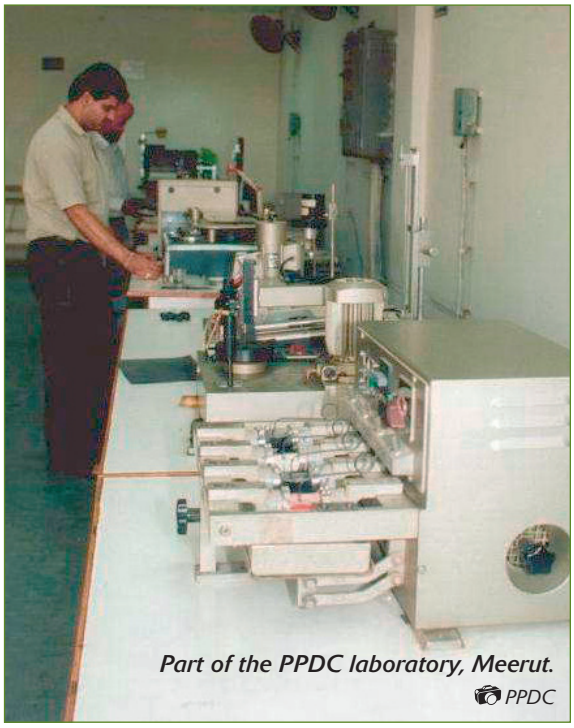
India has a passion for sport. Cricket, hockey, athletics and football — all have very many thousands of participants so it is not surprising that the manufacture of sports equipment has become big business. The sporting goods industry is considered a key domestic industry for India and it is also an extremely important export business.



Part of the PPDC laboratory, Meerut. PPDC

Sports education of a different kind

Education and training in sport is usually associated with developing the playing skills among the new generation of youngsters getting involved with sporting and outdoor activities. In this instance, however, education is directed at those who manufacture the kit and equipment needed to play the game, writes Roger Beeby.

Many of the manufacturers serving the sporting goods industry in India are to be found clustered in and around the city of Meerut in Uttar Pradesh, some 70km north east of Delhi. Meerut is home to more than 20 large manufacturers and a host of many smaller manufacturers and individual craftsmen and women making all types of equipment. Balls of all descriptions and for any sport, as well as protective pads, helmets, racquets, the items needed for shot putt, discus, hammer and javelin and engineered items such as hurdles, starting blocks and nets of various sizes and types, are all part of the manufacturing mix. If a sport needs specific equipment, it's a fair bet that someone in Meerut will make it.

The Process and Product Development Centre (PPDC) in the city plays a vital role in the encouragement, education, and support of these many companies and craftspeople. It is a fully accredited test centre to ensure the highest quality standards and to introduce the best and most appropriate technology.

It is a part of the Small-Sized Industries Agency, run by the government of India. The centre assists in the development of the design of sporting goods for local industry and it produces prototypes of new items to follow the rapidly changing market. Technical consultancy and marketing services are all available to stimulate and assist local industry. The introduction of quality control systems such as ISO 9000 and Total Quality Management are achieved through workshops and seminars and detailed testing and consultancy.

PPDC has now introduced new technical education courses for sports equipment manufacturers. There are five main departments and workshops at the centre: Leather workshop and leather equipment stitching; wood working; rubber and plastics; mechanical and engineering; and the testing laboratory.

Short training courses from two to six months are run in all sections and include, for example, cricket ball production, cricket bat handles, stumps and bails, table tennis (ping-pong) bat manufacture, tool room procedures, the manufacture of cutting dies, and moulds, and leather processing and finishing for sporting goods.

The institute has already started two one-year diploma courses in the field of polymer technology and leather goods technology. Starting soon is a one-year diploma course on wood technology. Both courses will specialise on sporting goods.

The latest PPDC initiative to further improve training and education is a co-operation with The Leicester International School of Footwear at Leicester College in the UK and the international Textile Institute. The Textile Institute has members in 70 countries with its headquarters in Manchester, UK.

A modular two-year full time syllabus has been prepared to create high quality training and technical education in the production of cricket balls, pads and other sewn items, and also bats and stumps. Certificates will be awarded by Leicester College to stimulate the students and to raise standards. There will be external moderation of the work of the students to ensure the highest possible standards. Plans also exist for the introduction of other products into the programme. The model for this training is the well-established two-year diploma education programme which is delivered in the Central Footwear Training Institutes in Agra and Chennai where diplomas are awarded by Leicester College and approved by the International Textile Institute.

This latest initiative was started by V.S. Karunakaran who, together with C.P. Bhansal, will be responsible for its implementation through the teaching staff in Meerut, where Maghvendra Sharma is the technical officer in charge of the programme. He has been working closely with Peter Racklyeft, an international consultant and moderator in India, who has created much of the syllabus and represents Leicester College.