

Saraswatipur on the Rugby Map of the World

Khelo Rugby, an outreach programme of Jungle Crows Rugby Foundation, Kolkata, in collaboration with Salesian College Siliguri Campus and Royal Air Force Rugby Team “Spitfires” from England organized a month long Rugby coaching camp at Saraswatipur village in Jalpaiguri District, and conducted a Tournament on Wednesday 5 June 2013. A total of 14 teams in three categories of Seniors, Juniors and Sub-juniors took part in the coaching camp and in the tournament. For the children of Saraswatipur, an Adivasi village with over a 1000 families nestled deep inside the Baikuntapur forest, it was a firsthand experience playing rugby and a memorable one too. Two coaches from Jungle Crows, Amirul and Harinder stayed in the village for a month and trained the children who not only picked up the game fast but also displayed exceptional skill and talent. Saraswatipur, a sleepy hamlet surrounded by forests and tea garden on one side and River Teesta on the other, suddenly came alive with over 200 children taking part in the camp daily with great vigour and enthusiasm.

The coaching camp concluded with a Tournament on 5 June which began at 1.00 pm. All the 14 teams wore colourful jerseys and competed with each other for the top honours. The Royal Air Force Team players refereed the various matches played on a round robin league basis. The winning teams were awarded with trophies and cups and individual prizes too were distributed. The tournament ended at 4.pm with a sumptuous meal for all the players and organizers. The Guests from abroad were given a grand welcome in traditional Adivasi style before the start of the tournament.

The credit for bringing Rugby to Saraswatipur goes to Mr. Paul Walsh, a former staff of the British Council in Kolkata who resigned his job to establish Jungle Crows Foundation to popularize rugby among children from socio-economically weaker backgrounds. The Foundation through its Khelo Rugby programme has been organizing rugby coaching camps in and around Kolkata for the past several years and it is the first time that they have launched out into North Bengal to popularize rugby in the region. Salesian College through its NSS programmes has been actively involved in the socio-economic uplift activities in several tea gardens around Siliguri, Saraswatipur being one of them, and extended logistical support to the whole event.



