

2022

# REVIEW



**“OPENING THE  
PATH FOR MORE  
INDIAN PLAYERS”**

-Kalyan Chaubey  
President, AIFF

**REVIVING  
Hero Santosh Trophy**

An 80-year-old competition  
in a new format

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# President's Note

## Mr. Kalyan Chaubey

President, AIFF

The sporting world's eyes and ears are on the FIFA World Cup and hence on Football itself. It has been just over three months since my new team took over the reins at the All India Football Federation and I have been fortunate not only to be part of an exciting FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup hosted in our country, but also to witness the inaugural match of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

From a mere 13 teams in the inaugural edition in 1930 hosted by Uruguay, the World Cup in 2022 witnessed 32 nations play after 206 countries fought it out in the qualifiers. The traditional powerhouses of Europe and South America are often expected to succeed, but this World Cup has given us much more than that. Saudi Arabia's victory against Argentina, Japan's knockout blow against Germany, and of course Morocco becoming the first team from Africa to reach the semi-finals have all given hope to footballing countries in our region.

People often ask when India will qualify for the World Cup. That may be the ultimate goal for us at AIFF, but before that, we must be successful at the Asian level. I am happy to share that as we work on the roadmap to chart a sustainable plan for Indian Football, we have already made the first moves towards our mission to make our mark on the international level.

One of the most important decisions we have already taken, one which has been much discussed and argued – promotion for the Hero I-League clubs to the Hero Indian Super League. All speculation that it won't happen has been buried and AIFF, as per the roadmap agreed with AFC, has taken that step. While that makes the Hero ISL and Hero I-League a dynamic duo of club competitions at the highest level, our second move has been to ensure that the third competition after the above two – the Hero Second Division League – is open only to Indian players.



There is a dearth of top Indian players in key positions as these are all occupied by foreigners in the Hero ISL and Hero I-League. Hence, this move will help in opening the path for more Indian players to hone their skills at this level. We are confident that this, along with our focus on the inter-state senior championship, the Hero Santosh Trophy, will help throw up a larger pool of talent for the selection of the national squad.

This year, the format of the Hero Santosh Trophy has been changed in order to provide more matches to states and also avoid playing the same opposition every year. Also, another first in the national championship is that the two semi-finals, along with the third-place and final matches will be played in Saudi Arabia. That gives over 100 players and coaching staff the experience and opportunity to travel abroad and play in international facilities. Another motivating factor as many of them could be using their passports for the first time.

These are initial steps and perhaps the first of many more that the AIFF will usher in; we hope this will be a good start on a long path to international success.

# A Journey to Greater Heights

**Dr. Shaji Prabhakaran**  
Secretary General, AIFF

We came in at a very difficult phase of Indian Football and assuming charge as Secretary General of AIFF after a serious governance crisis presented me with many challenges. Though these challenging situations are nothing new to me, in perspective of the overall situation of Indian Football, we have a big task ahead to completely reform every aspect of the game in the country.

Since taking charge, I have been on a mission, first to understand holistically every aspect of the organisation – its strengths and weaknesses, and secondly, to primarily focus on developing the strategic roadmap with a dedicated team of professionals to bring about a complete transformation of football in India.

Though the organisation of the FIFA U17 Women's World Cup 2022 had taken much of focus in our first 60 days, we are resolute to work out a future roadmap which would bring back the glory days of Indian Football – the golden period of the 1950s and 1960s.

We are blessed with one key resource, i.e. our incredible human capital and for India to achieve its big goal, we have to collaboratively work as one. The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 showed how Asian sides are seriously challenging the giants of the game and moving in an upward trajectory. This strengthens our belief that India can do the same as well, provided we have a long-term plan with a realistic goal to challenge ourselves to become one of the top 10 footballing nations in Asia. That is our short-term target.

We have consistently engaged with our stakeholders as part of our team's goals to have a shared vision of the way forward for Indian Football.



We will strengthen our Member Associations, clubs and other stakeholders to have a vibrant football culture and change the image of the game through our good work and collaborative approach.

We also would like to thank our partners, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Sports Authority of India, FIFA and AFC for the day-to-day support we get in every aspect of our work, which keeps motivating us. Together, we can transform Indian Football.

There's a long way to go, and we will make every effort to improve the economic value chain of our players and partners in this journey to position football in India as an attractive proposition and a sport for the masses, and ultimately make India a footballing nation for the good of the game, and of the world.



# Proud to be Gracious Hosts

*Just a couple of months before the Qatar World Cup, India hosted the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup amidst much fanfare*

The FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup India 2022 was the ideal platform for the younger generations to showcase their talent and carve out a niche for themselves. India hosted the 2022 FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup this year from October 11 to October 30, 2022. Sixteen teams from six confederations played at three different venues – Bhubaneswar, Goa and Navi Mumbai. Spain defeated Colombia 1-0 to be crowned Champions.

*"Hosting the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup was an honour as well as an opportunity for the entire nation. Remaining cognizant of the positive impact such a major international tournament can have on the ecosystem of Indian football, the LOC, in collaboration with FIFA, the Government of India, AIFF, the respective state governments and all our respected stakeholders - has taken multiple initiatives to further the progress of women's football,"* said AIFF President **Mr. Kalyan Chaubey**.

FIFA President **Mr. Gianni Infantino** was felicitated by the All India Football Federation, in the presence of AIFF President Mr. Kalyan Chaubey, Vice President Mr. NA Haris, Secretary General Dr. Shaji Prabhakaran, Treasurer Mr. Kipa Ajay, along with the members of the AIFF Executive Committee, State Association representatives, and Technical Committee ahead of the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup final in Navi Mumbai on October 30, 2022. Mr. Infantino also interacted with representatives from the State Associations, and complimented India for being gracious hosts of the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup.

*"India has been a fantastic host. This makes me believe that you can do more in other competitions as well. In the meantime, there can be only one World Champion, but there are many other countries that took part, not champions. However, I always say that all the countries win in the end. Football brings smiles to every little girl and boy in the world. When children play or watch football, they smile,"* said Mr. Infantino.

Former Indian captain **Bala Devi** said on the occasion, *"India hosting the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup was fantastic news for all of us. Furthermore, Indian players playing alongside some of the best young talents during the World Cup was significant because this event served as a springboard for their careers."*



**Oinam Bembem Devi**, former midfielder of the Indian Women's football team, has been one of the foremost advocates of women's football in India for several years and she expressed her jubilation about the tournament. The Padma Shri recipient buoyantly expressed her thoughts about the tournament saying, *"The FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup India 2022 had shown to the parents that there are opportunities in India for women's football that can be explored and this tournament was the perfect way to shine the spotlight on women's football in India."*

*"Hosting the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup had been a great learning process for us. There are so many things involved in hosting a FIFA event- there are technical conducts, and event management, one has to take care of protocols ranging from security to accreditations and power back-ups and so many things. But we have managed to do it successfully. For the U-17 World Cup, we had the main stadium and another five training sites which were developed, including the main pitch of the Kalinga Stadium, all according to FIFA standards,"* said **Mr. Vineel Krishna**, IAS, Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Department of Sports, Government of Odisha, who was deeply involved in successful organisation of the U-17 Women's World Cup in Bhubaneswar.

"It is not only the hosting rights of the World Cup, but also an overall economic growth that we were looking to bring about through the sport. We all know that our state had so many beautiful beaches, and a very welcoming culture. Football is a great means of promoting the tourism industry in Goa, thus further boosting our economy," said **Dr. Ajay Gaude**, Director, Department of Sports and Youth Affairs, and Executive Director, Sports Authority of Goa.

"Tournaments of this nature allow everyone to watch world-class athletes perform in your backyard and the young generation certainly gets inspired by seeing these young athletes perform and excel in the sport, and I think it's extremely important because it leaves behind a strong legacy," said **Dr. Vijay Patil**, the Founder President of the DY Patil Sports Academy. The DY Patil Stadium was the proud host of the summit clash in the U-17 Women's World Cup, watched by thousands of people in the stands.





# Reviving Glories of Old

*Indian Football fans will get to see a revamped version of an 80-year-old competition, the Hero Santosh Trophy, this season*

The Hero Santosh Trophy is a tournament steeped in history, one that has produced many greats of Indian Football. As we get ready for a new chapter of the Senior National Football Championship, the atmosphere in Indian Football is rife with excitement after last season's packed stadiums at the Payyanad Stadium in Manjeri, one of the hidden gems of the beautiful game.

The Malappuram crowd thronged the Payyanad Stadium even four hours prior to kick-off of the Hero Santosh Trophy Final between Kerala and Bengal, where the former went on to lift their seventh Santosh Trophy title with a penalty shoot-out win over the 32-time champions.

It is with this fervour that the Hero Santosh Trophy is all set for a total makeover, which will see 32 states fight it out for the top prize in this 80-year-old competition. It's not only the Hero Santosh Trophy, but also the Hero Senior Women's National Football Championship that will receive a makeover of the same order. However, what makes this season all the more special is that the semi-final and final of the Santosh Trophy will, for the first time, be played outside India - in Saudi Arabia.



"The Santosh Trophy is one of the most prestigious trophies in Indian Football, and we have plans to restore it to its former glory. We want all the promising players of the country to participate in the competition, so that it would make the Santosh Trophy a great platform for the future generation," said AIFF President **Mr. Kalyan Chaubey**.



"We have seen prestigious competitions being hosted with much fanfare in other countries in the past, and we wanted to bring the same mould into football as well," said Mr. Chaubey. "This new step will also give a lot of motivation to the state teams and its players to do well and get the opportunity to play abroad for the first time," Chaubey added.

AIFF Secretary General **Dr. Shaji Prabhakaran** said, "I am glad to see the enthusiasm that the state associations have shown in proactive participation in the Hero Santosh Trophy and the Hero Senior Women's NFC. With the new competitive structure for the senior NFCs, we can expect greater value addition in many aspects of the game at the state level."

A number of former winners of the Santosh Trophy hailed the move to revive the past glory of the tournament. Former India captain, AIFF Executive Committee Member, and Advisory Committee Chairman **Shabbir Ali** believes that the Hero Santosh Trophy can now give more value addition to the Indian Football calendar.

"It's a brilliant step taken by the AIFF to revamp the Hero Santosh Trophy. With all the states now participating in the competition, it will be interesting as they will all get to play more matches," said Mr. Ali. "Also, with the zonal system now lifted, the teams will get to play different kind of opponents every year. Hosting the semi-finals and final in Saudi Arabia also adds a lot of value to the Santosh Trophy as well," he said.

**Padmashri Brahmanand Sankhwalkar**, a Santosh Trophy winner himself with Goa, believes that the renewed vigour with which the tournament is being organised will give greater incentive to the players. "For me, the Santosh Trophy is one of the topmost tournaments in India. It is a good attempt to bring back the glory of the past. I am sure the players will have a lot of incentive to do well, as they will be able to play abroad. It is a very good move," he said.

Ex-India international **Renedy Singh**, who had won the Santosh Trophy with Bengal and Manipur, believes that increasing the number of games will be a good step for Indian Football. "I have won the Santosh Trophy, and I can tell you that every state works hard to put together its team for this competition. Of course, this time, the semi-finals and final will take place in Saudi Arabia, which will provide further motivation to the players, who will get to play in such facilities in that country," said Renedy.

**Harish Rao**, who was the coach when Maharashtra won the Santosh Trophy last time, feels that hosting the tournament at a higher level will help give more opportunities to Indian players. "The Santosh Trophy is one of the best tournaments, especially for the youngsters. It's only the Indian players that play in the Santosh Trophy, and in the long run, it will help Indian Football," said Rao.

## Hero Santosh Trophy Groupings

GROUP I	GROUP II	GROUP III	GROUP IV	GROUP V	GROUP VI
Karnataka	Kerala	Goa	Bengal	Meghalaya	Punjab
Delhi	Mizoram	Assam	Maharashtra	Odisha	Manipur
Gujarat	Rajasthan	Tamil Nadu	Madhya Pradesh	Sikkim	Jharkhand
Uttarakhand	Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	Chhattisgarh	Telangana	Chandigarh
Tripura	Andhra Pradesh	Arunachal Pradesh	Daman & Dadra	Pondicherry	Himachal Pradesh
Leh & Ladakh	Jammu & Kashmir	Nagaland	Haryana	Andaman & Nicobar	Lakshadweep



# Of the Footballers, For the Footballers, By the Footballers

*Footballers governing the beautiful game is something that we have all been waiting to see. Now it's happening!*

The administration of Indian Football never had such a star-studded line-up.

A number of former national team players have been co-opted in various AIFF committees this year under the presidentship of Mr. Kalyan Chaubey. With knowledge and expertise both on and off the pitch, these members, who have donned the blue jersey in the past, are an extremely valuable addition to the AIFF administration to help take Indian Football Forward Together.

The new administration of the AIFF was swift to induct the former greats of yesteryears into decision-making positions in the Executive Committee, Technical Committee, Advisory Committee, and so on.

“The challenges can be tough, but the newly elected committee has the necessary experience to take up the tasks and reach the destination. The problems don't have quick-fix answers. But I can promise that there will be sustainable solutions, and they will bring results. I assure you that we have already started moving towards that direction by creating various high-power committees to suggest the solutions that we are looking for. We want to involve all eminent footballers to work on the different challenges Indian football is facing today, and reach the desired goal,” said **Mr. Chaubey**.



*"There are lots of hopes from the current management in AIFF. AIFF President Kalyan Chaubey has been a player himself, so he knows what footballers need, and how to improve the conditions for them. And AIFF Secretary General Shaji Prabhakaran has been a FIFA Development Officer in the past, and has worked in football for so long, so we have a lot of hopes about further development of Indian Football,"* said former India captain and AIFF Technical Committee Chairman **IM Vijayan**.

*"We all should work for the development of Indian football. That is all we are here for. I believe we can bring a lot of experience and provide the right advice for the improvement of football,"* said former India captain and AIFF Executive Committee Member **Bhaichung Bhutia**.



*"We now have two former women footballers in the Executive Committee, and it is a great honour and opportunity for us to represent the women's football community. This new refreshing change now means that we get a direct voice at the top administrative level, and I am sure that we can now begin to take better steps towards improving women's football in India,"* said former India player, AIFF Executive Committee Member, and Women's Football Committee Deputy Chairperson **Thongam Tababi Devi**.

*"One of the things we should focus on is regular participation of the Women's National Team in the Asian Games, and the performance in the World Cup and Asian Cup qualifiers. The Olympic Qualifiers are also coming up next year, and that is another area where we want to do well. Another critical issue, of course, is that of the rankings, for both the women and the men's teams,"* said former India player and AIFF Executive Committee Member **Pinky Bompal Magar**.



*"We should be at a stage where Asian Cup Qualification is a regular thing for India, and for that, our National Team needs to play during every international break. That's the only way the set of players will get better at playing alongside each other, that is how the team chemistry will build up. If we do that, I'm sure we can perform well once we get to the AFC Asian Cup,"* said former international and AIFF Technical Committee Member **Eugeneson Lyngdoh**.

*"I feel privileged that I shall have an opportunity to be a part of an important decision-making body in the AIFF. We are committed to the development of football at the grassroots level and take decisions to enable Indian football to make a greater impact at the international level,"* said former international and AIFF Technical Committee Member **Arun Malhotra**.





**AIFF's Executive Committee: The Team behind the scenes, taking Indian Football Forward Together**

# The Way Forward

*A proper league system with promotion and relegation between the different tiers is the need of the hour for Indian Football*

The league structure underwent a major revamp with the implementation of the AFC-approved roadmap this season.

The All India Football Federation announced in the first week of November 2022 that the Roadmap for Indian Football, as approved by the Asian Football Confederation in October 2019, after consultations with the Hero ISL and Hero I-League clubs, the AIFF and its marketing partners, will be followed. As per the Roadmap, the winners of the 2022-23 and 2023-24 Hero I-League seasons will stand a chance to gain promotion to the Hero ISL without any participation fee, basis fulfilment of the club licensing criteria.

AIFF General Secretary **Dr. Shaji Prabhakaran** said, "The decision to promote the I-League winner to the ISL is as per the roadmap which was agreed earlier. We have just continued with the roadmap. This will end all the speculation and will take Indian football forward. The I-League clubs will welcome this decision. The I-League champions will not give any participation fee. Since all the clubs playing in the ISL will have to fulfil Premier one licensing criteria, the I-League winners will also have to do the same."



*"The league structure needs to be a competitive one, and promotion and relegation are essential components of it. Just like promotion has its perks, relegation is also an essential part of the game. Especially in the latter part of the season, the teams in the bottom half don't have much motivation on the pitch. You throw relegation into the mix, and they will be fighting tooth and nail to avoid it. That makes the league much more competitive,"* said former India captain, AIFF Executive Committee member, and Advisory Committee Chairman **Shabbir Ali**.

*"I am truly excited by the prospects of the AFC approved roadmap for promotion and relegation. It will definitely take Indian football to newer heights and raise hopes for the clubs in the upcoming years. The Roadmap is absolutely perfect for taking Indian football ahead. As a player I played the NFL and then the I-League. I wanted to play in the ISL but that couldn't happen since I retired by then. And now that clubs can qualify for the ISL, I am very happy that players will finally get an opportunity to experience something new,"* said former India captain, AIFF Executive Committee and Technical Committee Member **Climax Lawrence**.



*"It's absolutely essential to have promotion-relegation. There is not that much difference between the I-League and ISL teams, especially the Indian players, and it would be very interesting to see them getting a chance to fight with the best on a regular basis. The ISL has brought in a lot of improvement in terms of infrastructure into Indian Football, which will help us in the long run. When the I-League clubs get into the ISL, they will also have to work on their infrastructure and grow their operations as a whole. That will only go on to improve the sport in India,"* said former India captain **Jo Paul Ancheri**.

*"I am very happy that we have finally been successful in convincing everyone about the importance of promotion from the I-League to the ISL, and that's a big step. It will bring something very important to our league system – competitiveness, and it will bring something the I-League clubs will have to fight for. I also can't wait for the time when the relegation starts as well, because the competitiveness will be present at that level too. It will bring more pace and intensity to such games,"* said India Senior Men's National Team Head Coach **Igor Stimac**.





# The Next Generation

*Our youngsters will now have an opportunity to showcase their talent at the national level, while getting more match time*

Hero U-17 Youth Cup 2022-23 will kick off on December 22, with the tournament set to be played across two phases. While the group stages will be played from December 22, 2022 to January 5, 2023, the final rounds, the venue for which will be announced later, will take place from January 20 to January 31, 2023.

There will be a total of 115 matches across 11 locations (Group Stages + Final Rounds) during the course of the tournament.

A total of 50 teams from 29 States/Union Territories have been divided into 10 groups, which will be played across 10 locations in the country in a single-leg round-robin format in the group stage. The 10 group winners and six best second-placed teams will qualify for the Final Rounds.

The Final Round will be played in a knock-out format, starting from the round of 16 stage.

AIFF Secretary General **Dr. Shaji Prabakaran** said, "We are coming up with the U-17 Youth Cup involving different academies and clubs from more than 30 states, which will see participation from more than 50 teams. This would definitely help us find talent for our India U-17 team, which is already in preparation for participating in the final rounds of AFC U-17 Asian Cup in May 2023.

"As we see it, the players, especially the youth players, didn't have the opportunity to play in any competition during the pandemic, which is why we have created this league, which would definitely inspire the youth," he said. "We plan to have a robust youth and Elite League structure going forward. This will be announced when we come out with the roadmap for our long term vision that could set our youth and elite development structure.

"This is just the beginning, and I'm sure the participating teams and clubs will be inspired with this opportunity, and we will find exceptional talent that could become future stars for India going forward."



Former India international **Renedy Singh** said, "It is very important to hold junior tournaments, and I am very happy to see importance being given to this tournament," said Renedy Singh. "It will be a good opportunity for the teams that get to progress to the latter stages. The Elite Youth League is a good start, but we need to keep building from there."



#### The following are the groupings:

**Group A, Bengaluru:** Alchemy International FA (Karnataka), Garhwal FC (Delhi), Lakshadweep Football Academy (Lakshadweep), Parappur FC (Kerala), Mumbai Kenkre FC (Maharashtra).

**Group B, Kolkata:** ATK Mohun Bagan (West Bengal), Sanju Football Academy (Sikkim), FAO Academy (Odisha), Minerva Academy FC (Punjab), Football 4 Change Academy (Manipur).

**Group C, Patna:** Alpha Sports Academy (Bihar), Hyderabad FC (Telangana), Odisha FC (Odisha), Techtro Swades United FC (Himachal Pradesh), Young Heroes (UP).

**Group D, Imphal:** Classic Football Academy (Manipur), Gauhati Town Club (Assam), Shillong Lajong (Meghalaya), East Bengal (West Bengal), Jamshedpur FC (Jharkhand).

**Group E, Hyderabad:** Sreenidi Deccan FC (Telangana), Mumbai City FC (Maharashtra), Gandhinagar FC (Gujarat), Silvassa United FC (Daman and Diu), Jeppiaar Institute of Technology FC (Puducherry).

**Group F, Chohal:** Punjab State FA U-17 (Punjab), Kumaon Heroes (Uttar Pradesh), Real Lona FC (Ladakh), Real Kashmir FC (Jammu & Kashmir), Himalayan FC Kinnaur (Himachal Pradesh).

**Group G, Bokaro:** Sail Football Academy, Bokaro (Jharkhand), KR Football Leaders (Uttarakhand), Rajasthan United FC (Rajasthan), Madan Maharaj FC (Madhya Pradesh), Adani Sarguja Football Academy (Chhattisgarh).

**Group H, Rudrapur:** Corbet FC (Uttarakhand), Hero FC (Jammu & Kashmir), Ladakh Football Schools and Academy (Ladakh), Chandigarh Football Academy (Chandigarh), Sudeva Delhi FC (Delhi).

**Group I, Bhilai:** RKM Football Academy (Chhattisgarh), Premier Sporting Football Academy (Bihar), Muthoot Football Academy (Kerala), Chennaiyin FC (Tamil Nadu), The Diamond Rock FA (Madhya Pradesh).

**Group J, Goa:** FC Goa (Goa), Bengaluru FC (Karnataka), ARA FC (Gujarat), Zinc Football Academy (Rajasthan), Churchill Brothers FC Goa (Goa).



**ALL INDIA  
FOOTBALL  
FEDERATION**