

## **OBC Soccer Club**



Five years ago, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2016, what started as just a physical activity for young boys has grown into a soccer club of repute in the city of Coimbatore, the Manchester of South India, in the state of Tamil Nadu. Twelve boys from impoverished homes (ages between 8-15 years) came for the first training session, to get away from the drab, dull, and delinquent scene of what is their homes.

This soccer club is in a church compound of Rathinapuri, which is a bad neighborhood that is known for crime, gangs, and drug menace. The

neighborhood has a large migrant community as well as poor daily wage laborers. Alcoholism and other addictions are very prevalent in the homes of the people living in this locality. There is also widespread violence among the various political gang affiliations which often has young boys and girls as its members. All of this has steered the young minds towards addictions and or violence due to gang affiliation or political affiliations.

It was only in 2017 that the passion to really train and develop players for the state of Tamil Nadu and for India was birthed in Rafael Simon, the coach of OBC Soccer Club. Since that small beginning in October, there have been 170 who have trained to be football players in the last five years. Some of those who have trained here have gone on to become district-level and state-level players.

OBC Soccer Club has participated in nearly 80 tournaments to date. The team has returned as winners or runners-up in around 40 of these tournaments. This winning habit has developed a hunger for more among the boys, in their sporting lives as well as life in general. Most of the boys were doing poorly in school but since their training and development at the OBC Soccer Club, their outlook on life has changed and they have done remarkably better in school and their studies.

Eight boys have received scholarships to study in various schools in the state of Tamil Nadu, of which two have received full scholarship to study in their respective schools. The coach makes sure that everyone attends school and are up to date with their studies. Special care is also taken to visit their homes to regularly check on their mental and physical well-being.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, when there was a full lockdown enforced for many months, a food kit (rice, lentils, and vegetables) was supplied to the homes of the boys who were training at the OBC Soccer Club. This was a great help to the boys because most of the parents of the boys are daily wage laborers and they had no means of income during the lockdown.

The mission of this soccer club is to continue to make a change in the lives of every boy who encounters us. The small changes may seem invisible on the outside, but they will be visible in the years to come. The boys have found an activity which they are pursuing wholeheartedly, and this takes their attention away from the vices around them.

We have seen the amazing changes in the character of the boys who have trained at our facility and remarkable changes among their parents. Parents have become more responsible and are listening to the

boys when making choices for their family because these boys have matured into good human beings making right choices in life.

We want to continue bringing change, one boy at a time! Our vision is to train and develop good soccer players and good human beings who will impact their community and the society at large.



**Fabian Anto:** He came at the age of 14 (8<sup>th</sup> grade) to our soccer club. He was a good kid with potential, was trained, and developed into a good athlete and a good soccer player with good pace after his stint with the club. He received a scholarship to St. Mary's Higher Secondary School, Madurai, and went on to represent St. Mary's School (Madurai) in the state-level tournaments. Fabian is pursuing his BBA at Rathinam College at present, having received a sports scholarship. His mother is the only family member earning income and his dad is unemployed. They have hope that their son can change their life in the future. Time at the club has sure rescued Fabian from a life of alcohol and gang violence, which was the norm in his family. Fabian is one of the bright gems of our soccer club.



**Laba Rawal:** He belongs to Nepal and has been a member of our soccer club since 2018. His parents are daily wage laborers who have been migrating from state to state until they settled here in Coimbatore. Laba has four siblings and was almost pushed into child labor by his parents because of their terrible financial situation. Coach Rafael was able to convince Laba's parents to let him attend a selection trial for Ragavendra School and he got selected. He was able to get a full scholarship there and continues his studies until this day. He has been selected for an I-League Professional team from Bengaluru – *Kick Start* and will play for them in a few months. Laba has been winning Best Player of the Tournament awards regularly since last year and his story will definitely turn into another wining one for our soccer club.

*Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation. Genesis 21:18*

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