

Mumbai-based sports academy The Sports Gurukool found a similar start, too, in 2004. Capitalizing on the city's congestion, Jay Shah set up India's first full-sized tennis court on a school terrace in Santa Cruz as an open center for children to develop their talent in sports. Since then, it has established five academies across Mumbai as recreational centers for children and adults to play a variety of indoor and outdoor games. "India does not have community centers for sports. Our objective is to create a culture of sport through activities and infrastructure," says Shah. These centers also cater to schools with no sports facilities—another income generating avenue for the startup.

Outsourcing school curriculum has become increasingly popular, especially with new international schools mushrooming in metros like Mumbai and Bangalore. Moreover, schools are recession-proof—a big selling point for many. For instance, take Edu Sports, the business vertical of Bangalore-based Sportz Village. Way back in 2003, Saumil Majumdar saw a basic consumer need for playing facilities for kids; this propelled the launch of his sports venture in 2008. The firm set out to convert 30 plots of land into playing fields for children. Running on the back of a retail model, it charged Rs. 800 a month as entry fee. Unfortunately, bad access to land in urban areas didn't do the vertical any favors; it shut down in three years.

Nevertheless, Sportz Village developed Edu Sports and it now services the sports and PE curriculum for 5,000 kids from KG to Standard IV across 13 schools in India. In a way, this led Majumdar back to his early desire to use PE as a pedagogical tool. "Sport is

a powerful tool to solve disputes and develop team building," affirms Majumdar whose firm's value proposition lies on health and fitness. "Indians are 'sporty', but not necessarily into playing sports seriously. I found that this was a huge opportunity."

Sports goods and apparel retailers can carve their own niche in this segment, too. For Ramakrishna R.K. Kalluri, founder of Playgroundonline.com, the sports industry presented a lucrative opportunity to distinguish himself from his counterparts. And he did so via a specialized online store. This web portal sells branded sports merchandise—everything from equipment, apparel, books and footwear to fan merchandise—through a network of partnerships with manufacturers. This eliminates the risk of offering spurious items. Having a technology-based business also allows Kalluri to cater to tier II and tier III cities, like Cochin, Mangalore, Jaipur, Coimbatore, Surat and Ahmedabad. "These regions are good growth areas for us, as they have no access to branded, quality goods," Kalluri explains.

In addition, Playgroundonline.com is looking at the NRI market overseas and the gifting arena as two other areas of opportunity. According to estimates, the domestic sports goods and apparel market is pegged at Rs. 2,500 crore. "We will also be targeting the B2B market—schools, academies, corporates and housing complexes," says Kalluri.

While these ancillary activities generate revenue, the big bucks still come from corporate events. "Tapping corporate events made our business model viable," says Saran. Corporate firms are scheduling time for team building and wellness activities, as well as inter- and intra- corporate tournaments. For sports management firms, this has provided a good medium to promote games like tennis, table tennis, badminton, football and golf, with a set number of events organized each year. "We are soon going to

PROFITS ON THE PLAYGROUND: R.K.

Kalluri & Srinil Battula of Playgroundonline; Amit Thomas & Bappaditya Bhattacharjee of Root Sports; Saumil Majumdar of Sportz Majumdar (l. to r.)

