

Let's make our lives a playing field!

The athletic meet was coming to an end. It was a morning of healthy competition and glorious sportsmanship. The last event was the mixed relay, two boys and two girls from each school. As the middle school team took their places on the tracks, the audience fell silent. In the third leg was a young fourth grader. She stepped in to support her team as her teammate had a fall and was on the bench with a bruised knee. The young athlete's nervousness was palpable, and you could see her trying to calm her nerves and prepare to run against the competition who stood around her like oak trees. One could only guess she was telling herself..."I will do my best... I won't let my team down." The race started and when she received the baton, she flew. She held her team's position and completed the baton transfer without a glitch. The audience finally took a collective breath!

'**ESPRIT DE CORPS**' was launched this year for the TISB, NAFL and NPS Group of schools. A Sports Fest that celebrated Athletics, Swimming, Basketball, Soccer, Kho Kho, Volleyball, Cricket, Throwball and Badminton. It offered innumerable opportunities for students to meet, compete, make new friendships, and learn invaluable life lessons. There were also events for the staff like Carrom, Chess and a 5K Marathon. When it came to the spirit of competition, it was difficult to distinguish between the teachers and the students!

Grace under fire, grace in the face of victory or loss, team refinement and accord were outstanding facets of Esprit De Corps. The anecdotes must be shared, the life lessons emphasised.

Manifesting temperance: ESPRIT DE CORPS SAW ADMIRABLE SELF-DISCIPLINE AND DECORUM PREVAILING, MORE THAN ONCE AND IN ABUNDANCE.

We watched teams spar and win, battle and lose through the many competitions. One of the teams had a close miss with an umpire's call. They didn't agree with it and knew it could cost them. Yet, with deep restraint and sensible behaviour they held together, played, and yes, went on to lose the game. Things could have unravelled. Hot words could have burst out. Sorrow at losing could have caused the balance to tip. But the teams shook hands and everyone moved on graciously.

Elevating gamesmanship: FAIRNESS, ETHICS, RESILIENCE, AND SPORTSMANSHIP CAME TOGETHER IN HEARTWARMING AND FULL MEASURE!

Winning is the burning goal in every heart, but irrespective of this all-consuming desire, I saw opposing teams play like one. During a fierce basketball match, one of the boys accidentally tripped and fell to the ground. His glasses flew off and fell some distance away. Without missing a beat, two opponents came to him - one put out a hand to help him up and the other picked up his glasses and handed it to the boy. A display of the true essence of 'Esprit De Corps' - *the common spirit existing in the members of a group and inspiring enthusiasm, devotion, and strong regard for the honour of the group* (Merriam-Webster Definition & Meaning)

Bouncing back: BEING PLIABLE IS THE ONLY WAY ONWARD

Sport builds resilience because children must learn to cope with failure. Not getting selected on a school team, losing the finals, coming last in a race are highly upsetting moments on the play field. Yet, they teach children how to navigate failure and disappointment. Children who use mistakes as an opportunity to reflect and grow, find new ways of improving performance and success.

Basketball champion, Michael Jordon, has said "I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." He should know because he was removed from his high school basketball team for poor performance.

Bouncing back on the playing field prepares for life's unpredictable challenges that can overwhelm young minds - disappointing grades, university rejections, failed relationships, losing a dream job...

Angela Duckworth, TED speaker, in her much-viewed talk, '**The importance of grit in predicting success**', avers that talent alone is not enough. Perseverance and effort pave the way for success. A commitment to go back to more tenacious labour requires the discipline of consistency. Pushing oneself through daily training drills to build expertise needs dogged faith in oneself and steely fortitude to achieve mastery.

Not all students who participated won a medal but all of them learned life skills that shapes winners. In the words of a gritty student who didn't make the cut at the Athletic Meet, "I'll practise every day. I know I'll get faster!"

This is the spirit I would like all of us to celebrate. Parents, please play with your children. Allow them to lose and struggle as they process and deal with their emotions. Guide them through what researchers call 'Productive Struggle.' Family time has become such a precious commodity and so I sincerely urge you to create the space for you to interact over a board game, a trek, a nature walk or just a picnic at Cubbon Park.

The singular motivation to launch '**ESPRIT DE CORPS**' was to increase field time and reduce screen time. One of our banes in today's world is the addiction, across age groups, to laptops and gadgets. This causes undue stress on the eyes and even causes sleep deficiency and fatigue. A better world is one in which we work, learn, play outdoor games and fall asleep feeling beautifully tired.

Do write to me and share your experiences as you engage as a family with your children. Let's commit to making 2024 a healthier and happier year for all of us!

Best wishes,
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