

Sport » Football

Franz Gastler turns Ranchi girls to football

Anumeha Yadav



Coach Franz Gastler sitting with the girls in the first-ever practice session in Hutup in Ormanjhi 20 km from Ranchi in 2009.

A group of teenage footballers from a village on the outskirts of Ranchi in Jharkhand have achieved something which even sportsperson with the best facilities and support in cities would only dream of.

Eighteen tribal girls representing Yuwa India under-14 all-girls team were placed third among 10 all-girls teams from Spain playing for the Gasteiz Cup in Victoria Gasteiz in Spain on July 13. The girls - students in village schools in Ormanjhi 20 km from Ranchi who played outside their village for the first time - were placed third after two wins, two losses, and one draw against international teams. Earlier the same month, during the Donosti Cup, Spain's biggest football tournament, the girls made it out of the group phase defeating two teams from Spain before they lost to Santa Teresa (Spain) and Wisconsin International (USA) placed 2nd and 3rd respectively.

Over the last few days, the image of the joyous footballers wearing red and white sarees over their heads and flowers in their hair and around their wrists lifting their prize at Gasteiz Cup tournament has been shared again and again on social media sites. The team's guru the founder and Executive Director of Yuwa-India, Franz Gastler, a 30-year old American who had first come to Jharkhand four years back to teach in villages, shared the story of the team's journey from Ranchi to Spain.

Excerpts from an email interview:

What was the biggest challenge you and the team faced to reach the tournaments in Spain?

Obtaining the documents to allow the girls to travel. After we were invited by Donosti Cup with the support of TZBZ a group of student entrepreneurs in the Basque country of Spain, the main challenge, funny enough, was obtaining birth certificates. Most girls did not have official birth certificates (as they were born at home).

Yuwa doesn't have the staff to get these for eighteen girls, so the girls and their parents took the task on. At first, mothers and fathers accompanied the girls to the local Panchayat office. But as the weeks dragged on into months, the parents could not leave their fields and day labour jobs to follow up time and again. The girls reported to us that Dinesh Sahu, the panchayat sewak, had slapped several of them in the face when they arrived to follow up on the work. He made many of them sweep his office floor, and demanded bribes from each and every one of them. He told them that if they went to Spain, I would sell them into slavery.

How did the girls' families respond to the girls' participating in the tournament?

It was also a challenge getting support from the parents. While all of the parents wanted their daughters to get this opportunity, most could not fathom what a massive opportunity this really was. Most had never been outside of Jharkhand, and going abroad was hard to imagine.

We run classes and practices in three villages, and girls come from 10 villages to attend the program. My staff and I

spent days tracking down parents in far-flung villages to sign documents -- although they had been told to meet us and sign documents at a certain time / date, they would sometimes leave for weddings etc. far away, and with no means to contact them.

The girls were often left to fend for themselves, against all the entrenched forces working against them in society, family and government. Nothing that's intended for them reaches them as it should. They have to fight for everything.

But that's one reason I admire these girls so much. They take on the challenges in their lives with courage, devotion and team spirit. Their grit and hunger to improve their lives and the lives of those around them often leaves me in awe.

What support have you got from the state and central government so far? What support could the sports and government authorities offer to the team in terms of funds, facilities, land etc.?

We've gotten no support from the state government as of yet. We have applied for land on a long-term lease because the land we play on is disappearing from right under our feet as land prospectors come in and buy up the land and put brick walls around it. Right now our proposal is sitting with the Sports Secretary, and she has said that without the support of the Jharkhand cabinet ministers, nothing will happen.

I don't know what has become of Dinesh Sahu, the panchayat sewak. The last I heard he was still in the same office, but had been told me might be transferred somewhere else. The media was very helpful, and the Inspector General CID Jharkhand Anurag Gupta was very helpful when we brought this to his attention. He said we can file a report, which we did. I don't know if any meaningful disciplinary action has happened, however.

Keywords: [Franz Gastler](#), [Yuwa-India](#), [Gasteiz Cup tournament](#)

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Satish

Hats off to Franz Gastler action speaks , our youth need to learn lesson from this there is talent hidden in every corner of India, some one to take action and hard work and bring this, that will be real Social service to the Nation

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Rupayan Bhattacharyya

Congratulation to all girls of Yuwa India, Franz Gastler for your dedicated and glorious performance, and THE HINDU for publishing the amazing news.

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Varun

Excellent work from Staz and stupendous achievement by these bold girls. These are the people who make us proud. Really happy to see this news.

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Sabla

Amazing amazing work Staz. And of course the brave and talented girls. So proud of you! The officials who exploited the girls instead, are a disgrace, ashamed that they are a part of our society too. Blessings!

2 days ago · [Up Vote \(0\)](#) · [Down Vote \(0\)](#)

Priyanka

Wonderful motivation. This achievement is a proof of vast talent present in our mother land. I really want to appreciate the efforts of Franz Gastler. He could have chosen to train a male teenager team. Instead he chose the most weaken section, tribal girls, of our society. Its an example of a perfect job planned and executed in the most practical way. Actions are much more louder than his work. Our many more vocalists whether social workers or politicians should take the leason from this foreigner to do the work rather than just taking about it. Priyanka

2 days ago · [Up Vote \(1\)](#) · [Down Vote \(0\)](#)

najma sultana

CONGRATULATION TO YUWA TEAM GIRLS...u all deserve to get fame equal to India cricket team.

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Anand Kumar

Oh wow - thanks thehindu for bringing such articles. This is a nice breather amid all the news related to Indian scams day after day. The work of Franz is appreciable and of highest order. We should salute such people from the bottom of our heart because they are actually doing the ground work the govt. is supposed to do despite having no power in their hand. And Mr Franz, I do concur when you say "Nothing that"s intended for them reaches them as it should. They have to fight for everything." Having lived in the smaller town of the same state for first 20 years of my life, I can echo your feeling. And make no mistake there are people like Dinesh Sahu on every corner and how the oppress people every day is well documented. I truly wish these kind of goons are punished severely but I am as helpless as you feel thinking nothing at the end would happen to Sahu. The system is designed to protect these people unfortunately :(Thanks a lot for encouraging those young girls.

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Soumitra Roy

Really great job done by you...You are the real hero Mr. Franz Gastler

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