

On the ball with Sunil Chetri

When the Indian football team captain Sunil Chetri 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. Chetri, 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 Chetri as he addressed the audience.

The school was holding its investiture ceremony and Chetri 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 fulfil 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 bring 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 battle. 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



Sunil Chetri congratulates a newly inducted Students' Council member as principal Satabdi Bhattacharjee looks on. (Right) He meets members of the sports team. (Left) Head girl Ananya Chaudhary gets an autograph. (Santosh Ghosh)



one hour of football helped me put in three to four hours of focussed 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 responsibility, the dignity and authority of the post and how prepared he or she is for the interview," explained principal Satabdi Bhattacharjee to

The Telegraph Salt Lake.

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.

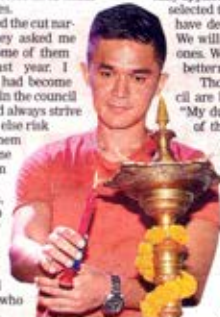
That is why at the ceremony, the principal addressed the newly elected council members as much as those who did not make it in her speech.



"Those of you who have been selected as leaders today are great. But those of you who are not on stage are no less. You must learn to move on," she urged.

Rahul Sinha, a student who had unsuccessfully applied, said: "Some of us were not selected to the school council. But we have decided not to dwell on that. We will co-operate with the chosen ones. We will work together for the betterment of the school."

Those who made it to the council are brimming with excitement. "My duty is supervising the work of the four house captains along with my colleague," said Class IX student Siddharth Rastogi, one of the two house-in-charges who are both in the same section. "We have to settle disputes without being partial," said the resident of Unworld City.



Showli Chakraborty and Sudeshna Banerjee