On the ball with Sunil Chettri

When the Indian football team captain Sunil Chettri walked up to the stage at The Newtown School to deliver a speech as chief guest for the school’s investiture ceremony, the audience comprising teachers, students and parents expected him to talk football. Chettri, however, decided to talk about a lot more.

“You know, I am totally jealous of you all. This is the best time of your lives. I want to swap my life with yours because I miss your lives so much. You must make every day count. Only then will you be happy,” said Chettri as he addressed the audience.

The school was holding its investiture ceremony and Chettri had graced the occasion as chief guest.

“You learn faster if you enjoy doing something. Take an interest in academics even if it is for half an hour a day. Then studies will become much easier. Your parents struggle really hard to fulfill all your demands and buy you gifts. You should also try and make them happy. And just a little interest in studies will make them happy. And believe me, once you bribe your parents with a little bit of good marks, they will do absolutely anything for you. No one will love you more than your parents. My parents still come down to watch my games. My dad still points out my mistakes after every game. That input helps me improve,” he added.

He then went on to address the parents in the audience. He shared some of his parenting experiences and also gave tips to parents about how to handle their kids in difficult situations.

“It is important for kids to be able to talk to you. If they cannot then you’ve lost the bottle. When I was a kid my mother used to be the goalkeeper. My dad used to move around the field with the ball. I was the striker. Once there was just a week left for my Class X Board exams. But I badly wanted to go out and play. I asked my dad and to my surprise he agreed. It was a hot afternoon and my parents and I were the only ones on the field. Finally after completing the game I sat down to study with full concentration. That one hour of football helped me put in three to four hours of focused study,” he recalled.

Fight for council spot

The investiture ceremony was taken so seriously by the students that about a dozen of those who did not make it in the final round met the principal the day before the ceremony.

The school has an elaborate four-step procedure in place for the selection of the student council members.

At first, applications are invited from those who think themselves fit to be on the council, justifying why they feel that way.

Then they have to fill up a questionnaire, explaining, among other things, the importance of being a team player and identifying the problem areas in the school that can be rectified.

This usually reduces the number of applicants to half. Then they appear for an interview with the principal, the headmaster, the school coordinator etc. “This way we try to check if the candidate has understood the responsibilities, the dignity and authority of the post and how prepared he or she is for the interview,” explained principal Satabdri Bhattacharjee.

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At the final stage, their class teachers have to fill in a grade sheet marking them on character attributes like politeness, honesty and regularity.

The top 10 are taken from Class IX as heads and from Class VIII as deputies.

This year, those who missed the cut narrowly were crest-fallen. They asked me why they did not make it. Some of them were council members last year. I explained to them that they had become complacent, taking their spot in the council for granted. In life they should always strive to improve on a daily basis or else risk being overtaken. I also told them that responsibility had to come from within and not just from the badge.

After an hour’s discussion, all of them left promising to support the post-bearers for the sake of the school.

That is why at the ceremony, the principal addressed the newly elected council members as much as those who did not make it in her speech.

Sunil Chettri congratulates a newly inducted Students’ Council member as principal Satabdri Bhattacharjee looks on. (Left) Head girl Ananya Chaudhary gets an autograph. (Santosh Ghosh)

(Right) He meets members of the sports team.