporates to look at it from that angle.

Arun is of the view that all responsible corporates would like to contribute. There is value in communicating – through customer and employee conversations – about the value in committing to sport. It's one way of letting customers and employees know that we're aligned to a common vision. It adds to the brand image. It sparks loyalty within the customer and employee base. So, it makes good business sense ***as well.***

The discussion then moved on to that of stories from the hinterland and identifying and nurturing early stage talent. How do we connect the stories from the grassroots, and take them all the way to the Olympics?

Mustafa and JSW look to solve this at the foundation stage – ages 12 to 18. At that stage many young people with talent face problems such as poor advice, poor training, bad nutrition etc., and not many go through. This is what JSW is trying to address with the institute and their facilities. So, all the athlete needs to do is roll out of bed, lace up, and show up to train. They are adding facilities in more geographies so that they reach a lot more kids, reach them a lot earlier, so that the transition for a kid with talent is easier.

GoSports' aim is to work with athletes at the national level. Their research found that athletes drop out, not at local, district or state levels, but after they reach the national level. Additionally, what they've attempted to do with the Paralympic programme, is to change the narrative, even just the perception of how disability is viewed. ***They have to win, and that's important, but that's not the only perspective that we want to support.*** Tokyo is a great example because when we all work together, we all collaborate, and we see results. But we need a mindset change in the way this support is extended. There are crores given to athletes when they win (no other country does this at this scale)– if all that money is given to support athletes earlier in their journey, we will see even more results.

Arun added to this saying that we would need the right partner vehicle to do it. If you fund a particular programme, its always thematic – the result is supporting the athlete. But actually what we're doing is supporting an ecosystem. All of them benefit. It's a great thought – to support an entire value chain.

Krishna directed an audience question to Roopa – is gender mainstreaming possible? How much of that has helped created role models? Her response was that for IndusInd Bank sponsoring women in sports is of great importance. So when they say we want to be more inclusive, they include gender, as well as disabilities. It is also a way of promoting livelihood (make a woman independent – financially as well as with confidence).

Mustafa added that our girls that are supported are actually performing better than the boys.

Deepthi elaborated on the point on gender role models, with the example of Deepa Malik, a medallist at the Rio Paralympics. She had an unfortunate accident and her life changed. She's also a mother. And even though she has now stopped competing she's on the Paralympics committee. They all have jobs, won medals and made India proud. It's how you look at gender. If that changes then we won't have to ask these questions.

Roopa provided a counter view that we still have mainstream and non-mainstream issues in India. It is unfortunately also about where society is today. Not everyone has role models.

This led Krishna to ask Roopa and Arun – is there an opportunity for corporates to go beyond CSR and even look at employing athletes? This would even create a sporting culture in companies.

Roopa responded by saying that you have to find the right fit. ***While it's important to give them life skills, it's equally important to give them dignity, and not just be 'accommodating'.***

Arun added that it's a great idea, especially in the tech industry. To have a fresh channel of talent, to have sports people, train them and point them in a different direction.

JSW has a programme along with Citibank, where they have created an endowment fund where any athlete can apply for a fund for higher education, to build their life after their sporting career. Mustafa added that it's not very easy for corporates to just employ someone. They need to have certain skill sets. And that this endowment was a step in that direction.

As the session drew to a close, Krishna emphasised one commitment from Sattva - that will curate all this wonderful work that all our panellists are doing and take it to the larger CSR ecosystem.

He then went around and asked each of the speakers for one prediction for Paris 2024 and one wish from the CSR ecosystem:

- Arun – purely from a CSR perspective, medals are important, but it's about raising the level of participation and removing obstacles.
- Deepthi – Prediction: double the participation. Wish: that they get flooded with queries. She expressed her gratitude to all their partners.
- Roopa – Wish: I'm humbled to be where I am. But the real changemakers are out there... they are really the torchbearers. They are equally to be applauded, along with the medal winners
- Mustafa – Prediction: we will finally break the single digit barrier. Wish: CSR committees to get more bullish on sport. There is no great nation in the world that is not a sporting powerhouse. It is a soft power.

Closing remarks and vote of thanks:

Krishna thanked the panellists and attendees to wrap up the session with the following closing remarks:

- We need to ride on people who are passionate about sport to take the rest of us there
- There are many ways on contributing; it's not just about writing a cheque
- The efforts so far have shown that collaboration is clearly a win-win
- Hopefully together we can create a forum or a platform for Paris 2024.

This concluded the event.

About Sattva

Sattva Consulting is a mission-driven organisation focused on scalable solutions for social impact. We partner with our clients – corporations, philanthropists, foundations and social organisations – achieve their social impact goals effectively and maximise the return on social investment. We offer end-to-end support covering research, strategy consulting, implementation, programme management, impact assessment, social audit, talent solutions and more. www.sattva.co.in