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**AIFF AWARDS NIGHT
A STORY OF
TRIUMPH & PROGRESS**

- Kalyan Chaubey
President, AIFF

**MANOLO MÁRQUEZ
MAGIC SHOW
SET TO BEGIN**



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President's Note

The success of AIFF Awards Nights is a mirror of Indian football's progress

Kalyan Chaubey

An Awards Night is not all about awards only. It is a night of joy when people come together to celebrate and appreciate certain unique achievements; not only of their own but of others too. They also share the stories that remain masked behind the joy; the stories of dedication and hard work that fetched them success.

The AIFF Awards Night in New Delhi on July 19, 2024, held for the first time since 2017, was no different. Now that the show is over, we can assert with pride and conviction that the night was a huge hit. We remain grateful to the Hon'ble Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports, Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, and the Hon'ble Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. Kiren Rijiju, both known for their passion for sports, for gracing the occasion despite their busy schedules. We were pleasantly surprised to learn that Dr. Mandaviya, aware of the heavy Delhi traffic in the evening, boarded a Metro from his office in central Delhi to ensure he arrived on time for the Awards Night in the extreme southwest of Delhi. It was an incredible gesture that left all of us deeply indebted to him.

It's a special day as we honoured the best players, coaches, referees, member associations and everyone involved in the Indian football fraternity, who helped the sport move forward together in our country. While I heartily congratulate the individual award winners for their great achievements, a careful look at the awards list would reveal the story of how Indian football has progressed in the recent past.

Take the example of the Jammu and Kashmir Sports Council, which was bestowed with a special award. Serious football activities in Jammu and Kashmir nearly came to a standstill due to political unrest.



At the All India Football Federation, we fought against the tide and, with active help from the J&K Sports Council, made every effort to normalise football activities in the state. In 2023, the Under-17 National Camp was held in Srinagar with great success and the team finally emerged as the champions of the SAFF tournament. This year, another U17 National Camp is being held there and I am sure our experience will be no different from the previous season.

The J&K Sports Council did everything for the betterment of the game. It upgraded the infrastructure at the TRC Ground. Recently, the Blue Cubs Development Centre for Jammu and Kashmir Sports Council Football Academy in Srinagar was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports, Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya. It is a great thing for Indian football. Kashmir is at a high altitude and enjoys cooler climates in comparison to other parts of India. Having one of the nearly 30 Blue Cubs Development Centres here in Kashmir



will certainly help the boys train and progress toward the international level. J&K Sports Council is one example of the many. Several other state associations, Bengal, Manipur, Punjab, Odisha, Goa, Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Karnataka, have found places on the award list for contributing heavily towards the improvement of football.

While Gujarat did a tremendous job in grassroots activities and launching new projects, the way Punjab has been supporting women's football is unthinkable. Karnataka held the maximum number of youth tournaments, and Kerala and Maharashtra emerged as leaders in registrations of the biggest number of men's and women's footballers, respectively.

Ever since this committee took over, special emphasis has been given to increasing international and national football activities in the northeast. In 2023, the Tri-nation tournament in Manipur was a big success. This year, when the All Manipur Football Association bagged the award for being the most successful Member Association in the National Football Championships (NFCs), it didn't surprise those who follow Indian football closely.

In the northeast, Arunachal Pradesh has never had the opportunity to host the Men's National championship for the Santosh Trophy since its inception in 1941. In March 2024, they hosted the Santosh Trophy and final rounds, and the Government of Arunachal Pradesh and the Arunachal Pradesh Football Association walked away with a special award for conducting it fittingly. Equally noteworthy was the contribution of the Government of Odisha and the Football Association of Odisha, who hosted a series of international and domestic tournaments this season.

We aimed to spread the game to every nook and corner of the country and we are proud to say we have achieved our target to a great extent. But we are aware that the work is not yet over. As poet Robert Frost famously said: "Miles to go before I sleep", we intend to follow a similar policy.



Chhangte, Indumathi named best on a shining Night of AIFF Awards

The gala night of the AIFF Awards saw the chosen best assemble to celebrate the joy of Indian Football

Lallianzuala Chhangte and Indumathi Kathiresan were named the AIFF Best Men's and Women's Players of the Year 2023-24 in a glittering AIFF Award Night attended by a galaxy of icons from the sporting world in New Delhi on Friday, July 19, 2024.

Among the dignitaries present were the Hon'ble Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports, Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, the Hon'ble Union Minister, Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. Kiren Rijiju, Olympic medal winner Mr. Yogeshwar Dutt, India's Davis Cup captain, Mr. Rohit Rajpal and many other well-known faces of Indian sport.

Among other dignitaries were Mr. Amitav Sharma, Executive Council Member, IOA, Lt. General Harpal Singh, Executive Council Member, IOA, Mr. Monal Chokshi, General Secretary, Swimming Federation of India, Mr. Narendra Batra, former President, IOA, FIH, and Hockey India, Mr. Rajiv Mehta, former Secretary, Indian Olympic Association, Mr. Bholanath Singh, Secretary General, Hockey India, Mr. Kishore, General Manager, Nivia Sports, Mr. Sahdev Yadav, Treasurer and Executive Council Member, Indian Olympic Association, Mr. Bhupinder Singh Bajwa, former President, Wushu Association of India, Namdev Shirgaonkar, President, Commonwealth Taekwondo Union, Mr. Vipin Kumar, Brand Manager, Performax, Mr. Rochak Langer, Chief Operating Officer, FSDL, Mr. Jackey Kothia, Head of Marketing, IndiGo, Mr. Shiv Sharma, Deputy Director General, Sports Authority of India.

The entire top brass of the All India Football Federation, including the AIFF President Mr. Kalyan Chaubey, Vice President Mr. NA Haris, Treasurer Mr. Kipa Ajay, Acting Secretary General Mr. M Satyanarayan, Executive Committee members, and senior officials of the state associations, were present.

While welcoming the minister, AIFF President, Mr. Kalyan Chaubey, said, "Today is a day of joy. I would like to thank Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, the Hon'ble Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports, and all my colleagues in the AIFF and the IOA for joining us here. It's a special day as we honour the best players, coaches, referees, member associations and everyone involved in the Indian football fraternity, who help the sport move forward together in our country."

Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, the Hon'ble Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports, said, "It's an honour to be present in this prestigious event organised by the AIFF and our friend Kalyan Chaubey. It's fantastic to see the best players, coaches, referees, and state associations being felicitated here. Football is the most popular sport in the world. I believe that sports isn't only about playing, but about discipline and friendly behaviour. I believe that when we present awards, we recognise their greatness, and in turn encourage the winners to keep winning and perform even better. Let us all pledge to take Indian sports to greater heights."

Mr Kiren Rijiju, Hon'ble Union Minister, Parliamentary Affairs, said, "I'd like to congratulate all the award winners tonight. Thank you for inviting me on such a wonderful evening for Indian football. I'm very happy to be here with my colleague and the new Sports Minister, Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya. I'm sure under his and our Prime Minister's guidance, the entire sports fraternity will do better."

"It especially heartens me to see rapid development in grassroots football, the results of which, I'm sure we will see in the next 8-10 years. With the Khelo India and the Youth Leagues, Indian football will have a good future. From the early 1950s and 1960s, Indian football was at a very high standard and we can surely revive it. It's not possible to get success immediately. The footballing culture has to go deeper. We need to build that passion and craze in the country. Money and infrastructure is not enough alone. Culture of sports is the most critical, and medals and trophies will follow."

Apart from Chhangte and Indumathi, the other individual award winners were Khalid Jamil (Best Men's Coach), Sukla Dutta (Best Women's Coach), David Lalhlansanga (Promising Men's Player), Neha (Promising Women's Player), Ramachandran Venkatesh (Best Referee) and Ujjal Halder (Best Assistant Referee).



AIFF AWARDS NIGHT 2024



Lallianzuala Chhangte was awarded the AIFF Men's Player of the Year for the second time in a row, becoming the fifth player to win the award multiple times. The 2023-24 Indian Super League Cup Winner scored 11 goals, assisted seven in all competitions for his club Mumbai City FC, and was the highest-scoring Indian in the ISL. For the Indian national team, Chhangte scored against Qatar in Doha in the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers in June 2024.

Chhangte said, "I am so honored to receive this award. Although I can't be there, I'm sending a huge thank you to our Hon'ble Sports Minister sir. Thank you so much for this prestigious award, of which I feel undeserving. And tonight, I thank God, my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for His guidance, protection, and blessings. He's the only reason why I am here. Next, my family who have been my biggest supporters since day one. My friends and family from Mumbai City FC and my brothers in the national team. This would not be possible for me without you guys."



Indumathi Kathiresan was awarded the AIFF Women's Player of the Year, becoming the first player from Tamil Nadu to win the award. The midfielder won the 2023-24 Indian Women's League title with Odisha FC, scoring five goals in the competition. Indumathi won the Best Midfielder award in the IWL. For the Indian national team, she scored against Estonia in the Turkish Women's Cup in February 2024.

Indumathi said, "I am delighted to be here tonight and receive this award. I didn't expect to win it. I'm so happy and I would like to thank my coaches and teammates for helping me win this award."

Young striker **David Lalhlansanga was awarded the AIFF Promising Men's Player of the Year** for his fiery goalscoring form last season. The 22-year-old scored 34 goals for Mohammedan Sporting in last season's I-League, Calcutta Football League, and the Durand Cup, helping his side win the former two titles. Lalhlansanga was the top scorer in the CFL and the Durand Cup, and earned his first national team call-up in May 2024 for the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers.





Eighteen-year-old winger **Neha** was awarded the **AIFF Promising Women's Player of the Year** for her stellar performances down the flanks. She scored two goals in India's SAFF U19 Women's Championship triumph in Bangladesh. Neha was also influential in Haryana's run to the final of the Senior Women's National Football Championship for Rajmata Jijabai Trophy, scoring three goals for her state. She also netted one goal in the IWL for HOPS FC and was part of the senior India squad for the friendlies against Uzbekistan and Myanmar.

Neha said, "I feel happy to win the most promising women's player award. It's a great honour to receive it in front of my coach and a senior player like Indu *didi*, who I admire. I hope I can make my country and parents proud, and I wish to keep performing well."



Jamshedpur FC head coach **Khalid Jamil** was awarded the **AIFF Men's Coach of the Year**. Taking charge of the club midseason, he led the Red Miners to the semi-finals of the Kalinga Super Cup, their best-ever finish in the competition.

The AIFF Women's Coach of the Year was awarded to **Sukla Dutta**, who coached India to the **SAFF U19 Women's Championship** title in Bangladesh and also won the inaugural edition of IWL 2 as the head coach of Sreebhumi FC, thus earning promotion to next season's IWL.



Ramachandran Venkatesh was awarded the **AIFF Referee of the Year**. He has been an AFC Elite Referee since 2022 and oversaw the final of the ISL Cup and the Kalinga Super Cup this season. Venkatesh also refereed one match each in the AFC Cup and the AFC U23 Asian Cup Qualifiers.

Ujjal Halder was awarded the **AIFF Assistant Referee of the Year**. He was included in the AFC Elite Referee panel this year and oversaw 22 matches in the ISL and the I-League in the 2023-24 season.





Punjab Football Association was the MA with most Coaching Courses.
Mr. Vijay Bali (L), Joint Secretary, Punjab Football Association and Executive Committee Member, AIFF, received the award on behalf of PFA.



MA that hosted the most AIFF competitions: Football Association of Odisha & Goa Football Association
Mr. Avijit Paul (L), Joint Secretary, Football Association of Odisha, and Executive Committee Member, AIFF, and Mr. Caitano Fernandes (C), President, Goa Football Association, received the award on behalf of FAO and GFA, respectively.



Most Successful MA (Club Competitions): Indian Football Association (West Bengal)
Mr. Ajit Banerjee (C), President, IFA, and Mr. Anirban Dutta (L), Honorary Secretary, IFA, received the award on behalf of IFA.



Best MA - Supporting Women's Football: Punjab Football Association
Mr. Vijay Bali (L), Joint Secretary, Punjab Football Association and Executive Committee Member, AIFF, received the award on behalf of PFA.



MA with most player registrations (men's): Kerala Football Association
Mr. Anilkumar Prabhakaran (L), Secretary, Kerala Football Association, received the award on behalf of KFA.



Most Successful MA (NFC Competitions): All Manipur Football Association
Mr. Rattan Kumar Singh (L), President, All Manipur Football Association, received the award on behalf of AMFA.



MA with most player registrations (women's): Western India Football Association (Maharashtra)

Dr. Kiran Chougale (R), Secretary, Western India Football Association, received the award on behalf of WIFA.



Special Award for MA launching new projects: Gujarat State Football Association

Mr. Mulrajsinh Chudasama (L), Secretary, Gujarat State Football Association, received the award on behalf of GSFA.



MA with most Grassroots activities: Gujarat State Football Association

Mr. Mulrajsinh Chudasama (L), Secretary, Gujarat State Football Association, received the award on behalf of GSFA.



MA with most Youth tournaments conducted: Karnataka State Football Association

Mr. M. Satyanarayan (L), Acting Secretary General, AIFF, received the award on behalf of KSFA.



MA with most Refereeing courses: Gujarat State Football Association

Mr. Rajdeep Singh Jadeja (L), Executive Committee Member, Gujarat State Football Association received the award on behalf of GSFA.



Government of Arunachal Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh Football Association: For hosting the Santosh Trophy Final Round

Mr. Kipa Ajay (L), Secretary, Arunachal Pradesh Football Association, and Treasurer, AIFF, received the award on behalf of APFA.



Govt of Odisha and Football Association of Odisha: For hosting FIFA WCQ, Intercontinental Cup, Kalinga Super Cup, Senior Women's NFC Group Stage, Junior Boys' and Girls' NFC Tier 1 and Sub-Junior Youth League

Mr. Avijit Paul (second from left), Joint Secretary, Football Association of Odisha, and Executive Committee Member, AIFF, received the award on behalf of the Govt. of Odisha.



Jammu and Kashmir Sports Council: For twice hosting the India U17 men's national team camp and upgrading the infrastructure of the TRC Ground

Ms. Nuzhat Gul (L), Secretary, Jammu & Kashmir Sports Council, received the award on behalf of J&KSC.



Ms. Smriti Suri (R), Senior official, Football Sports Development Ltd accepted the Special Award in recognition of outstanding support in promoting football on behalf of FSDL.



Mr. Rupinder Singh (R), Business Development Manager, Nivia, accepted the Special Award in recognition of outstanding support in promoting football on behalf of Nivia.



Mr. Shiv Sharma (R), Deputy Director General, Sports Authority of India, accepted the Special Award in recognition of outstanding support in promoting football on behalf of SAI.



Mr. Shiv Sharma (R), Deputy Director General, Sports Authority of India, accepted the Special Award in recognition of outstanding support in promoting football on behalf of Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports.



Mr. Vipin Kumar (R), Brand Manager, Performax, accepted the Special Award in recognition of outstanding support in promoting football on behalf of Performax.



Team IndiGo accepted the Special Award in recognition of outstanding support in promoting football on behalf of IndiGo.



Manolo Márquez appointed head coach of Senior Men's National Team

Márquez has been coaching in India since 2020, first as head coach of Hyderabad FC before he switched over to FC Goa

The All India Football Federation's Executive Committee meeting, chaired by AIFF President Shri Kalyan Chaubey, was held at the Football House in New Delhi, on Saturday, July 20, 2024.

The meeting was attended by AIFF Vice President Mr. N.A. Haris, Treasurer Mr. Kipa Ajay, and members Ms. Thongam Tababi Devi, Ms. Valanka Natasha Alemao, Ms. Pinky Bompal Magar, Mr. Menla Ethenpa, Mr. Vijay Bali, Mr. Syed Husnain Ali Naqvi, Mr. Neibou Sekhose, Mr. Maloji Raje Chhatrapati, Mr. Mohan Lal, Mr. Syed Imtiaz Husain, Mr. Arif Ali, Mr. Bhaichung Bhutia, Mr. Shabbir Ali, Mr. Climax Lawrence, and Acting Secretary General Mr. M. Satyanarayan.

Mr. Ajit Banerjee President, Indian Football Association (West Bengal), Mr. Caitano Fernandes, President, Goa Football Association, Mr. Mulrajsinh Chudasama, Secretary, Gujarat State Football Association, Mr. Anuj Gupta, President, Football Delhi, and Mr. Rochak Langer, COO, FSDL were present as special invitees.

The Committee, in the first order of the day, deliberated on the appointment of the new head coach for the Senior Men's National Team, and selected Manolo Márquez for the job, effective immediately.

During the 2024-25 season, Mr. Márquez will continue his role as the head coach of first team at FC Goa, handling both responsibilities concurrently before assuming the national coaching role on a full-time basis.

Commenting on the development, AIFF President Shri Kalyan Chaubey stated, "We are delighted to welcome Mr. Márquez to this important role and are also thankful to FC Goa for their generosity of releasing him for national duty. We look forward to working with Mr. Márquez in the years ahead. The AIFF, FC Goa, and Mr. Márquez will collaborate closely to ensure there is minimal impact between the two jobs and strive to achieve the best possible results for all involved."

Responding to the appointment Mr. Márquez said, "It's an honour for me to be the National Football Team coach of India, a country I consider my second home. India and its people are something I feel attached to and I feel a part of since I first came to this beautiful country. I want to do my best to bring success to the millions of fans we have. I am very grateful to FC Goa for allowing us the flexibility to help the national team during the coming season while I am still the club's head coach. I'm grateful to the AIFF for this opportunity and we hope to do great things for football."

Aged 55, Manolo Márquez has extensive knowledge and experience of Indian football and coaching national team players, especially youngsters. Many national team players in the last few years were called up from his Hyderabad FC team.

Márquez has been coaching in India since 2020. He has coached two ISL clubs – his first stint was with Hyderabad FC (2020-23), before he switched over to FC Goa (2023-present). He is an ISL Cup winner with Hyderabad FC in 2021-22. Overall, Márquez had an extensive coaching career in Spain – Las Palmas (top division) and Las Palmas B, Espanyol B, Badalona, Prat, Europa (third division).

On other developments, based on the recommendation of the AIFF President Shri Kalyan Chaubey, the Executive Committee of the AIFF has resolved today to appoint Mr. Anilkumar Prabhakaran as the Secretary General of the AIFF. The Executive Committee has also accepted the resignation of Mr. Anilkumar from the AIFF Executive Committee and all other sub-committees he was a part of. Mr. Anilkumar's appointment shall be subject to the internal protocols and induction procedures as required by the AIFF Constitution and he shall take charge upon the completion of the same.





Stakeholders exchange ideas as AIFF hosts Women's Football Strategy Workshop

The workshop focussed on planning and building a robust structure for women's football, through maximum participation at grassroots

SRUTI CHAKRABORTY & AKHIL RAWAT

The All India Football Federation hosted the Women's Football Strategy Workshop, conducted by FIFA expert, Mr. Simon Toselli, as a part of the FIFA Women's Development Programme, on Friday, June 21, 2024, in New Delhi.

Members from state associations, IWL clubs, and guests from the Sports Authority of India (SAI), the United Nations, UNESCO, and UNICEF, alongwith AIFF Vice President Mr. NA Haris, AIFF Acting General Secretary Mr. M Satyanaranan, AIFF Women's Committee Chairperson Ms. Valanka Alemiao and Women's Committee members Ms. Shabana Rabbani, Ms Madhurimaraje Chhatrapati, Ms. Chitra Gangadharan and Ms. Thongam Tababi Devi, attended the workshop to discuss various strategies and planning for the development of women's football in India and formulate the Women's Football Strategy for the next five to six years.

Welcoming the participants, AIFF Vice President, Mr. NA Haris, said: "Whatever we try to do in women's football, it should bring good results. And to achieve, we need to focus more. To bring focus, we need to be more disciplined. Football has developed well in India in the last few years, especially in women's football. Our President Mr. Kalyan Chaubey and the Acting Secretary General, Mr. M Satyanarayan are working hard in this aspect. I am confident that women's football can do much better at a faster pace."

The objective of the Women's Football Strategy Workshop is to plan to advance Indian Women's Football towards a consistent and reflective sporting fabric for the country and build a robust structure through maximum participation at grassroots. It was a combined effort from all stakeholders who gathered to form a holistic approach towards football development to build a successful Women's National Team. The ultimate goal is to qualify for the 11th edition of the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2031 on merit.

AIFF Acting General Secretary Mr. M Satyanarayan said, "We had a very positive workshop and we're also happy to have representatives from UN, UNICEF, and UNESCO here. It was a fruitful day with not just club and state representatives and other stakeholders, but referees as well. We've seen an upsurge in the number of girls playing football thanks to Khelo India Leagues. This strategy comes at an appropriate time, there's nothing better than putting a plan and working towards that.

"Looking at our senior women's team, we hope to climb to 40s in the FIFA rankings in the next few years if we put in the quality work and skills into that. The growth isn't just dependent on the players but the people who manage the game. We discussed all these aspects today and Mr. Toselli's expertise was crucial for us. It's going to be one huge combined effort from states, clubs and sponsors. We need more and more girls playing football in an organised way. Playing Baby Leagues is one thing but having girls play consistent and organised football is our motive."

The key focus areas (pillars) discussed in the workshop were - National Teams, Competitions, Grassroots, Capacity Building and Governance.





Mr. Simon Toselli, FIFA Women's Football Technical expert, said: "First of all, big congratulations to AIFW for putting this strategic workshop together. We've been collaborating for a few months and the aim was to organise this workshop to make the key stakeholders come. The main actors of football here in the Indian clubs are from different regions, from the states, from league organisers. We invited them to propose key strategic directions and pillars such as grassroots, youth development, competition, elite governance, and then to open the discussion and hear the reality, understand their feedback, and inputs, for us to consider and analyse to build the strategy. The workshop was dynamic, we had nice participation, and now we are working on the next step. It's going to be another job to analyse this session to integrate and finalise the strategy."

Ms. Valanka Alemao, the AIFW Executive Committee member and Chairperson of the AIFW Women's Committee, said: "In women's football, like in all walks of life, inclusivity is important. If everybody is involved in it, and the team is strong, then the sky's the limit. India is a great country; the beauty of India is its diversity. We have diversity with different languages, religions, cultures and food. But what keeps us going is one heart and one love. It is the scouts we need to concentrate on. We are emphasising on the 2031 World Cup. For that, all of us should gather and work together to see that Indian women make the World Cup. Today, all the stakeholders of women's football were invited. A lot of brainstorming was involved. There was teamwork and a lot of ideas spoken. Now, we need to implement what was said today. That's our task now."

Mr. Shiv Sharma, Deputy Director General, SAI, said: "It is often said that women's football in India is better than men's football. That can be said about lots of other disciplines as well. Hopefully, Indian football will enter the world circuit in the next decade. India is planning to host the Olympics in 2036. I hope Indian women's football is ready by then so we can field a competitive team."



Pyari's lovely strikes steal the hearts in Myanmar face-off

Playing against higher-ranked opponents, the Indian Senior Women's National team displayed resilience and proved a few points in Yangon friendlies

SRUTI CHAKRABORTY

Pyari Xaxa can surely pride herself on her ability to uphold a promise, no matter how difficult the circumstances. Five months ago, in the Turkish Women's Cup, Pyari scored the crucial fourth goal in the Indian Senior Women's National team's ding-dong battle against Estonia and made it clear she wasn't finished yet. "I want to score more for my country," the 26-year-old striker was quick to say after the match.

The Odisha native, who plys her trade for Odisha FC in the Indian Women's League, kept her word when the Indian senior women's national team faced hosts Myanmar in two FIFA friendlies at the Thuwunna Stadium in Yangon on July 9 and 12, 2024.

Pyari emerged as the star performer, scoring a goal in each match. She found the net in India's first game in a 2-1 loss. In the second game, where India displayed marked improvement in their performance, nimble-footed Pyari put the Blue Tigresses ahead before Myanmar could force a 1-1 draw.

While analysing the matches against Myanmar, head coach Langam Chaoba Devi said, "To progress to the next level, our girls need to play high-intensity games against higher-ranking teams. Since the Turkey trip, we have noticed issues with endurance and stamina, particularly around the 65 to 70-minute mark.

“However, in these matches against Myanmar, I have seen improvements as the girls didn't tire as quickly. We need more days to work on various areas like aerial balls, finishing, and combination play.”

When India played two international friendlies against Uzbekistan in Tashkent in May 2024, the coach expressed her desire to usher in new faces in the squad. Chaoba said, “We need young talents nationwide to emerge as future stars. I am trying to bring in new faces and provide them with international football experience.

“I need three more Dalimas, three Ashalatas, three Anjus, and three Pyaris for this team. And can we do that without bringing in new talents? We will have to prepare for the future,” she said earlier.

Coach Langam Chaoba Devi started Aruna Bag in the first match, while 19-year-old Mousumi Murmu made her senior debut in the second half of the second match.

When asked if she had identified the best future talents in women's football in these matches, she responded, “I am looking at the team as a whole, and everyone is giving their best. We are improving and progressing.”

In the second match on July 9, India began aggressively, but their early efforts were thwarted by a solid Myanmar defence, who were aided by challenging playing conditions. Even though India dominated the first half, they couldn't score.

The breakthrough came early in the second half, when Pyari Xaxa took advantage of a long clearance from goalkeeper Elangbam Panthoi Chanu. Myanmar responded almost immediately, with Win Theingi Tun scoring from a cross by Yoon Wady Hlaing to level the score.

In the first match, Myanmar opened the scoring with a 14th-minute header from Win Theingi Tun, capitalising on a corner. Pyari equalised in the 58th minute with a tap-in after a spill by the Myanmar goalkeeper.

However, San Thaw Thaw restored Myanmar's lead in the 74th minute, converting a free-kick. Despite India's efforts to find another equaliser, the Myanmar defence held firm, resulting in a win for the hosts.



Aruna Bag: A ride incredible to the international arena

"I chose football". The 21-year-old with a multi-sport background finally broke through to the Senior Women's National Team in the friendlies in Uzbekistan



SRUTI CHAKRABORTY

At 18, when most teenagers are busy deciding what subjects to choose and which college to attend for advanced studies, Aruna Bag was faced with the dilemma of choosing between kabaddi and football.

Aruna decided to choose football over kabaddi at the age of 18, and it kicked off a remarkable journey that landed her with the National team within three years. In between, she dedicated herself to intense training and tireless endeavour to improve her skills. She faced numerous challenges along the way, but her passion and perseverance kept her going. She embraced the opportunities that came her way and by the time the defender turned 21, she was called up to represent the country.

"Since childhood, I played football and cricket with the local boys just for fun. My father, who used to play football in local leagues and tournaments in Bardhaman, inspired me a lot," Aruna told the www.the-aiff.com from the National camp in Kolkata.

"My sports teacher in school encouraged me to participate in sports like kho kho, kabaddi, football. At that time, my father used to regularly watch many football games at home on television, from where my interest, especially in football grew. After I played in school-level competitions, my teacher asked me to choose between kabaddi and football before the School National Games," she said.

"I chose football," she says. "I can't describe it in words, what happened in me then but I think football became my weakness. A lot of credit for this transformation goes to my father."

Aruna grew up in Kalna, a historic city in the Purba Bardhaman district of West Bengal, often called the "City of Temples." Her father owns a cycle repair shop, while her mother is a housewife. She also has a school-going sister. Despite appearing to have a smooth journey, it wasn't always easy for her.

She said, "I used to practice in the Asansol ground and travel from Kalna to Asansol every week, a nearly five-hour journey. I started following women football players like Ashalata di (Devi), and Dalima di (Chhibber) and asked myself if they could do it, why not I?"

That's when my hard work and dedication to football started. I always dreamt of playing for the national team, but I never thought that playing two seasons in Kickstart FC would lead me to play for the country. When I shared the news of my national team call-up with my parents for the first time, they were happier than me."

Aruna represented Karnataka in the Senior National Women's NFC in the 2022-23 season. Then she played her first season in the Indian Women's League (IWL) for Kickstart FC in the same year. She also participated in the Karnataka Women's League (KWL) last season before staying back with Kickstart FC again in the 2023-24 season. She scored against East Bengal in the latest season of IWL and was named the player of the match.

When asked about her domestic football journey, she said, "It's not that I was performing consistently in all the seasons. In the first season of IWL, I used to be on the bench for Kickstart. I think, I didn't impress the coaches in the earlier season, but I decided to play in KWL to improve my game. After KWL, this season, I was in the starting XI for most matches for Kickstart in IWL."





Aruna got her national call-up during the Uzbekistan tour last month. She played her first game in the first of the two friendlies where she replaced Soumya Guguloth in the 89th minute. “That feeling was surreal,” she says.

“In my second National camp, my main aim is to work harder, so that I can be considered for the starting eleven. The training in the National camp is excellent, and I am learning a lot from it – especially the game style, and passing drills. From what I learned in Uzbekistan, they are technically strong, hold the ball, close down players, and release the ball quickly,” Aruna had said before leaving for Myanmar, where she was rewarded for her hard work and started in both matches at right-back.

“All the players here are senior to me. Some of them are my idols whom I follow and look up to. They are extremely helpful and motivate us a lot. It was a dream come true to play with players like Ashalata di whom I used to watch since childhood. I talk to her on a personal level about my game. She is sweet and makes me understand things. I try to follow her advice.

Aruna has a list of players she admires, including Sunil Chhetri, Lallianzuala Chhangte, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Sergio Ramos. “Apart from Chhetri sir, I like Chhangte. His speed, ball control and endurance are something I am fond of. I am also a big fan of Cristiano Ronaldo because of his mentality. He has reached this place because he is mentally strong. I always try to follow these things,” Aruna said.



Indian trio plays decisive roles in ZNK Dinamo Zagreb's maiden cup title

Kashmina's penalty in the cup final shootout helped Dinamo Zagreb earn the trophy, in a game where two more of her compatriots played important roles

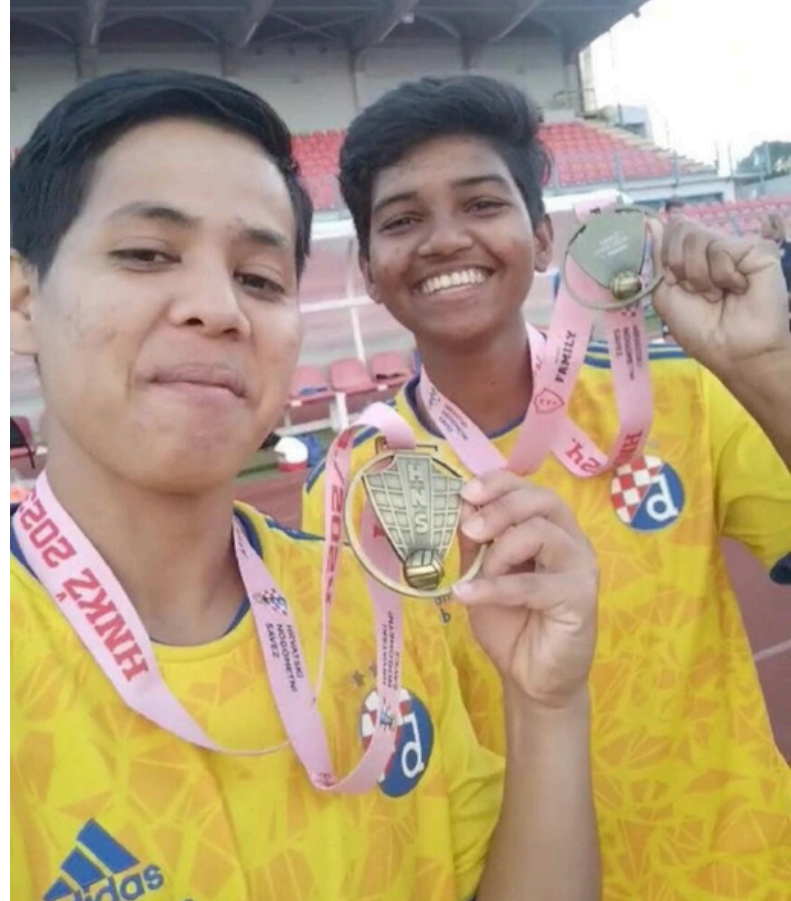
SOUOMO GHOSH & SRUTI CHAKRABORTY

Saturday, June 22, 2024, was a special night for women's football in India. Three Indians – Jyoti Chauhan, MK Kashmina, and Kiran Pisda -- helped their club, ZNK Dinamo Zagreb clinch the Croatian Women's Football Cup, the club's maiden silverware at the top echelons of Croatian football.

Kashmina, the 25-year-old midfielder from Manipur, turned out to be the cynosure of all eyes at the SRC Mladost ground in the picturesque town Cakovec, as her successful conversion broke the deadlock in the sudden death when the final match was poised to go either way.

Dinamo's summit clash against ZNK Osijek was a tight knot that was only undone after a penalty shootout that went down to sudden death before Kashmina calmly scored the final spot-kick to help the Croatian capital side win 5-4 on penalties after the match ended 1-1.

It was a sensational victory against a powerhouse club like Osijek, who are record 19-time champions of the Croatian Women's Football Cup. They had been invincible throughout this season until going down to Dinamo in the final.



As a club, ZNK Dinamo Zagreb have been a haven for Indian women footballers over the last couple of seasons. It began with Jyoti and Soumya Guguloth, in 2022, and they were soon joined by winger Kiran and Kashmina, who eventually played their crucial roles in their team's momentous triumph on Saturday.

Kashmina told the-aiff.com, "The way we won this cup was special. Our club had never won it before, and the manner in which we won it right at the end, simply makes it all the more memorable.

"I've scored a few goals in the IWL as well, but winning here in Croatia, with the three of us playing an important role in the team, it really feels like we have created history for our club," said Kashmina.

While Kashmina came on from the bench in the final, Jyoti and Kiran played the full game. Both Jyoti and Kashmina had scored one each in the quarter-finals and semi-finals, respectively.

This is the second season when ZNK Dinamo Zagreb made it to the final of the Croatian Women's Football Cup, and it is a case of being second-time lucky. They lost the final 2-3 to ZNK Split last season. Jyoti had scored in that final but only ended up with the silver medal.

"Winning the Croatian Women's Football Cup is a huge achievement for us all. Not only is it the first time our club has won it, but what makes this win even better is that we had lost the final last season, and now have come back to win our first title," said Jyoti, a striker, who comes from Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh.

From an Indian perspective, we are now seeing an era in which multiple of our senior women players are going abroad to win silverware with their respective clubs. Manisha Kalyan had started things off by winning the Cypriot First Division Women's League in 2022-23, followed by Dangmei Grace winning the Uzbek women's league and cup double with FC Nasaf.



Blue Tigers to play Tri-Nation friendly tournament in Vietnam in October

The Indian senior men's team, led by new head coach Manolo Marquez, will play a Tri-Nation friendly tournament in Vietnam during the October 2024 FIFA Window. Apart from India and hosts Vietnam, the third team in the fray are Lebanon.

Both Vietnam (116) and Lebanon (117) are placed ahead of India (124) in the latest FIFA rankings.

Fixtures:

October 9: Vietnam vs India

October 12: India vs Lebanon

October 15: Vietnam vs Lebanon



Right preparations won the title for Corbett, says coach Mohammad Rizwan

Scoring an average of seven goals a game, the debutants stormed their way to the AIFF Club Futsal Championship title

AKHIL RAWAT

Corbett FC took to the futsal court in Gujarat by storm. Debutants only by name, but not by their game. A staggering 48 goals in seven games en route to lifting the trophy after Sunday's final. The numbers speak for their dominance.

But they were given a real test by Golazo FC, and it took an extra-time winner from who else but PC Lalruatsanga in the 49th minute to seal the title. Twice Corbett had taken the lead in regular time, but Golazo crawled back each time. However, when teenage sensation Lalruatsanga, hiding in plain sight at the back post, slid in to convert Pratik Swami's inch-perfect cross, there was no time for another comeback. Corbett FC ran out deserved winners, becoming the first Uttarakhand side to win an AIFF tournament. Lalruatsanga's 17 goals, more than a third of Corbett's, earned him the Golden Boot.

"The key to our championship success was the quality of our players, our positive attitude, and thorough preparation," said head coach Mohammad Rizwan.

Corbett literally faced every sort of challenge in their path to becoming champions. If the final was a test of their perseverance, the semi-final against Ambelim produced some heart-in-the-mouth moments when their 6-2 lead with just 10 minutes to go was slashed to 6-5 and they had to scrape through to the finish line. The wild celebrations at the whistle, perhaps more impassioned than the ones after the final, conveyed it all.

"The semi-final against Ambelim was a tough battle as we expected but we managed to clinch a 6-5 victory. In the final, Golazo posed a formidable challenge with their solid tactical prowess and technical skills," said Rizwan.

"In the end, celebrating with my teammates is a memory I'll forever cherish," he added.

Until the semi-finals, they spewed pure dominance on the futsal court. An 11-1 demolition of former champions Delhi FC, a 9-0 drubbing of Nyenshen FC, eight past Classic Football Academy, six past Millat FC and five past Sports Odisha. There was no stopping Rizwan's army.

The army spearheaded by Lalruatsanga, and well complemented by the likes of Pratik Swami, Aaron Dcosta, Malsawmtluanga Pautu, Lalbiakzuala, and captain and goalkeeper Lhakpa Dorjee Bhutia. They hail from various corners of the country but on the court of the Swarnim Gujarat Sports University, they synced with perfection.

"Our two-week camp helped fine-tune our strategy. We planned each match based on the opponents' strengths and weaknesses. We learned from our mistakes and improved continuously," said Rizwan.

Humble words. They didn't make many mistakes in these two weeks but that hunt for perfection pushed them to the champions crown. "It's a remarkable achievement for us at Corbett FC. It reflects on our dedication, teamwork and determination," added Rizwan.

However, it would not be fair if we don't speak about the other challengers who may have fallen short of the trophy but did their part in lighting up the third edition of the AIFF Futsal Club Championship.

Golazo FC, who weren't only free-scoring but watertight too, boasted the best defensive record with just eight goals conceded. FC Thyristor, Ramhlun Venglai, the Mizoram champions and debutants at the national stage, who had a great run into the semi-finals with mostly homegrown talents. Ambelim SC, who sent defending champions Minerva Academy FC packing with a sensational 8-2 victory. Debutants Millat FC, who overcame the opening-day defeat to win three in a row and qualify for the quarter-finals. Speed Force FC, who must feel unlucky to miss out on the knockout stage by the barest of margins despite winning three thrilling matches.

15 days, 43 matches, 386 goals. The AIFF Futsal Club Championship 2023-24 was an out-and-out success. A celebration of the sport of futsal, which is gradually finding its feet in the country.





Probables announced for SAFF U17 and U20 Men's Championship camp

The All India Football Federation named 31 probables for the U17 national camp and 36 probables for the U20 national camp for the SAFF U17 and U20 Men's Championship 2024, respectively.

The U17 national camp is being held in Srinagar, while the U20 national camp is taking place in Goa.

List of probables for SAFF U17 Championship (to be held in Bhutan from September 18-28):

Goalkeepers: Rohit, Aheibam Suraj Singh, Nandan Ray.

Defenders: Thongram Rishikanta Singh, Lekhachandra Phairembam, Mohammed Kaif, Asher Rebello, Yaipharemba Chingakham, Usham Thougamba, Chingtham Renin Singh, Karish Soram, Abdul Salha, Jodric Abranches.

Midfielders: Ngamgouhou Mate, Lunkhongam Chongloi, Kishor Tiwari, Laishram Suraj Singh, Levis Zangminlun, Banlamkumar Rynjah, Mohammad Sami, Vishal Yadav, Manbhakupar Malngiang, Mohammad Shameel, Mohammad Arbash, Brahmacharimayum Sumit Sharma.

Forwards: Ginminhao Khongsai, Prem Hansdak, Ahongshangbam Samson, Lairenjam Bharat, Hemneichung Lunkim, Dhriten Mehra.

Head coach: Ishfaq Ahmed.

List of probables for SAFF U20 Championship (to be held in Nepal from August 19-28):

Goalkeepers: Divyaj Dhaval Thakkar, Lionel Daryl Rymmei, Priyansh Dubey, Sahil, Tajamul.

Defenders: Dhanajit Ashangbam, L Hemba Meetei, Malemngamba Singh Thokchom, Manabir Basumatary, Ngangbam Surajkumar Singh, Ngasham Bitan Singh, Pramveer, Ricky Meetei Haobam, Sachin Dev, Sonam Tsewang Lhokham, Surendra Singh Konjengbam, Thomas Cherian.

Midfielders: Akash Tirkey, Arjun Singh Oinam, Ebindas Yesudasan, Gurnaj Singh Grewal, Ishaan Shishodia, Manglenthang Kipgen, Manjot Singh Dhami, Rohan Rajesh Mangaonkar, Vanlalpeka Guite.

Forwards: Gwgmwsar Goyary, Haodamlan Vaiphei, Hridaya Vinay Jain, Kelvin Singh Taorem, Korou Singh Thingujam, Linky Meitei Chabungbam, Monirul Molla, Naoba Meitei Pangambam, Rohen Singh Chaphamayum, Thanglalsoun Gangte.

Head coach: Ranjan Chaudhuri



DRAWS OUT FOR JUNIOR BOYS' NFC AND JUNIOR GIRLS' NFC TIER 1 AND TIER 2

The draw of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 of the Junior Boys' National Football Championship for Dr. BC Roy Trophy 2024-25, along with Tier 1 and Tier 2 of the Junior Girls' National Football Championship 2024-25 were conducted at the Football House, on Wednesday, June 26, 2024.

The **Tier 1 of the Dr. BC Roy Trophy** will be played in Narainpur, Chhattisgarh, from July 27 to August 12.

Group A – Uttar Pradesh, Mizoram, SAI, Odisha

Group B – Jharkhand, Goa, Maharashtra, Delhi

Group C – Punjab, Chandigarh, Meghalaya, Karnataka

Group D – West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu

The **Tier 2 of the Dr. BC Roy Trophy** will be played in Nagaon, Assam, July 28 to August 11.

Group A – Nagaland, Andaman & Nicobar, Manipur, Lakshadweep, Haryana

Group B – Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Jammu & Kashmir, Gujarat

Group C – Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Assam

Group D – Rajasthan, Pondicherry, Bihar, Telangana

The **Tier 1 of the Junior Girls' National Football Championship** will be played in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, from August 3 to 20.

Group A – Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar

Group B – Manipur, Goa, West Bengal, Haryana

Group C – Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat

Group D – Odisha, Mizoram, Delhi, Chhattisgarh

The **Tier 2 of the Junior Girls' National Football Championship** will be at Belgaum, Karnataka from July 27 to August 9.

Group A- Chandigarh, Andaman & Nicobar, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Jammu & Kashmir

Group B – Rajasthan, Lakshadweep, Maharashtra, Tripura, Pondicherry

Group C – Assam, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Telangana

Group D – Sikkim, SAI, Meghalaya, Madhya Pradesh



I-LEAGUE 2023-24 RELEGATION

The All India Football Federation has decided to impose relegation in the I-League 2023-24 as per the rules and regulations.

In the 13-team competition, NEROCA FC with 14 points and TRAU FC with 13 points finished as the two bottom teams and have been relegated. Mohammedan Sporting Club with 52 points emerged champions.

AIFF GRASSROOTS DAY CELEBRATED ACROSS THE COUNTRY ON JUNE 23

The AIFF Grassroots Day was celebrated with great enthusiasm in more than two dozen states across the country on Sunday, June 23, 2024.

In 2023, the Federation declared June 23 as the AIFF Grassroots Day, which is the birth date of former India captain, Asian Games gold medallist and national coach for several years, Pradip Kumar Banerjee.

This year, the event saw participation from over 160 entities - clubs, member associations (state/UTs), academies, NGOs, schools, etc. - who organised a variety of activities including tournaments, workshops, and football festivals for kids under the age of 12.

The celebrations were a tremendous success, with approximately 10,000 participants (kids, parents, coaches, volunteers, event coordinators, etc) involved in various events across India. The widespread involvement and the diverse range of activities highlighted the growing interest and commitment towards the development of grassroots football in India.



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