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**INDIAN WOMEN'S FOOTBALL
CONTINUES TO FLOURISH**

- Kalyan Chaubey
President, AIFF

**ASHALATA DEVI:
100 CAPS AN
EPOCH-MAKING FEAT**



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President's Note

Indian women's football continues to flourish

Kalyan Chaubey

Women's football is rapidly advancing in India, and October 2024 presents an opportunity to honour two women who have served as role models for future generations.

Indian women's team defender Ashalata Devi requires no introduction in the Indian football circles. Now, she has played her 100th game in international football against Pakistan in the SAFF Women's Championship in Nepal, which India won by a thumping 5-2 margin. It is a huge achievement on her part.

Another woman from India has achieved a notable feat. Assistant referee Riiohlang Dhar is currently busy supervising in the FIFA U17 Women's World Cup in the Dominican Republic. She officiated in the match between Spain and the USA and will be given responsibility in more matches.

These achievements clearly explain how much women's football has progressed in India. But like Rome was not built in a day, this feat was also not accomplished overnight. It is the result of through and through hard work the present committee put in ever since they took over 25 months ago.

The sheer number of women's football tournaments currently being held in India is unprecedented. The Indian Women's League, after the takeover of the current Committee, has been converted on a home-and-away basis, thus allowing the clubs and their players to operate more systematically and professionally. It has also allowed us to give more matches to each team, which was not the case earlier.

While the best women players in India hone their skills in the IWL, the AIFF's decision to establish the IWL 2 as the second tier women's league was also well received. In the long run, this will increase the pool of professional women players in the nation, indirectly increasing the competitiveness of the senior national



team.

This is not the end of the story. In the last couple of months, we have organised the Sub-Junior Women's and Junior Women's National Championships in the most extensive manner and the group matches of the 29th Senior Women's National Football Championship for the Rajmata Jijabai Trophy are currently in progress. It amounts to more than 150 matches played all over the country.

When tournaments such as these are held across the country, it is not just the players that benefit from them. Indeed, people from all walks of life around the game also benefit, thus further growing the economy within the game. From referees to ground staff, everyone benefits from the growth of such tournaments.

New footprints on the sands of Indian beach soccer

The Federation, along with development on the conventional football front, is also looking towards a holistic approach to create different avenues for those involved in the game. We have identified beach soccer as one such avenue, where India can progress in the long run.

We conducted the first ever Beach Soccer National Championship in Surat last year, and the sport has experienced rising popularity ever since. The efforts of the



AIFF produced immediate results as the sport was, for the first time in history, included in the 2023 National Games in Goa, followed by its appearance in the Diu Beach Games 2024.

Such has been the interest in beach soccer that the AIFF has now taken it upon itself to once again field a beach soccer national team in the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup qualifiers, which are set to take place next year. This is the first time in 16 years an Indian national beach soccer team will compete at the Asian level.

Of course, it has its own set of challenges, which we have been working towards. The first problem that we have addressed is that of beach soccer-specific coaches. India held its first-ever AFC Beach Soccer Certificate Course (Level 1) in Porbandar in October 2024, which will be followed by trials and selection of a national team.

At the end of the day, it is our hope that the 25 players, who get selected for the national beach soccer team, will have an experience of a lifetime and then go on to share that knowledge with the generations to come. Right now, it is less about results and more about how we grow a long-ignored sport in India.

Beach soccer is one area where various studies have shown that the game can give something back to the community. The game being played mostly in coastal areas, both beach soccer and the tourism industry can enjoy a symbiotic relationship. Our honourable Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi ji, that great visionary he is, played a huge role when the Beach Games was held in Diu. The success of the Games once again underlined how it could inject new life into India's beaches.



A calm Ashalata Devi promises many more storms after crossing the 100 mark

The 31-year-old became the first Indian woman footballer to reach a century of international caps

SRUTI CHAKRABORTY

Loitongbam Ashalata Devi, the distinguished centre-back, who has faithfully guarded the Indian women's national team's defence like the legendary Rock of Gibraltar for the past 13 years, donned the Blue Tigresses' jersey for the 100th time on Thursday, October 16, 2024, when India beat arch-rivals Pakistan 5-2 in the SAFF Women's Championship 2024 at the Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu.

On the eve of the historic occasion, Ashalata poured her heart out to www.the-aiff.com on the journey she undertook in 2011, on the highs and the lows, and the memories that remain etched in her mind.

How do you feel that you're about to reach such a milestone?

Ashalata Devi: I'm very happy and excited that I'll reach 100 caps in the first game of the SAFF Championship. It's difficult to put this feeling into words. This tournament is very important for our team. I hope we can play better and win the trophy.



I feel the emotions about the fact that I'll become the first Indian woman footballer to get a century of international caps for the country. I'm proud of my hard work and consistency. I would like to thank my teammates that I was able to play with them for so long and perform at a high level together.

When you debuted in 2011 in the Olympic qualifiers, did you ever think you'll get to 100 caps?

Honestly, I had never thought that. Since I started playing, I have always enjoyed playing football and I just wanted to keep representing the nation. I never set a dream that I want to get 100 or 200 caps. That was not on my mind. But I've been very excited in the last few matches that I'm about to play my 100th one.

What's in your mind right now? You're about to reach an important milestone. Do you feel any pressure?

I think some pressure is always there ahead of big games and big tournaments. I've always accepted that we should feel the pressure. Because the more we feel it, the more the opponents also feel. I have to perform, and I have to remain calm, and focus on my game. We had a setback in the previous SAFF Championship, so we want to right those wrongs.

What were the highest and the lowest points of your 13-year career so far?

The lowest point was when we hosted the AFC Women's Asian Cup in 2022. We never thought we'd have to withdraw from the tournament due to COVID. After working hard for so many months, all those unfortunate things happened. That's the biggest setback of my life. We all will never be able to forget that in our lives.

The highest point was when we won the 2019 SAFF Championship here in Nepal. There were a lot of changes in the team during that time. But everyone performed their best, gave everything on the pitch. We had utmost unity and team bonding. There hasn't been a better moment than that in my career so far.

What is the most memorable match of your career?

The friendly match we played against Brazil in Manaus in 2021 before the Asian Cup. We faced so many legends like Marta and Formiga. We did lose the match but that was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. That was a surreal opportunity for our team. We took a lot of learnings from that match.

You've seen a lot of transition in women's football since you started playing. What are your thoughts on that and as a player, what do you want to change?

I started representing India in youth teams in 2008 and the senior team in 2011. That was a very different time. In the last two to three years, the scenario of women's football has changed a lot. We didn't have the IWL before 2016. There weren't many opportunities for women to play football round the year. Now, we get a lot of tournaments. There's IWL, IWL 2, Khelo India Leagues, National Championships and much more. We had a four-month long home-and-away IWL last time. We should keep improving. If we keep playing more matches, it will help women's football grow in the country.

What would be your favourite India XI to play alongside you?

I'll make a line-up of senior players I've looked up to. At goalkeeper, I would put Roni ma'am (Ronibala Chanu), Tuli Goon at right-back. Romi Devi and Alochana Senapati at centre-backs with me. Umapati Devi at left-back. In midfield, Bembem Devi with Premi Devi. Sasmita Malik as the left-winger. Tababi Devi as striker. Prameshwori Devi on the right wing.

What are your future plans for the future?

Obviously, I'll try to play for as long as I can. Honestly, there's nothing else I know apart from football (laughs). I really love football with all my heart. Even when I am injured, I continue to work hard and recover so I can get back to full fitness and enjoy football again. After retirement, I want to be involved with football. I'll continue to play for as long as I enjoy football and my body allows me to.

When Sunil Chhetri retired in June after playing more than 150 games, you talked about how difficult it is to play with such consistency for so many years. How do you feel about yourself when you're also about to reach a big milestone?

When Sunil sir retired, I was so shocked. Maintaining yourself at the top level for almost two decades is so difficult. I've realised that the things we love and are passionate about, we think about that a lot deeper. We keep wanting to get better, whether it's on the training pitch or in the gym or technical or classroom stuff. When we're younger, there's a lot of hunger to get better. After getting to a higher level, there's more struggle to maintain that level of performance. That's a big thing. Because you can't drop that level or else other better players will take our place. It's tough after you're over 30 years of age. Our body gets slower, and recovery from injuries is also more difficult. I always think that whatever the issues I face, I can't stop and give up. The hard work can never stop. That's exactly how Sunil sir kept going for so long and gave so much joy to our country.





Who would you like to dedicate this 100th game to? A lot of young girls, including in this team, consider you as a role model. What's your message to the fans?

My mother has never watched me play live. I wanted to bring her for the AFC Women's Asian Cup match in Navi Mumbai but that couldn't happen because of COVID. So, I would like to dedicate this match to her. Also to my teammates, coaches and physiotherapists who have helped me in my tough times, physically and mentally.

To the fans, I would like to tell them to keep watching our matches and supporting us on social media. Your support and blessings mean a lot to us. Keep supporting women's football as much as possible.



Farukh Choudhary: A striker's reawakening through three turmoil years

The 27-year-old marked his return to the international fold after 1099 days with a crucial equalising goal against Vietnam

AKHIL RAWAT

October 10, 2021 was a bittersweet day for Farukh Choudhary. In a must-win game against Nepal in the SAFF Championship, he delivered a crucial assist for Sunil Chhetri to score the winning goal in the 82nd minute. But at that moment, he would never have foreseen he'd have to wait over three years to don the India blue again.

An anterior cruciate ligament injury suffered in the same match ruled him out of the football pitch for over a year. India went on to win the SAFF Championship title in Maldives as his teammates carried his number 12 jersey in the celebrations. "I believe that life has given me a chance to rise higher than ever and I'm going to be back stronger than ever," Farukh had stated after the injury.

Last Saturday was the beginning of his comeback. 1099 days after his previous appearance for the country, Farukh didn't just make the starting eleven, but also scored the important equaliser in the friendly against Vietnam in Nam Định. A proper poacher's finish – getting in behind the centre-back and lobbing the ball above the onrushing keeper. That's the kind of instinct and composure you need when you're desperate for a goal. It was only India's third goal of the year 2024.

"It feels really good personally. I wasn't part of the national team for so long. I was giving my best at club level. And to be back and make a difference here feels amazing," said the 27-year-old.

Farukh isn't a youngster making his way through the ranks. But in a way, it does feel like a second debut for him. He is a highly-experienced forward at the international level for the nation, having made his India debut in the 2018 SAFF Championship. He has played under three different coaches - Stephen Constantine, who handed him his debut, Igor Stimac, under whom he scored his first India goal and won his first trophy, and now Manolo Márquez, who trusted him to don the national colours again. Farukh repaid the trust by scoring India's first goal in Márquez's tenure.

"I was working towards my comeback. I always knew that eventually I will make it to the national team again," said Farukh. "And when I say that I knew I would make it, it's not out of arrogance. It was the belief. I knew if I perform in ISL, I'll get a call-up for the camp. And then when I join the camp, it's up to me to make a place in the first eleven."

Whatever Márquez saw in the five days of training in Vietnam was enough to impress him and give him a place in the starting line-up. "The entire last three years, I was preparing for it. I wasn't desperate, but I knew that with time, it would come. I didn't play many games for Jamshedpur FC due to injury. Last year, I played some games but didn't score many goals. So it didn't make sense for me to be part of the national camp. Now that I have scored two goals (in the ISL), got a call-up, scored here also, I think it is a good run for me individually," said Farukh.

Immediately after scoring the goal, Farukh pointed to the bench, dedicating his goal to his teammates, and especially, physiotherapist Gigy George, who played a big role in Farukh's recovery from the ACL injury.

"Gigy sir has supported me a lot. I had promised him that whenever I score a goal, I'll come to you. But obviously, we were chasing the game and after the equaliser, wanted to restart quicker, so I didn't have time to go to the bench but I pointed there to my teammates, Aakash (Sangwan), Nikhil (Poojary), Rahul (Bheke), all these guys, and specially Gigy sir," shared Farukh.





Blue Tigers to host Malaysia in November friendly

The Senior India Men's team will play a friendly match against Malaysia during the FIFA Window on November 19, 2024. The match will be played in India, the venue for which will be announced later.

Malaysia are currently ranked 132rd in the FIFA ranking, while India are ranked 126th.

The last time the two teams met was in October 2023 in the Pestabola Merdeka semi-final. The Blue Tigers lost 2-4.



Aakash Sangwan: The boy from a boxing village who made it in Indian football

Results aside, the big positive from the tournament was international football returning to Hyderabad after 16 years

AKHIL RAWAT

It has been quite a last few months for Aakash Sangwan. After impressive performances at left-back for Chennaiyin FC in the last two seasons, the 28-year-old signed for FC Goa and has now earned his first-ever India call-up.

After five training sessions in the city of Nam Định, Vietnam, the dream was finally realised for the Bhiwani boy when he came on in the 89th minute in the friendly against Vietnam for his senior India debut, and helped India keep the hosts at bay in the final few minutes to keep a 1-1 draw.

"The first call-up to the national team is always special as everyone desires to play for India at least once in their lives. So, it means a lot," said Sangwan, who shares his room with former Chennaiyin FC teammate Farukh Choudhary.

"The experience so far has been great. I can see why most of these players have been a part of the national team for so long, everyone here is confident and sure about their abilities. I want to contribute to the team as much as I can in whatever way possible, so that we can move forward in the right direction," Sangwan added.

It was just over a week before when Sangwan discovered he would be on the plane to Vietnam, thanks to a text that left him confused at first, and then pleasantly surprised.

"Well, someone sent me a congratulatory text and I couldn't make out what the wish was for. Then when I went online I saw the list of probables and realised why I got the text. It was a surprising as well as a joyous moment," he shared.

What's not surprising for Indian football fans is Sangwan's inclusion in the national squad. Dishing out consistent performances in the ISL in a highly-competitive position like left-back and making to the national team where several names like Subhasish Bose, Akash Mishra, Jay Gupta, and Naorem Roshan Singh have played at the position in the last year, just goes to show the level he has acquired.

It's a unique situation, but Sangwan has the same head coach and the majority of the coaching staff at his club FC Goa, and the national team, which in some way, has made adjusting to the India camp easier for him.

"One thing I can say about the coaching staff is that they are honest and direct people. Good or bad, they will tell you directly to your face. Coach Manolo's relationship with me is just as good as he has with every other player in the national team and FC Goa," he said.





Just over two years ago, Sangwan was an I-League player for RoundGlass Punjab FC, hoping to make a big move. Chennaiyin FC came calling and after 10 assists in two seasons for the Marina Machans, the doors to the Indian national team have opened up.

"I believe it's the constant learning and growing day by day that helped me gain these recent step-ups in my career. I will keep trying to do what I have always done - and that is giving my best and learning from every situation, whether good or bad," he said.

Sangwan's footballing journey began in Bhiwani, a town in Haryana renowned for producing world-class boxers. But Sangwan's sporting journey began with his feet - at the age of 10 when he joined a local coaching academy at the Bhim Stadium with his two elder brothers.

"Until 16 years of age, I played in every open tournament possible in Haryana. Then my family shifted to Panchkula and I started training at the Sector 17 Ground in Chandigarh. For the next few years, I played inter-university tournaments and the Santosh Trophy," he said.

Then, Minerva Punjab FC happened, which opened Sangwan's doors to professional football. He was part of the club's senior team from their very first season in the I-League and made his debut in April 2017. In the 2017-18, Minerva won a historic I-League title, bringing Sangwan his first major trophy.

"I spent multiple years at Minerva. From coming on as a substitute to eventually becoming a regular in the first eleven. I later played for Churchill Brothers and RoundGlass Punjab FC before making it to the ISL."



SAFF U17 champions contemplate more fireworks on Asian platform

After successfully defending their SAFF U17 title in Bhutan, Ishfaq Ahmed's Blue Colts now eye the big prize - a place in the AFC U17 Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2025

AKHIL RAWAT

There's no time for celebrations for the Indian men's U17 team. After their successful title defence of the SAFF U17 Championship in Bhutan on September 30, the Blue Colts were back in Srinagar and already on the training pitch two days later, preparing for the all-important AFC U17 Asian Cup Qualifiers to be held in Thailand from October 23 to 27.

The players' moment of basking in the glory was limited to the Changlimithang Stadium as they waved the tricolor and chanted with a thousand-odd Indian fans after the full-time whistle, and got their pictures clicked with the trophy, with DJ Bravo's 'Champion' being blasted on the loudspeaker.

"We returned to Srinagar on Tuesday evening, had a rest day on Wednesday and a recovery session on Thursday morning before returning to our normal training routine," said head coach Ishfaq Ahmed, who has won back-to-back SAFF titles with the same batch. 16 out of the 23 players were part of his SAFF U16 Championship winning squad last year in Bhutan as well. The team moved to Kolkata on October 13 to continue their training.

"It is not easy to repeat success and I have been putting a lot of emphasis on that. If you want to be a good football team, you always have to be consistent and do better than last time. I think we did quite well. Our opponents had also improved from last year. But, we still need to work a lot more ahead of the Asian Cup qualifiers."

The SAFF U17 Championship, for which the Blue Colts had been training since July in Srinagar, was seen as the first hurdle of what could be some hugely significant next few months for them. India are pitted against Brunei Darussalam, Turkmenistan and hosts Thailand in Group D of the AFC U17 Asian Cup Qualifiers, where the group winners and five best runners-up among all 10 groups will qualify for the final tournament in Saudi Arabia in April next year. The AFC U17 Asian Cup 2025 will also act as the qualification tournament for the newly-expanded 48-team FIFA U17 World Cup Qatar 2025.

The only way is upwards for Ishfaq Ahmed's boys. The former India international is delighted with the winning habit his team has created but also knows that the hurdles will keep getting higher as they enter deeper into the realm of international football. Ahmed singled out what he was impressed with in Bhutan and what he wants to improve.

"Honestly, I was happy with the way we were organised defensively. But I was disappointed with the Nepal match (4-2 win in the semi-final), where we lost concentration and conceded two quick goals, which I feel went against our character. We had been very disciplined in every match.

"We need to concentrate on attacking and defending set-pieces, and pay attention on counter-attacks. Players are told their job in every situation and they need to do that. We need to be better at finishing. Teams make it difficult for us by sitting back. But the good thing is that we created a lot of chances and were able to score in every match," he said.



The focus shifts to Brunei (October 23), Turkmenistan (October 25) and Thailand (October 27) now. Ahmed said that the boys have also taken learnings from India U20s who narrowly missed out on qualifying for the AFC U20 Asian Cup last week due to an inferior goal difference, and understand the importance of converting as many chances as they can so that they don't end up in regret.

"I am very sure that we will create many chances (in the qualifiers) but we have to be more lethal in front of the goal. We have a big example of the under-20s in front of us. We have to go all out in every game. The last one against Thailand will be the toughest one.

"Of course, we are preparing for all three opponents, but the first match is the first hurdle as of now. It will be crucial because it will set the bar and tone for the rest of the two matches for us," Ahmed concluded.







AFC U20 qualifiers: A bittersweet end to India's teasingly close campaign

The Ranjan Chaudhari-coached India U20 boys missed out on qualifying for the AFC U20 Asian Cup China 2025 on goal difference

SOUOMO GHOSH

They tried so hard and got so far, but it did not matter in the end. India came within just a few goals of qualifying for the AFC U20 Asian Cup China 2025, in what was their best qualification campaign in 22 years at this age group.

The equation was simple for the Blue Colts as they took to the pitch against Laos in their last match of Group G of the AFC U20 Asian Cup qualifiers. After beating Mongolia (4-1) and suffering a heartbreaking defeat against IR Iran (0-1), India needed to win against hosts Laos at the Lao National Stadium KM16 in Vientiane, Laos, and then hope for the results in the other nine groups to go their way.

While they executed the first part, the latter was eventually their undoing. The top teams from each group, along with the five best second-placed finishers qualified for the final rounds. While India's victory against Laos (2-0) on Sunday, 29 September, 2024, initially put them among the top five second-placed teams, the Blue Colts had to endure an agonising four-hour wait to find out that they eventually finished seventh, falling short on goal difference.



Syria, Uzbekistan, Korea Republic, Saudi Arabia, Korea DPR, Indonesia, IR Iran, Iraq, Japan, and Qatar qualified as the winners of their respective groups, while Yemen, Kyrgyz Republic, Australia, Thailand, and Jordan qualified as the five best second-placed teams.

India (+4) only fell short on goal difference, after garnering six points, the same as Thailand (+17) and Jordan (+8). There were no celebratory scenes after the match, as everyone rushed to their phones to check what was happening in the other groups. However, Laos being four hours ahead of the Middle East, where several crucial games were being played, the exhausted Indians were in for a long night.

In the end, Kyrgyz Republic's 1-1 draw against Japan, and Australia's stalemate against Qatar were enough to push India out of the top five. Glued to the sundry live streams from across the internet, the Blue Colts had one last hope. Jordan had to beat Qatar. However, even that did not come to pass, the latter winning 3-2 on their home turf.

India head coach Ranjan Chaudhuri rued the missed chances. "The boys played so well, I am proud of them. But sometimes, things just don't go your way," he said. "We created so many chances that we could have scored six-seven goals against both Laos and Mongolia. Eventually, we were punished for not converting them. That's where we need to improve."



Despite the unsuccessful qualification campaign, however, India can take comfort in the heart they showed in the three matches. While their games against Mongolia and IR Iran were played in front of empty galleries, the Laos match saw an attendance of 3,323 in Vientiane, as the spectators jeered every India attack.

After the dust had settled at the Lao National Stadium, however, the sentiments were completely reversed. As the Blue Colts traipsed out of the stadium towards their bus, they were flanked by hundreds of Laotian supporters, who gave them a standing ovation in the mixed zone. Autographs were signed and selfies clicked aplenty, in a show of the true sporting spirit.



AFC Grassroots Charter welcomes AIFF as newest Silver member

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) has become the latest Member Association of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) to be endorsed with a Silver-level membership under the AFC Grassroots Charter.

Bestowed with a Bronze-level membership in 2020, the AFC Grassroots Panel members were pleased to note the AIFF's strong commitment towards grassroots development through long-term sustainable programmes, regional involvement, and strong partnerships with various stakeholders across the country.

As part of their evaluation, the AFC experts visited the AIFF Headquarters in New Delhi and received updates on the future plans and ongoing activities of the grassroots and youth football department as well as women's football, referees, and competitions divisions.

The assessors were particularly impressed with the Blue Cubs initiative, designed to instil a lifelong love for the sport among children between the ages of four and 12 by engaging them in various football activities.

The project, which aims to involve 35 million children by 2026, includes several elements, ranging from establishing development centres and hosting festivals to expanding the reach of the game to schools and remote villages across the subcontinent through active collaboration with major stakeholders such as Indian Super League clubs, local governing bodies and non-profitable organisations.

The panel members also travelled to the southern state of Goa and visited the SESA Football Academy, where they observed various grassroots activities and training sessions of 'C' licensed coaches.

Additionally, they visited the FC Goa academy, which is focused on advancing grassroots football in the region, and were pleased to observe a strong collaboration with the state government and regional investors, which has resulted in the establishment of a robust system, including a youth league for ages six to 18, that held nearly 1,100 matches in the past year alone.

Finally, the experts visited the Youth Futsal Academy and commended its efforts in ensuring regular competitions and training sessions for children from across the state, under the supervision of expert coaches.

AIFF Secretary General Anil Kumar Prabhakaran said: "This recognition is a testament to the Grassroots team's dedication and hard work.

"It will undoubtedly fuel our motivation to even greater heights. With this momentum, I am confident we are well on our way to reaching Gold level membership in the near future."





Diamond Harbour FC bag I-League 3 title

The Bengal side put on a dominant show in the play-offs

Diamond Harbour FC from Kolkata realised the dream they harboured right from the start of the season as they won the I-League 3 title defeating Chanmari FC 1-0 at the Naihati Stadium on Sunday, October 6, 2024.

Midfielder Ragav Gupta's stinging left-footed grounder from outside the box in the 29th minute made all the difference and brought an end to Chanmari's eight-match winning run. Overall, the Mizoram side had a rather unimpressive day in office.

Diamond Harbour, only in their third year in the business, not only qualified for the I-League 2 but also bagged their maiden national-level title.

Whatever the scoreline may suggest, the match hardly went right down to the wire as the Kibu Vicuña-coached side had overwhelming control over the proceedings and could have easily won by a far bigger margin.

The Bengal side with 69 per cent ball possession camped themselves around the Chanmari goal and opened up the rival defence time and again. Prolific striker Narohari Shrestha, with eight goals in his kitty in the tournament, missed a couple of easy chances.

Shrestha, however, turned the provider when Gupta scored the only goal of the match. While he was quick to anticipate Gupta could have a clear view of the goal and placed the ball in the right area, the lanky midfielder unleashed a grounder that left the Chanmari FC custodian Zothanmawia stranded.

Four teams – Diamond Harbour FC, Chanmari FC, Keinou Library & Sports Association FC, and SAT Tirur – have qualified for the 2024-25 I-League 2.



FIFA Coach Capacity Building Workshop: AIFF President calls for true leadership training programme in women's football

The four-day FIFA Coach Capacity Building Workshop, organised by the All India Football Federation and conducted by FIFA experts Mr. Simon Toselli and Ms. Stéphanie Spielmann, concluded at the National Centre of Excellence (NCE) in Kolkata on Thursday, September 19, 2024.

This workshop is a vital component of the FIFA Women's League Development, which falls under the broader FIFA Women's Development Programme.

The Workshop was attended by 25 coaches (19 women and six men) from the Indian women's national teams, IWL, and IWL 2 clubs, and various other stakeholders. They were from 12 states. Mr. Toselli is a FIFA Women's Football Technical expert and Ms. Spielmann is a former player, a UEFA A-License coach and a FIFA and OFC instructor.

The All India Football Federation President, Shri Kalyan Chaubey, who addressed the participants on Day Three of the Workshop, said: "Women's football is one area, where we have huge potential to progress at the international level. But to achieve this target, we need to have a true leadership training programme."

The AIFF President pointed out that women's football in India is popular in certain pockets of the country. He said: "Our target should be to identify more talents in women's football in these areas. All of you, who are participating in this Workshop and working diligently to enhance their knowledge, may identify the talents and share it with the talent scouts of the AIFF on a regular basis. It will help to create a bigger pool of players."



“We should be able to identify at least 200 talented women footballers in the age group of 17 to 23 years and train them through the leadership training programme. These players have to be given proper advanced training and provided with more match time, if we aim for the 2030 Asian Games or the 2029 AFC Women’s Asian Cup.”

Shri Chaubey thanked the FIFA for sending its two experts, Mr. Simon Toselli and Ms. Stéphanie Spielmann, for conducting the Workshop. “Participation of women’s footballers in India has increased by 138 per cent. I am confident that FIFA would come forward to give us more support in the development of women’s football in India,” he said.

The event featured theoretical sessions in the mornings, practical field sessions in the afternoons, and dedicated one-on-one breakout sessions for personalised interaction with the experts.

Mr. Toselli and Ms. Spielmann discussed their experience and expertise of women's football at FIFA, leadership skills of a coach, styles of play, game models, positional coaching, football fitness, and periodisation, and general characteristics of female football players.

Mr. Toselli emphasised the importance of communication, saying, "If you are good at communication and explanation, your team will do great." He said any workshop of this nature will enhance knowledge and contribute to building a successful career.

Ms. Spielmann said that it is always important for the coaches to demonstrate while explaining any point to players during training. “It saves you time, it doesn’t waste I,” she said. Stephanie encouraged the coaches to reflect deeply, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and make necessary adjustments to overcome challenges.



Hyderabad to host Santosh Trophy in December

Hyderabad will host the final rounds of the 78th National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy for the first time in 57 years, it was announced by the All India Football Federation on Wednesday, October 2, 2024.

The last time the City of Pearls hosted the prestigious tournament was in the 1966-67 season when Railways defeated Services to lift the trophy in an all-institutional final.

The final rounds are tentatively scheduled for the first week of December. Telangana has received a bye to the final rounds as the host association. The winners of nine groups and last season's finalists - Services and Goa - will play the final rounds in Hyderabad. The group stages will be played in November.

Group A: Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab.

Group B: Chandigarh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Delhi.

Group C: Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bengal, Bihar.

Group D: Tripura, Manipur, Sikkim, Mizoram.

Group E: Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland.

Group F: Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha.

Group G: Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Andaman & Nicobar.

Group H: Kerala, Pondicherry, Lakshadweep, Railways.

Group I: Maharashtra, Gujarat, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, Rajasthan.



India to take part in FIF Ae World Cup featuring eFootball

India to participate in the FIF Ae World Cup 2024. This edition of the FIF Ae World Cup will feature the eFootball game for the first time ever, which will be held on both mobile and console versions (dates and venue to be announced by FIFA later).

Eighteen teams, including India, will play in the meet. The matches will be played in a 2v2 format in the Console Category and 1v1 format in the Mobile Category in the FIF Ae World Cup 2024.

Indian passport holders of the age 16 years and above are eligible to participate, provided that the player is registered on fifa.gg, has not represented any other FIFA Member Association in previous tournaments and is not under sanctions in any eFootball tournament.

The top eligible player from the in-game qualifiers on the mobile version will be nominated to represent India at the World Cup. The top eligible players from the console version will be invited to participate in national qualification trials, the details of which will be communicated in due course. Three players selected from the qualifiers will represent the country in the console version.

To participate in the FIF Ae World Cup 2024 users will have to pass an online qualifier phase comprising of 3 Rounds of in-game Events running from October 10th – 20th 2024. Details of the in-game online qualifiers shall be found in the link below:

https://e-football.konami.net/fifae_world_cup/2024/en/



Hat-trick hero CH Sakip hands Karnataka Sub Jr Boys' NFC Tier 1 title

Karnataka emerged victorious on their home turf, to emerge champions of Sub Junior Boys' National Football Championship 2024-25 Tier 1, after defeating Manipur 5-1 at the Bangalore Football Stadium, on Sunday, September 22, 2024. The hosts led 3-1 at half-time.

CH Sakip (7', 27', 65') was on form for Karnataka, scoring a hat-trick, while Rishaan Chaudhuri (44') and Arvidrian Samwanki Lato (85') pitched in with a goal apiece. Khutheipham Muktar Rehman (34') scored the only goal for Manipur.

While Manipur had put in an expansive display on their road to the final, the hosts turned up to the summit clash showing more initiative and took the lead through Sakip in the seventh minute. Sakip made a fine run at the far post, where he found himself unmarked, as a cross was whipped in from the left. The fullback had to only touch the ball in from point-blank range.

Sakip scored his second of the afternoon when a Manipur defender handled Karnataka midfielder Chaudhuri's shot from outside the box. The referee Harkomal Singh Duhra pointed to the spot. Sakip calmly slotted it home to double the home side's lead.



Manipur, however, would not give in that easily and pulled one back through captain Rehman, who after receiving the ball from Laishram Mahesh Singh, belted it in from outside the box.

The hosts kept attacking in waves and looked in no mood to be complacent with their one-goal lead. Chaudhuri scored their third a few minutes before the half-time whistle, to give Karnataka the two-goal cushion again.

Manipur came out with heavier momentum in the second half, but Karnataka managed the early onslaught well before they scored a fourth. Sakip ran onto a long ball hooved from the defence and found himself one-on-one with the goalkeeper and he calmly completed his hat-trick.

The fifth and final nail in Manipur's coffin was put in by Arvidrian, who was played through behind the defence. His shot took a deflection before looping into the goal.

The final played in Bengaluru on Sunday brought the curtains down on the three-week-long Sub Junior National Football Championships for boys' and girls' Tier 1 and Tier 2.

THE LIST OF WINNERS:

Sub Junior Boys' NFC Tier 1: Karnataka

Sub Junior Boys' NFC Tier 2: Assam

Sub Junior Girls' NFC Tier 1: Manipur

Sub Junior Girls' NFC Tier 2: Madhya Pradesh



Hosts Assam crowned champions in Sub Jr Boys' NFC Tier 2

The Sub-Junior Boys' National Football Championship Tier 2 final match proved a complete mismatch as hosts Assam hammered Haryana 11-0 to emerge champions in Jorhat on Friday, September 20, 2024.

The winners, who led 7-0 at the break, were powered by Tanmoy Boruah's double hat-trick, who scored six goals, equally divided into two halves. Tamash Daimary and Arup Karmakar scored two goals each, while Nivir Protim Borgohain also found his way into the list of goalscoers in the one-sided contest.

It was a dominant display from Assam right from the kick off. Assam's offensive prowess was shown from the beginning with Tamash Daimary's goal in the 6th minute. It was quickly followed by skipper Tanmoy Boruah's goal in the 12th minute. Arup Karmakar added to the tally just four minutes later, and Tamash struck again in the 19th minute, netting a penalty in the 21st minute.

Tanmoy found the back of the net once more in the 25th minute, and Arup capped off a spectacular first half with another goal in the 31st, leaving Assam in a commanding position with seven goals.

In the second half, Tamash continued his impressive performance, scoring three more goals in the 54th, 59th, and 78th minutes, and substitute Nivir Protim Borgohain scored in the 62nd minute to complete the sensational rout.



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