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# VISION 2047

T A R G E T 2 0 2 6

**SAFF U19**



**CHAMPIONSHIP 2023  
NEPAL**



**“TESTING TIME  
FOR BLUE TIGERS  
IN MERDEKA”**

- Kalyan Chaubey  
President, AIFF

**MISSION MERDEKA :  
MILLIONS AWAITING**





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# President's Note

## Merdeka Cup 2023: A keenly awaited testing time for Blue Tigers

**Kalyan Chaubey**

Any international football conference, where top officials of different Member Associations come together, is not about going through the listed agenda or arriving at decisions only. It is also an opportunity to interact with each other and exchange views, which could have a far-reaching effect on taking the game ahead.

The inaugural AFC Member Associations (MAs) and Regional Associations (RAs) Presidents' and General Secretaries' Conference 2023 in Tashkent was no different. Having come to the Uzbekistan capital, which is also nicknamed the "City of Bread", I was privileged to meet senior officials from various nations in Asia, the FIFA President and the newly-appointed General Secretary of FIFA, and was greatly enriched by interacting with them.

And here I have gathered a piece of information that I would like to share with my readers. The President of the Football Association of Malaysia told me a huge interest has already been generated in Kuala Lumpur for the upcoming Merdeka Cup match between India and hosts Malaysia to be played on October 13. The Bukit Jalil National Stadium in Kuala Lumpur is of gigantic size, having a capacity of around 90,000. I have been told that more than 30,000 tickets for the match have already been sold. The way things are going, there is a possibility that a full house for the match cannot be ruled out.

No doubt, I was pleased with the development. I am sure all the football fans of India will have the same feeling. A big crowd watching our very own National Team in a foreign land is a rare occasion and as the President of the Football Federation, I feel immensely proud about it.



Now, with this, I would like to say a few things. My meeting with FAM President Haji Hamidin bin Haji Mohammed Amin and his immediate decision to invite India to the Merdeka Cup 2023 was hailed by the Indian media. While I thank them for taking up the cause of Indian football immediately.

Incidentally, this season, the Merdeka Cup would be an ideal platform to gauge the progress of the National Team on the eve of the Asian Cup final rounds in Doha in January next year. The Merdeka Cup will be the last stop as a tournament before the Asian Cup. In between, there will be World Cup Qualifiers and preparatory camps.

The Merdeka Cup 2023, in my opinion, will be an intense battle. It is played within the FIFA window, with only three teams in the fray. India have been drawn against the hosts



in their first match. From a ranking point of view, India are placed at 102 in comparison to Malaysia's 134 place in the FIFA table. But in reality, things could be different. Like India, Malaysians are making rapid progress recently. In September, they played two friendly matches against Syria and China and were able to draw both matches. Against India, they would like to keep up their newfound success.

Following Palestine's withdrawal, Tajikistan remain the only other side in the tournament. They are believed to be a competitive side and challenging them would definitely be great fun if we reach the final. From my side, I can say that I have enough confidence in our team. They did wonders in the Tri-Nation, Intercontinental Cup and SAFF Championship. In the King's Cup in Thailand, India were unlucky to lose against both Iraq and Lebanon after doing most things right on the pitch.

The Merdeka Cup is often called the "Old Lady of Asian Football." Many years ago, it was known as the Mini Asia Cup because of the depth of the tournament. We have had a long-standing association with Merdeka since 1959. Now that we are playing there again after 22 years, it leaves me truly excited. I am sure every Indian football fan is also feeling the same way.



# Merdeka 2023: A stimulating story of Reminisce and Rivalry



## **Dr. Shaji Prabhakaran**

Secretary General, AIFF

The Indian national team is back in the Merdeka Tournament after 22 years, which brings back old memories from our golden era when we were regular participants in the prestigious competition in Kuala Lumpur, then an annual event. India's rivalry with Burma (now Myanmar) and hosts Malaysia used to be one of the highlights of the tournament those days.

Now, we are getting this opportunity to play in Malaysia after a long gap in front of a capacity crowd Bukit Jalil Stadium in Kuala Lumpur. Adding to our King's Cup participation last month in Thailand, I'm sure this southeast Asian trip will also provide our players vital experience as they prepare for the FIFA World Cup 2026 Qualifiers and the AFC Asian Cup 2023.

It's also important to look back and review our performance in the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China. The Games proved to be a better outing for the football team than it was in 2014.

The Indian men's team qualified for the round of 16 before encountering a heavyweight side like Saudi Arabia. No doubt we did put on a strong performance against the west Asian side but it was not enough for us to conquer one of the Asian giants. We did take invaluable learnings from our four matches on such a grand stage.

Our women's team performance in the Asian Games was extremely encouraging. In both the games, Blue Tigresses played excellent football against higher-ranked opponents, and if we had a bit of luck, perhaps we could have qualified for the second round. We could see a definitive progress in our women's team since our last competitive outing against Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek. In just over two weeks' time, India will participate in the AFC Olympic Qualifiers in Uzbekistan, and I'm sure the Asian Games experience must have been of great help as they prepare to face more of the continent's heavyweight sides.



Off the pitch, an important development has been the visit of FIFA delegation of the Talent Development Scheme. That's the seriousness with which the FIFA-AIFF Academy is taking shape in India. Arsine Wenger, FIFA Chief of Global Football Development, is all set to visit India next month to meet the stakeholders and discuss the implementation of this important project. We can't wait to see such a legendary figure in our country.

At the domestic front, after a long gap, our National Youth Championships are back in action. Both Boys and Girls are getting the opportunity to play and showcase their talents at the national level in different age-group competitions. It's going to help in scouting better talents and increasing the participation of youngsters at all levels. With the new two-tier format, there is a competitive balance in these competitions with an improved structure at the youth level.

We are trying to improve every aspect of football with a dedicated focus. We, at the AIFF, decided to extend the contract of the national men's team head coach Igor Stimac as a result of the thought process, where we need a continuity and a process-oriented approach as per our Vision 2047 strategic roadmap. There are no shortcuts to success in football.



# India and Merdeka Cup: The legacy Blue Tigers need to live up to

*Triumphant charges, legendary goalscorers and humbling defeats, India's tryst with the Merdeka is varied, colourful and a great parable for the game itself*

**JAYDEEP BASU**

The night of August 15, 1971, was one of the worst moments in Indian football. While the nation celebrated its 24th Independence Day, a pall of gloom descended on the camp of the Indian National Football Team in Kuala Lumpur. Only a few hours ago, India played the last league match of the 1971 Merdeka Cup and it ended in a resounding 1-9 defeat against Burma (now Myanmar). It was one of India's biggest defeats in international football.

Hell broke loose the next day. The Union Ministry of Education in New Delhi, which then looked after the Sports Department, too, shot off a not-too-kind letter to the All India Football Federation asking to explain the humiliating defeat. In turn, the AIFF asked the manager of the team, N Vittal, to file his report on the disaster.

The AIFF was rattled by the Government's letter. It sent a cable to the Indian team in Malaysia to return home immediately and not proceed to Singapore to play the Pesta Sukan Cup. More defeats against stronger teams would only worsen the situation, feared the AIFF.

The story didn't end here. In fact, it turned out to be one of Indian football's greatest 'comeback stories.' As the two coaches, PK Banerjee and GMH Basha, along with the manager, informed the footballers of the AIFF instructions, a few senior players stood up and said going back home was an unacceptable decision.



Mohammed Habib, Amar Bahadur, Syed Nayeemuddin, Subhash Bhowmick – all had only one thing to say. Let us go to Singapore and try to give our best. We would not come back from the Pesta Sukan Cup empty-handed. Too many injuries in the team cost India dearly against Burma. It would not happen again.

The footballers kept their word. India returned from Singapore as the joint winner of Pesta Sukan. It included a massive 6-0 victory over Malaysia. Mohammed Habib and Subhash Bhowmick scored two goals each, Nataraj and Swapan Sengupta struck the other two. The Union Sports Ministry didn't press for a report on the Merdeka massacre.

But make no mistake. India's story in Merdeka is not about defeats only. Since 1959, India have played in the Merdeka Cup in Malaysia 17 times till date. Over the years, they have had some remarkable wins under their belts that would go down in history among India's all-time best matches. One of them was in the 1986 Merdeka when India stunned mighty South Korea 4-3 to reach the semi-finals.

South Korea made the World Cup final rounds in 1986 and nobody gave India a chance against them. The Koreans were simply stunned when India shot into a 3-1 lead before anyone could realise what was actually happening.

"Nobody expected us to win, not even we," said midfielder Mauricio Afonso with a laugh. One of India's four goals came from his boot. "Koreans warmed up when we took a 2-1 lead, but my long ranger made it 3-1. They were desperate and narrowed the margin, but our fourth goal gave us more confidence. We won 4-3, finally," Mauricio said.

Apart from Mauricio, the goals were scored by VP Sathyan and Krishanu Dey, who found the net twice. One of the two goals was yet another example of amazing skills: he dribbled past a host of defenders before beating the goalkeeper. Krishanu was in devastating form that season. In the next match, he ripped open the Thailand defence to score a hat-trick as India raced to a 3-1 victory before falling to a selection side from Czechoslovakia by a solitary goal in the semi-final.

Mauricio, a star midfielder and India captain in the later days, is a humble person and spends his days quietly in Goa. "I was an ordinary player, but I feel proud to have played with legendary players like Sudip Chatterjee, Krishanu Dey, Camilo Gonsalves and others. All I would like to say is that the 1986 India team in Merdeka was an absolutely solid one and had a big bunch of talented players. Beating us was not an easy job," he said.







"Sadly, out of the three goalscorers in that unforgettable encounter against South Korea, two (Krishanu Dey and VP Sathyan) are no longer with us. Only I am still there to tell the tale," Mauricio concluded as his voice dropped and turned softer.

India's regular participation in the Merdeka Cup has given birth to many folklores of Indian football. Some of the players are still fondly remembered by old-timers in Malaysia. Chuni Goswami's mesmerising skills, Jarnail Singh's hair-raising hard tackles, Magan Singh's opportunism and Inder Singh's breathtaking proficiency to outwit the rival defenders are some of those. A few Malaysian clubs in the 1960s were determined to rope in Inder for their clubs, but the Punjab tiger refused to budge despite lucrative offers.

Out of the 17 times they played in Merdeka, India returned home with the runners-up trophy twice and finished third three times. Two more times the Blue Tigers made the semi-finals. In 1959, India were unbeaten runners-up in their maiden entry in the Merdeka Cup. In 1964, the title slipped away when Chuni Goswami's India lost by a solitary goal against Burma in the final. A yet-to-be fully fit PK Banerjee was not in his usual self in the final. To add to India's woes, Goswami was injured early in the match and performed far from his best for the rest of the outing.

Slowly, Indian football's close association with the Merdeka Cup became a thing of the past after 1986. For the next 15 years, India didn't participate for various reasons. The next time the Indian football team was in Kuala Lumpur was in the new millennium in 2001 under head coach Sukhwinder Singh with Jo Paul Ancheri as the captain.

Twenty-two years have passed since then. A lot of water has flown through the Ganges and the Klang River in Kuala Lumpur. Football has changed, and so has the international calendar. Instead of 10 nations playing a two-week-long tournament at a leisurely pace, it is all about four teams getting to play two matches each within the limitations of the specified FIFA window. The Indian campaign this time would be different and maybe difficult, too.

But the legacy will live on and Blue Tigers will have to live up to it.



# Merdeka Tournament 2023: Blue Tigers ‘can’t wait’ for Mini Asia Cup

*The Blue Tigers have been faced triumph and loss with equal bravado this year and a first Merdeka appearance in 20 years will be a test of their endurance*

**SOUOMO GHOSH**

India have a date with history in this October FIFA window.

On Friday, October 13, 2023, when the Blue Tigers take the pitch at the 90,000-strong Bukit Jalil Stadium in Kuala Lumpur to play the Merdeka Cup semi-final against hosts Malaysia, memories will come rushing back for the old timers. For the new generation, a fresh page will be opened in Indian football almanac.

Merdeka is no ordinary tournament for India. Malaysia are no ordinary opponents either. Both have huge significance in the history of the Senior Indian Men’s team, who played their first match 75 years ago.

Records say India, since 1959, have participated in the Merdeka Cup 17 times, which is more than in any other international tournament India figured in since 1947. At the international arena, India have played Malaysia 31 times, which is more than any other opponents India have played against.

No wonder, it prompted Blue Tigers Head Coach Igor Stimac to share his thoughts on why Merdeka is special to India. “We’ve played the Merdeka 17 times and ended runners-up on two occasions in the past. So, I definitely see a chance there. The first game will be a very difficult one for us against Malaysia.



"It will be a good match experience for us, as they have been playing well in recent times and have gotten draws against two higher-ranked opponents, China and Syria at home. I think we can safely say that they are an emotional side who are highly energised by their fans.

"I discussed with my captain Sunil (Chhetri) about the Merdeka, and he told me, boss, I can't wait. There will be a huge crowd and I expect an exciting game. We want to win and progress to the final, and make sure that our boys leave it all out on the pitch," he said.

Well, history and tradition are not the only reasons why Stimac and his boys are determined to make their mark in Merdeka. The 100 Days' countdown to the AFC Asian Cup just began in Doha, Qatar, on October 4, 2023, as the 24 teams started their preparations for the continent's biggest footballing event. The October FIFA International Window gives four of these teams the chance to test themselves on a somewhat smaller yet not-so-quiet stage in the capital city of Malaysia.

The Merdeka Tournament, which has gained the name 'Mini Asia Cup' over the years, will take place after a gap of nearly a decade, after AIFF President Mr. Kalyan Chaubey requested his FA Malaysia counterpart Dato Haji Hamidin bin Haji Mohammad Amin to invite India. Also joining the Blue Tigers and hosts Malaysia in the tournament are Tajikistan.







The tournament will be contested in a knockout format, where Tajikistan have already reached the final following Palestine's withdrawal. Malaysia and India will face off on Friday, October 13, with the winners taking on the Central Asians in the final on Tuesday, October 17.

India last participated in the Merdeka in 2001, when they lost their matches against hosts Malaysia (1-2), Thailand (0-2), and Uzbekistan (1-2). Current Assistant Coach and former Blue Tigers centre-back Mahesh Gawali was a part of that squad and believes that the current crop of boys is more prepared to take on their opponents in the tournament.

"I played the Merdeka once, but we could not win, as the level of our opponents was quite high. But I feel that this time, the boys are much better prepared; they are a much better side. We are positive that we will do well in Kuala Lumpur," said Gawali.

AIFF Secretary General Dr Shaji Prabhakaran believes that the Merdeka Tournament could be a favourable opportunity for the Blue Tigers to clock some progress ahead of the much-anticipated FIFA World Cup Qualifiers in November and the AFC Asian Cup in January.

"The Merdeka Cup is coming, and that provides us a favourable opportunity to further progress as a team. We are really looking forward to our boys giving their best on the pitch. I am sure the players are looking forward to the same too," said Dr Prabhakaran.





# Harjinder Singh & 1981 Merdeka: He made high and mighty bite the bullet

*The man with 'golden left foot' recalls his heydays at the helm of the Indian team, a time when he scored hat tricks for fun and took the Merdeka by storm*

**SRUTI CHAKRABORTY**

On the eve of the India versus UAE match in the Merdeka Cup on September 5, 1981, PK Banerjee looked at everyone's face and paused for a moment before speaking up. "Can any of you tell me what the exact population of the UAE is?" he asked. There was a momentary silence in the room for a few seconds before a Kolkata-based footballer raised his hands. "Maybe around a crore," he said hesitantly.

"You are more or less correct," replied Banerjee, then the Head Coach of the Indian Men's National Team. "Now tell me, what's the population of India?" he asked again. This time, there was no shortage of raised hands in front of him. "More than 70 crores," said at least three or four players together. Banerjee didn't react to this.

Instead, he looked sharply at the 18 boys sitting in front of him. Then came his next question, which struck everyone in the room like a stinging bullet. "How do you look at the scenario when a nation of 70 crore people gets beaten by a team whose population is less than a crore? Does it enhance the prestige of a nation like India? How will all of you go back to India and justify to your mothers that you lost to a country whose population is less than any of the major cities in India?"

Banerjee's comments had electrifying effects on the boys. The Blue Tigers were clearly charged up as they took the field against a strong United Arab Emirates team later that evening. They did wonders, to say the least. India ran away with a stunning 2-0 win.

Winger Harjinder Singh was one of the two goalscorers for India. Known as the "Man with a Golden Left Foot" during his playing days, Harjinder still remembers a few high points of the match and India's remarkable journey in the 1981 Merdeka that ended in a semi-final defeat against a Brazilian side.

"The match against the strong UAE in the group league was a game-changer. No one expected us to win, but we beat them 2-0. I scored first, and then Xavier Pius struck the insurance goal. My goal was the result of a through pass. I placed it past the goalkeeper with a left-footer," Harjinder told [www.the-aiff.com](http://www.the-aiff.com) from his Chandigarh residence.

"The 1981 Merdeka will remain etched in my memory forever. In the 4-3-3 system, I was assigned to play on the left by head coach PK Banerjee and I did a good job. I was adjudged the "Best Midfielder" of the tournament. Ironically, I learned about the award much later. We lost in the semi-finals and left for Pyongyang the same night to play a couple of matches against North Korea," he added.

Harjinder Singh donned the Indian national team colours from 1974 to 1983, earning a reputation as one of the most skilled players among his contemporaries. During his playing years, spanning from 1974 to 1983, he participated in two Asian Games, was part of the 1974 Asian Youth Championship joint-winners team and proudly featured on the Asian All-Stars team. Following his illustrious playing career, Harjinder embarked on a second innings as the coach of the Chandigarh Football Academy (CFA), contributing 22 years to nurturing talented footballers who later represented the nation across various age groups.

"Our performance in 1981 Merdeka was so good that we became heroes in the eyes of the local Indian fans. They showered us with gifts and dinner invitations. Five years prior to this, we didn't play well in Merdeka, and some of these Indian fans pelted stones on the team bus. In 1981, the story was completely different," Harjinder recalled.

"We drew 2-2 against hosts Malaysia to pave the way for a berth in the semi-finals. I scored both goals. I remember one of them vividly. I was near the six-yard box when the ball came to me. It was a soft pass. I controlled with my left and then chipped it over the goalkeeper's head. He was completely stranded," Harjinder, who is now the Head of Scouts in the AIFF, said.







India progressed to the semi-finals by securing victories against the UAE and Indonesia. However, their journey concluded with a 0-2 defeat against famed Brazilian club Sao Paulo in the semi-finals.

"In the semi-finals, we lost to Sao Paulo. They were certainly a better side, but there were other reasons behind the defeat. Throughout the tournament, it rained in Malaysia. The main pitch got increasingly muddy and controlling the ball required huge efforts. While we got tired, the Brazilians made the best use of their physical fitness, endurance and stronger bench strength. They were deserving winners," Harjinder said.

When questioned about the factors contributing to the successful tournament, Harjinder remarked, "There were reasons behind our success in the 1981 Merdeka. We had a lot of players on the team, whose individual brilliance was never in question. Manoranjan Bhattacharya, Prasun Banerjee, Prasanta Banerjee, Xavier Pius, Narender Gurung, and Bishwajit Bhattacharya, all had skills and an unquestionable ability to play with the ball. It made the difference. On the other hand, we prepared well before the Merdeka with long camps. We could iron out the deficiencies."

"Thereafter, we returned to India, and I was selected again to play in the King's Cup in Thailand after a few weeks. I was sitting in the hotel lobby in Bangkok when the captain of the Singapore team came and congratulated me for being named the 'Best Midfielder' in Merdeka. I was surprised and told the coach. PK then made some inquiries and found it to be true," he said.

Fast-forward to 2023, as India gears up to participate in the prestigious tournament after a hiatus of 22 years, Harjinder expresses confidence that this time too, the team will etch its name in history, stating, "The upcoming Merdeka will be a different ball game altogether. After all, football has changed a lot. But our boys should be able to hold the ball and not lose it in difficult situations. Merdeka has remained a traditional hunting ground for the Indians over the years. I am sure the boys will do well."



# INDIA AT THE MERDEKA: A STATISTICAL HISTORY

*COMPILED BY: GAUTAM ROY*



# 1959

31.08.59

India **2** Singapore **0**

(PK Banerjee, T Balaram)

03.09.59

India **2** Hong Kong **0**

(D Kannan, Rahamatullah)

04.09.59

India **1** Malaya **1**

(Rahamatullah)

(Robert Choe-Pen)

06.09.59

India **2** South Vietnam **2**

(Zulfiqar, D Kannan)

(Thoi Vinh x 2)

## SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Peter Thangaraj, SS Narayan

**Defenders:** TA Rehman, Ahmed Hussai, Mohammed Ali, SA Latif, Trilok Singh

**Midfielders:** M Kempiah, Mumtaz, Balaksihnan

**Forwards:** PK Banerjee, Rahmatullah, B Narayan, D Kannan, T Balaram, M Lahiri, Zulfiqar, Varahlu

**Coach:** SA Rahim

## INDIA FINISHED RUNNERS UP

# 1961

## GROUP A

03.08.61

South Vietnam **2** India **1**

(Do To Pinh, Ron Ly Van)

(Yusuf Khan)

## GROUP A

06.08.61

Japan **3** India **1**

(T Miyamoto x2, Watanabe)

(Jarnail Singh pen)

## GROUP A

09.08.61

India **2** Malaya **1**

(PK Banerjee, A Samajpati)

## SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Peter Thangaraj, SS Narayan

**Defenders:** TA Rehman, Jarnail Singh, O Chandrasekhar, Arun Ghosh, Trilok Singh

**Midfielders:** M Kempiah, Ram Bahadur, Franco

**Forwards:** PK Banerjee, T Balaram, D Kannan, Sukumar, Samajpati, Chuni Goswami, Rahmatullah, Yusuf Khan

**Coach:** Sailen Manna

## INDIA KNOCKED OUT IN GROUP STAGES

# 1964

24.08.64

India **1** Malaysia **1**

(Prasanta Sinha)

(Mahat Ambu)

## GROUP B

27.08.64

India **4** Cambodia **0**

(Chuni Goswami, Derek D'Souza x2, Inder Singh)

## GROUP B

29.08.64

India **2** Thailand **1**

(Ashim Moulick, Chuni Goswami)

(Aashdang)

## GROUP B

01.09.64

India **3** Japan **2**

(Chuni Goswami, Kajal Mukherjee, Derek D'Souza pen)

(Nomura, Kuwata)

## GROUP B

04.09.64

India **2** South Korea **1**

(PK Banerjee, Inder Singh)

(Park Im Sun)

## FINAL

06.09.64

Burma **1** India **0**

(Ba Pu)

## SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** C Mustafa, Salim

**Defenders:** Nayeem, Jarnail Singh, Sushil Sinha, PV Madhavan

**Midfielders:** Franco, Prasanta Sinha, Kajal Mukherjee, V Dhanapathy

**Forwards:** PK Banerjee, Chuni Goswami, Ashim Moulick, Yusuf Khan, Saleh Bin Abdullah, Inder Singh, Derek D'Souza

**Coach:** Mohammed Hussain

## INDIA FINISHED RUNNERS UP

# 1965

16.08.65

India **1** Japan **1**

(Ashim Moulick)

(Y Kuwahara)

## GROUP A

19.08.65

India **2** Hong Kong **2**

(Ashim Moulick, Ashoke Chatterjee)

(Yuen Kwen Choo x2)

## GROUP A

21.08.65

India **3** Malaysia **0**

(Kajal Mukherjee, Jankiram, S Anthony)



23.08.65  
South Korea **1** India **0**  
(Kim Sam Rak)

**GROUP A**

25.08.65  
India **2** South Vietnam **0**  
(Kajal Mukherjee, Ashoke Chatterjee)

**3<sup>RD</sup> PLACE**

27.08.65  
India **1** Burma **1**  
(Ashoke Chatterjee)

**SQUAD**

**Goalkeepers:** C Mustafa, P Barman  
**Defenders:** Arun Ghosh, C Prasad, Jarnail Singh, Altaf, Sushil Sinha  
**Midfielders:** Franco, Prasanta Sinha, Kajal Mukherjee, A Fernandes  
**Forwards:** Yusuf Khan, PK Banerjee, PV Jankiram, S Anthony, Ashoke Chatterjee, Ashim Moulick  
**Coach:** Mohammed Hussain

**INDIA FINISHED JOINT THIRD**

1966

14.08.66  
India **2** Hong Kong **0**  
(Rajendra Mohan, Ashoke Chatterjee)

**GROUP A**

20.08.66  
India **3** Japan **0**  
(Ashoke Chatterjee, Arumanayagam)

**GROUP A**

22.08.66  
Singapore **1** India **0**  
(Andy Yeo)

**GROUP A**

24.08.66  
India **1** Formosa **0**  
(Arumanayagam)

**GROUP A**

26.08.66  
India **1** South Vietnam **0**  
(Arumanayagam)

**3<sup>RD</sup> PLACE**

28.08.66  
India **1** South Korea **0**  
(Parimal Dey)

## SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** P Thangaraj, C Mustapha

**Defenders:** Arun Ghosh, Jarnail Singh, C Prasad, Nayeem, Altaf Ahmed

**Midfielders:** Kajal Mukherjee, Prasanta Sinha, A Fernandes

**Forwards:** Rajendra Mohan, PV Jankiram, Gurkripal Singh, Arjun Singh, Ashoke Chatterjee, Arymanayagam, Parimal Dey

**Coach:** S (Langcha) Mitra

## INDIA FINISHED THIRD

# 1967

### GROUP A

12.08.67

India **1** Thailand **1**

(Ashoke Chatterjee)

(Preaderm)

### GROUP A

13.08.67

India **3** Western Australia **1**

(Inder Singh x 2, M Gracias)

(T Lawlor)

### GROUP A

16.08.67

India **4** Hong Kong **0**

(Ashoke Chatterjee, M Gracias x 3)

### GROUP A

19.08.67

India **0** Malaysia **0**

### GROUP A

20.08.67

South Vietnam **1** India **0**

(Phan Doung Cam-Pen)

### MINOR POSITIONS PLAYOFF

22.08.67

India **1** Formosa **1**

(Inder Singh)

(Cheung Che Wai)

### MINOR POSITIONS PLAYOFF

22.08.67

Indonesia **3** India **0**

(Sujipto x 2, Bob Tan)

## SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** P Thangaraj, C Mustapha

**Defenders:** C Prasad, Nayeem, Jarnail Singh, Altaf, Ahmed, Arun Ghosh, M John

**Midfielders:** Bidyut Mazumdar, Ramakrishna, K Tirkey, Kajal Mukherjee

**Forwards:** Ashoke Chatterjee, Mohammed Habib, Arumanayagam, Marto Gracias, Inder Singh

**Coach:** Mohammed Hussain

## INDIA FINISHED EIGHTH



# 1968

## GROUP B

11.08.68

Malaysia **2** India **1**

(Zulfikili, Thanabalan)

(P Kannan)

## GROUP B

12.08.68

India **3** South Vietnam **2**

(P Kannan, Sadatullah x 2)

(Quang Kim Phung, Nguyen Van Ngom)

## GROUP B

15.08.68

India **1** Hong Kong **1**

(Ashoke Chatterjee)

(Cheng Yun Yu)

## GROUP B

19.08.68

India **3** Burma **1**

(Sadatullah, Nayeem, Inder Singh)

(Suk Bahadur)

## GROUP B

19.08.68

South Vietnam **1** India **0**

(K Nukulaomratana)

## MINOR POSITIONS PLAYOFF

22.08.68

India **1** Japan **0**

(N Pappana)

## MINOR POSITIONS PLAYOFF

24.08.68

South Korea **1** India **0**

(Kim Ki Bok)

## SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** C Mustapha, Salim

**Defenders:** Arun Ghosh, Altaf Ahmed, Sunil Bhattacharya, Santo Mitra, M John, C Prasad, Nayeem

**Midfielders:** Krishanaji Rao, Kajal Mukherjee

**Forwards:** Ashoke Chatterjee, N Pappana, Inder Singh, Sadatullah, Mideen Kutty

**Coach:** Sailen Manna

**INDIA FINISHED SIXTH**

# 1969

## GROUP B

31.10.69

Western Australia **1** India **0**

(T Pao pen)

## GROUP B

02.11.69

Burma **6** India **0**

(Maung Maung Ting pen, Ye Nyunt x 3, Hia Tay x 2)

GROUP B	04.11.69
India 3 Singapore 0	
(Latif, Habib, Magan Singh)	
MINOR POSITIONS PLAYOFF	06.11.69
Thailand 1 India 0	
(Kriengsek)	
SQUAD	
Goalkeepers: Balai Dey, AU Celestine	
Defenders: Bhabani Roy, Nayeem, C Prasad, KS Raju, AD Nagendran, AM Khairuddin	
Midfielders: Gurkripal Singh, Ranjit Thapa, A Latif	
Forwards: Inder Singh, Magan Singh, Amar Bahadur, Bhupinder Singh Rawat, Pranab Ganguly, Mohammed Habib	
Coach: Jarnail Singh	
INDIA FINISHED EIGHTH	
1970	
GROUP A	30.07.70
Formosa 1 India 0	
(Ho San Wah)	
GROUP A	01.08.70
India 3 Malaysia 1	
(Shyam Thapa, Nayeem pen, Ranjit Thapa)	(Wong Choon Wah)
GROUP A	03.08.70
Burma 2 India 0	
(Win Maung x 2)	
GROUP A	05.08.70
India 2 Western Australia 0	
(Magan Singh x 2)	
GROUP A	09.08.70
India 2 South Vietnam 1	
(Subhas Bhowmick, Habib)	(Nguyen Wan Xe)
SEMI FINAL	13.08.70
South Korea 3 India 2	
(Chung Kang Ji, Park Yi Chung, Lee Hai Taik)	(Subhas Bhowmick, Habib)
3RD PLACE PLAYOFF	16.08.70
India 3 Hong Kong 2	
(Magan Singh x2, Habib)	(Li Kwok Keung, Wai Hong)



## SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** C Mustapha, K Sampat

**Defenders:** Sudhir Karmakar, Nayeem, C Prasad, Ashoke Banerjee, P Shivadass, Prabhakar

**Midfielders:** Ranjit Thapa, D Nataraj, N Sen Gupta

**Forwards:** Shyam Thapa, Subhas Bhowmick, Mohammed Habib, Inder Singh, Magan Singh, Amar Bahadur

**Coach:** GMH Basha

## INDIA FINISHED THIRD

# 1971

### GROUP B

05.08.71

India **5** Phillipines **1**

(Subhas Bhowmick x 3, Shyam Thapa, Habib)

(T Lozano)

### GROUP B

07.08.71

Indonesia **3** India **1**

(Wasikto, J Abdilla, A Kadir)

(Habib)

### GROUP B

10.08.71

India **2** Singapore **2**

(Amar Bahadur, Shyam Thapa)

(Kim Lai, R Krishnan)

### GROUP B

13.08.71

Hong Kong **2** India **1**

(Wu Kwok Hung, Li Kwow Keong)

(Nayeem)

### GROUP B

15.08.71

Burma **9**

India **1**

(Ye Nyunt x 3, AN Aung Moe, Win Maung x2, Maung Aye x 2, Hia Tay)

(Magan Singh)

### MINOR POSITIONS PLAYOFF

18.08.71

Japan **1** India **0**

(N Hidaka)

## SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** K Sampat, Arun Banerjee

**Defenders:** Sudhir Karmakar, Nayeem, C Prasad, N Sen Gupta, S Gunapandian

**Midfielders:** Ranjit Thapa, Shyam Sundar Manna, D Nataraj

**Forwards:** Balakrishna, Shyam Thapa, Swapan Sen Gupta, Mohammed Habib, Subhas Bhowmick, Amar Bahadur

**Coach:** PK Banerjee & GMH Basha

## INDIA FINISHED TENTH

# 1973

### GROUP A

29.07.73

India **2** Thailand **0**

(Inder Singh x 2 pen)

**GROUP A** 31.07.73  
India **3** Cambodia **0**  
(Bernard Pereira, Magan Singh, N Ulganathan)

**GROUP A** 02.08.73  
India **0** South Korea **0**

**GROUP A** 04.08.73  
Malaysia **4** India **0**  
(Rahim Abdullah, Namat Abdullah, Harun Jusoh, Mokhtar Dahari)

**GROUP A** 07.08.73  
India **2** South Vietnam **1**  
(Magan Singh, Nicolas Pereira) (Ho Thanh Cong)

**MINOR POSITIONS PLAYOFF** 09.08.73  
South Vietnam **1(5)** India **1(4)**  
(Nguyen Van Mong pen) (Prasannan)

**SQUAD**  
**Goalkeepers:** EN Sudhir, K Sethumadhavan  
**Defenders:** Nicholas Pereira, S Gunapandian, Pradip Chaudhury, M Jayaraj, George Ambrose, SK Chathunni  
**Midfielders:** Thomas Fernandes, D Nataraj, S Prasannan  
**Forwards:** N Ulganathan, J Kosalram, Inder Singh, Bernard Pereira, Ramesh Redcar, Magan Singh  
**Coach:** PK Banerjee

**INDIA FINISHED SIXTH**

1974

**GROUP A** 24.07.74  
India **4** Thailand **2**  
(Magan Singh x 3, Bernard Pereira) (Pasrapon, Niwatna Sesawao)

**GROUP A** 26.07.74  
Malaysia **4** India **1**  
(Syed Ahmad x 3, Mohd Bakar) (Magan Singh)

**GROUP A** 29.07.74  
India **2** Hong Kong **2**  
(Magan Singh, Manjit Singh) (Yu Kwok Kit x 2)

**MINOR POSITIONS PLAYOFF** 01.08.74  
Indonesia **0 (4)** India **0 (2)**

**SQUAD**  
**Goalkeepers:** K Sethumadhavan, Prasanta Mitra  
**Defenders:** Nicholas Pereira, Ram Bahadur, Pradip Chaudhury, Shymal Ghosh, Subrata Bhattacharya, Dilip Palit  
**Midfielders:** Gautam Sarkar, Prasun Banerjee, Ranjit Thapa  
**Forwards:** Surajit Sen Gupta, Latifuddin, Manjit Singh, Magan Singh, Bernard Pereira, Shabbir Ali  
**Coach:** J Kittu

**INDIA FINISHED SIXTH**



# 1976

## GROUP B

08.08.76

Japan **5** India **1**

(Kunishige Kamamoto, Yoshikazu Nagai, Okedura x 2) (Devraj)

## GROUP B

10.08.76

South Korea **8** India **0**

(Cha Bum Keun x 3, Perk Sang In x 2, Kim Jin Kok, Park Young Joo, Kim Ho Kon)

## GROUP B

12.08.76

Malaysia **5** India **1**

## GROUP B

14.08.76

Thailand **6**

India **2**

(Weeryudh Sawesdi x 2, Kitichai, Miwat Sriswat, Witaya Lonakhul x 2) (Manjit Singh, Shabbir Ali)

## GROUP B

16.08.76

India **3**

Indonesia **1**

(Shabbir Ali x 3)

## MINOR POSITIONS PLAYOFF

19.08.76

India **2** Burma **2**

(Harjinder Singh, Manjit Singh)

(Maung Win, Maung Kyi Lon)

## SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Bramhanand, Sundereshan

**Defenders:** Mohan Kumar, Gurdev Singh, Jagir Singh, CC Jacob, Deka Raja

**Midfielders:** Parminder Singh, Sukhwinder Singh, AD Devraj, MM Jacob, Kubai, Mohammed Matin

**Forwards:** Koshi, Manjit Singh, Harjinder Singh, Shabbir Ali, Subramaniam

**Coach:** Jarnail Singh

## INDIA FINISHED SIXTH

# 1981

## GROUP A

01.09.81

India **0** New Zealand **0**

## GROUP A

03.09.81

Japan **3** India **2**

(Kato, Yokoyama x 2)

(Shabbir Ali, Manoranjan Bhattacharya pen)

## GROUP A

05.09.81

India **2** UAE **0**

(Harjinder Singh, Xavier Pius)

## GROUP A

11.09.81

India **1** Indonesia **0**

(Krishnendu Roy)

GROUP A

18.09.81

Sau Paulo Selection (Brazil) **2** India **0**  
(Tuico, Barbosa)

SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Bhaskar Ganguly, Bramhanand  
**Defenders:** Krishnendu Roy, Compton Dutta, Manoranjan Bhattacharya, Shyamal Banerjee, GS Parmar  
**Midfielders:** Parminder Singh, Prasun Banerjee, Prasanta Banerjee, Vijay Kumar, D Shekharan  
**Forwards:** Narinder Gurung, Harjinder Singh, CB Thapa, Shabbir Ali, Xavier Pius, Biswajit Bhattacharya  
**Coach:** PK Banerjee & GM Pasha

INDIA REACHED THE SEMI FINALS

1982

GROUP B

06.08.82

India **0** Thailand **0**

GROUP B

09.08.82

Ghana **1** India **0**

(George Al Hassan)

GROUP B

12.08.82

Singapore **3** India **0**

(Salim Moin, Fandi Ahmad, Malek Awab)

GROUP B

16.08.82

Santa Katarina Selection (Brazil) **1** India **0**  
(Rozario)

SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Bhaskar Ganguly, Bramhanand  
**Defenders:** Compton Dutta, Alope Mukherjee, Shymal Banerjee, Manoranjan Bhattacharya, GS Parmar, Anthony Rebello  
**Midfielders:** Prasanta Banerjee, Prasun Banerjee, Parminder Singh, Ashok Fadte  
**Forwards:** CB Thapa, Shabbir Ali, Xavier Pius, Manas Bhattacharya, Bidesh Bose, Biswajit Bhattacharya  
**Coach:** PK Banerjee

INDIA KNOCKED OUT IN GROUP STAGES

1986

GROUP A

22.07.86

India **1** Indonesia **1**

(Camilo Gonsalves) (Aitio Darmandi)

GROUP A

24.07.86

Malaysia **3** India **0**

(Azhar Sharif, Zainal Abedin x 2)

GROUP A

26.07.86

India **4** South Korea **3**

(Krishanu Dey x 2, VP Sathyan, Mauricio Alphonso) (Cha Hee Chul x 2 pen, Kim Dae Heum)



**GROUP A**

30.07.86

India **3** Thailand **1**

(Krishanu Dey x 3)

(V Laohakul)

**SEMI FINAL**

24.07.86

Czechoslovakia **1** India **0**

(Ladislav Kucernak)

**SQUAD****Goalkeepers:** Atanu Bhattacharya, Bramhanand**Defenders:** Krishnendu Roy, Tarun Dey, Alope Mukherjee, Paramjit Singh Walia, Charanjit Singh, Derek Pereira, VP Sathyan**Midfielders:** Sudip Chatterjee, Prasanta Banerjee, Bikash Pamji, Mauricio Alphonso**Forwards:** Biswajit Bhattacharya, Babu Mani, Sisir Ghosh, Krishanu Dey, Camilo Gonsalves**Coach:** Sukhwinder Singh**INDIA REACHED THE SEMI FINALS****2001****GROUP B**

22.06.01

Malaysia **2** India **1**

(Indra Putra Mahayuddin, Mohammad Nizaruddin Yusop)

(Jules Alberto)

**GROUP B**

24.06.01

Thailand **2** India **0**

(Manit Noyvach, Nirut Sirosieng)

**GROUP B**

26.06.01

Uzbekistan **2** India **1**

(Hamidullaev Bakhtiyor, Berdiev Anwar)

(IM Vijayan)

**SQUAD****Goalkeepers:** Virender Singh, Sangram Mukherjee**Defenders:** Surkumar Singh, Mahesh Gawli, M Suresh, KV Dhanesh, Daljit Singh**Midfielders:** Jules Alberto, Khalid Jamil, Jo Paul Ancheri, Basudeb Mondal, Renedy Singh, RP Singh, Dipankar Roy, Hardip Sangha**Forwards:** Abdul Hakeem, Alvito D'Cunha, IM Vijayan, Hardip Gill, Mohammed Najeeb**Coach:** Sukhwinder Singh**INDIA KNOCKED OUT IN GROUP STAGES****GAMES: 90****WINS: 34 DRAWS: 18 LOSSES: 38****GS: 124 GC: 140**



## STATE OF AFFAIRS

# Catching them young

*Karnataka's focus on youth development has seen the state introduce a new U-7 category that initiates kids to the game early and creates a stronger grassroots base for the game*

In the 2023-24 season, the Karnataka State FA's Youth Premier League marked a significant milestone by introducing the U-7 age category for the first time, complementing the previously established U-9 category. This move was in line with AIFF's broader vision for grassroots development, crucial in the lead-up to the 2026 and 2047 milestones.

All matches take place on Sundays at the Coolulu Turf Park in Koramangala, Bengaluru, on a 5-a-side ground. The venue quickly transforms into a vibrant hub, bustling with enthusiastic parents, family, and friends who gather to wholeheartedly support the young athletes. This palpable energy and community spirit become emblematic of the league's success. Remarkably, the league's eight weeks of matches so far were completed seamlessly, underscoring the efficient organisation and dedication of everyone involved.

A distinctive feature of this season was the league's emphasis on skill development over competition. All matches, regardless of age category, were played in a non-competitive format. No scores were recorded, and there is no points table. The primary objective is to allow young players to focus solely on honing their skills, without the pressure of winning or losing.





In the U-7 category, 14 teams participated, engaging in 13 matches each. Many senior league clubs don't get as many games a season! Matches are played in a 4v4 format, with two halves of 12 minutes each. The rules exclude goalkeepers and prohibit the use of hands. The smaller goal posts, measuring 2'3" x 2'9", and unique regulations such as kick-ins instead of throw-ins and rolling substitutions, have created an environment conducive to skill enhancement.

For the U-9 category, a whopping 37 teams were divided into two groups of 19 and 18 teams. Each team gets to play 17 or 18 matches in a 5v5 format, with games lasting for two halves of 20 minutes each. Unlike the U-7 category, U-9 matches allow goalkeepers, who have specific rules for ball distribution and goal kicks. Similar to the U-7 matches, there are no offside calls, and rolling substitutions are permitted.

Moreover, KSFA contributed to the league's smooth operation by involving young football enthusiasts through internship opportunities. These interns take on vital roles as tournament secretaries, ensuring the league runs efficiently across all age categories.

In summary, the KSFA Youth Premier League 23-24 season not only expanded its age categories but also fostered a nurturing environment for young players. By prioritising skill development and creating a supportive community, the league not only enriched the lives of aspiring footballers but also nourished the growth of grassroots football in the region.





# SAFF U19 Championship triumph: First stop of a long footballing journey

*Super sub Manglenthang Kipgen and Gwgwmsar Goyary plotted a real-time movie script to complete India's SAFF dominance across age groups*

**AKHIL RAWAT**

September was a glorious month for the Indian men's youth teams in the subcontinent. Exactly 20 days after the U16s won the SAFF Championship in Bhutan, the U19s, steered by head coach Shuvendu Panda, beat Pakistan 3-0 in the final in Kathmandu to win India's third SAFF title of the year.

Now, winning a SAFF tournament is not considered a huge achievement for the eternal powerhouse of the region. You are always expected to win. India have won plenty of SAFF age-group titles - 11 to be precise, including both men and women. But what's essential to note is that they are won by practically 11 different batches of players. Winning the regional competition is a habit for India, but for every group of youngsters, it's almost always their first international experience. Their chance to break into the scene, get their first taste of success, wear the blue of India for the first time and bring joy to their country. And for that, our Blue Colts and Young Tigresses deserve every bit of appreciation.

"It was so good to wear the blue jersey. There's so much difference between the club and national team jersey," said Manglenthang Kipgen, the MVP of the 2023 SAFF U19 Championship. Coming on as a substitute, Kipgen broke the deadlock in the final with a sizzling second-half strike and added another one from a free-kick before assisting Gwngwsar Goyary to finish the rout.

"The first goal was an emotional moment. I was so happy at that moment. It was a dream come true to score my first goal for my country in a final like this," shared the 18-year-old.

Kipgen was introduced in the second half of the semi-final and final, turning the match around each time. Every India attack would pass through his nimble feet in the middle third. Amidst the jeers of 12 thousand opposition fans, he had the courage to score the fifth and winning penalty in the shootout against hosts Nepal. "I had confidence in myself," he said. "I thought the last penalty could be the winning goal, so I told the coach I wanted to take it. That winning penalty gave me more confidence to play in the final.

"First of all, I would like to thank God, who gives me strength. Secondly, I would like to thank coach Panda for giving me this opportunity to represent India," added Kipgen.

Despite not starting a single match in the tournament, Kipgen's game-changing display in the final inevitably crowned him the MVP. "Pakistan were playing deep with five defenders and four midfielders. The coach told me to play between the lines. I tried to do whatever he told me to. We tried to dominate the game and convert all our chances," explained Kipgen.







The Manipur lad earned many new fans in Kathmandu, including members of the Bhutan squad, who were staying in the same hotel as the Indian team. He received many congratulations from the Bhutan players, and a few even asked him for his jersey.

Also held in high regard was India striker Gwngwsar Goyary, the joint top-scorer of the tournament with three goals. The Blue Colts' campaign started and ended with him. Quite literally. Goyary found the net inside the first minute of India's first match against Bangladesh and also wrapped up the magnificent campaign with a coolly-placed header in the last minute of the final against Pakistan.

Sharing his thoughts from an emotionally fuelled week and a half in Nepal, the Assam boy said, "The feeling after scoring the first goal was inexplicable. I was so caught up in my emotions that I didn't realise what was happening on the pitch. Before the match, during the warm-up, I told the coach that I would run and hug him if I scored.

"Scoring in the first minute of the first match and the last minute of the last match felt like a movie script. I prayed to God to give me at least one goal in the final. I had promised everyone in my club that I would become the top scorer here, so I badly wanted the goal. I hope we made India proud."

However, this SAFF U19 Championship triumph is only the beginning of a long footballing journey the Blue Colts have embarked upon. Bigger tests in bigger games on bigger stages will come, which the youngsters are well aware of. The next one will be the AFC U20 Asian Cup Qualifiers in 2024.

"This is the best international debut tournament I could've asked for," remarked Goyary. "But this is only the start. We have to go a lot higher now. In the future, I want to be like Sunil Chhetri. I hope to maintain discipline levels like him and become a top scorer like him. We are only getting started."





# Shooting Range

SAFF U19 Championship - Nepal











## Asian Games football after nine years: A campaign to build upon

*After a gap of nine years the Men's and Women's teams took to the Asian Games, coming back with a few wins, a few losses but their reputations burnished beyond measure*

It wasn't exactly a campaign to stay in memory forever. But then, it was not a forgettable outing either. The Indian Men's and Women's teams didn't really set the stands on fire at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China. But, given the circumstances and the quality of the opposition teams, the Indians proved they were heavy-duty, durable sides, tough and sturdy when pushed into adverse conditions.

Igor Stimac's under-24 boys weathered a storm even before they landed in Hangzhou. Domestic commitments took their toll; there was no preparatory camp, not even a training session before they bumped into hosts China in the opening encounter. Yet, they took everyone by surprise by reaching the second round of the Asian Games after 13 years.

The start wasn't an ideal one. In fact, far from it. Long travel, fatigue and a lack of training forced India to succumb to China after 70 minutes of intense battle. The 1-5 defeat gave the impression of a rout, but in reality, it was like what Neville Cardus once famously said about cricket: 'scoreboard is an ass.'

India turned around in the second game against Bangladesh, winning the hard-fought match by a solitary goal. Skipper Sunil Chhetri was once again in his element, scoring from the spot with a low shot. The third and final match of the group league ended in a 1-1 draw against Myanmar – it could have been in India's pocket by the stroke of an hour, but missed chances allowed the Myanmar bench to heave a sigh of relief.



In the pre-quarterfinals, no one gave India any chance against Saudi Arabia, ranked 57th in the world. Well, they were not off the mark. India did lose, but didn't go down without a fight. After a goalless first half, two quick goals in the second half upset the Blue Tigers' plans.

On the eve of the Saudi Arabia match, Stimac said: "Our main problem is the lack of possibilities in regards to our players' natural positions in the game. We are preparing to go out and fight against the rival camp. We are going to leave everything on the pitch. We are going to fight it hard."

Stimac and his men didn't deter from what they promised to their fans.

Thomas Dennerby's Blue Tigresses didn't match the men's team in results. They didn't win any of their two matches in the group league and were eliminated. Yet to say they made the fans feel proud won't be an exaggeration. There was no shame in losing against Chinese Taipei and Thailand, ranked 38 and 46, respectively, in the FIFA rankings. But the kind of football they displayed on the pitch left many people speechless.

In both matches, the Indian attackers ripped apart the rival defence time and again without much success. One thing is for sure: long after the Asian Games is over, football devotees will continue to discuss Manisha Kalyan and Anju Tamang and their fluent runs through the flank.

India's Swedish coach has truly done wonders; if Morning Shows the Day is still a relevant proverb, then followers of the game in India could easily expect some good news from the Olympic Qualifiers in Uzbekistan later this month.







# A learning experience in quest of excellence

*The Young Tigresses bowed out in the AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers, but the valuable lessons to challenge the elite will help pave the way ahead*

**SRUTI CHAKRABORTY**

Did anyone really expect India to cross the hurdles of AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers Round 2, which was played in Buriram, Thailand, in September?

The answer is loud and clear: no and NO. To think that India would make the next grade would have been impractical and removed from reality.

Well, that the Young Tigresses made all the way to Round 2 in Thailand was a hugely creditable achievement itself. Never before have the India U17 Women's National Team made that far in their previous attempts.

Yet, it was so near but so far. India's group was unusually tough; having two powerhouses of women's football, the Korea Republic and Thailand, made Priya PV and her girls' task tougher than expected. The defeat against Korea was humiliating; the 0-8 margin was far from respectable and most importantly, avoidable. Too many loose passes were let in, too many gaps were left in the defence. Naturally, India paid the penalty for letting their guards down in the second session.



Things improved in the second tie against hosts Thailand, despite the defeat that ensured India's ouster from the race. The girls looked far more settled than before and had more options than ever.

Indian girls wrapped up the campaign in style with a resounding 3-0 win over IR Iran. Bengal striker Sujanjana Kaul notched up a hat-trick; the 16-year-old simply ripped apart the Iran defence.

Well, it wasn't a memorable campaign, but there were silver linings here and there. The biggest takeaway was the learning experience. India's campaign could be defined by two heavy losses to oppositions far ahead in their development cycle and ranked higher than the Young Tigresses. What the scorelines did not reflect, though, was the psychological brunt of those defeats. It's often noted that what separates the elite from the rest is their ability to bounce back from adversity. The Young Tigresses proved that they are made of hardened steel with tough psyches, on a growth cycle to be proud of.

In the lead-up to the tournament, the Indian team had undergone extensive training camps in Indore and Goa. However, the team could not play a few preparatory matches before leaving for Thailand and it did make some difference against stronger opponents.

Priya CV said, "Despite the girls' unwavering efforts, we encountered significant challenges on the technical side. The match experience is priceless, as it equips players with the ability to read and respond to various in-game situations. The dearth of such experience was a pivotal factor, preventing our players from knowing and adapting to different scenarios.

"We have a good batch of players; all of them are ready to take on the challenges and we have a long-term plan with this team. We had a two-month preparatory camp and played some friendly games, which helped the players grow in confidence. We are more focussed on our attacking side and ready to show everyone our skills.

"I am confident and strongly believe that my girls can deliver the best," said the Head Coach.





# Sulanjana Raul: The prolific scorer, who aims to emulate Sunil Chhetri

*Goals in buckets, skills in sheets, Sulanjana Raul has been lighting up women's football in her home state for a few years now, and in Thailand she did so in the India blue too with a marvellous hat-trick*

**SRUTI CHAKRABORTY**

Sulanjana Raul was expected to be seen on the field since her childhood. But not to play football. As the daughter of a farmer from the remote village of Bhagabanpur in West Bengal's East Midnapore district, it was natural for Sulanjana to assist her father on the field. But her vision of what a field should be used for was always bigger, which was further fuelled by her father and a supportive family.

The result was quick and fruitful. Sulanjana, the 16-year-old wide-eyed village girl, is already one of the key upcoming footballers in the country and a member of the India U17 team for the AFC U17 Asian Cup Qualifiers Round 2 in Thailand. From an early age, Sulanjana has had a couple of aspirations that drive her every day. First, she is determined to fulfil her father's dream of becoming a professional footballer. And last but not the least, she holds a deep desire to meet her football idol and constant source of inspiration, Sunil Chhetri.

Sulanjana started playing football with boys from her village when she was only 10 years old. She embarked on this journey with little knowledge of the game's techniques or its rules. However, she was determined to master the game, not just for herself but to accomplish her father's unfulfilled football dreams.



"I want to become a good footballer and fulfil my father's vision. For me, nothing is bigger than him. He is my role model and I try to learn a lot from him. I also help my father with farming because I want to help him like a son does.

"Do your hard work and success will follow — that's exactly what my father's simple mantra is. I try to follow his advice and work hard to achieve my goals," said Sulanjana.

Sulanjana became a popular name in women's football in Bengal after she joined East Bengal Club and turned out to be a prolific scorer with 11 goals in the Calcutta Women's League. Her talent caught the attention of the scouts, leading to her selection for the U17 Women's National Team one year ago. Since then, Sulanjana has taken several significant steps towards fulfilling her father's cherished dream.

"I've come a long way from my days of playing with local boys, then getting selected in trials for East Bengal and now I am here, representing the U17 national team," Sulanjana said with a hint of pride in her voice.

She also scored her first international goal on her debut in Round 1 of the AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup qualifiers earlier this year against Myanmar. She took the tally to four with a stunning hat-trick against IR Iran.

"There is a huge difference between scoring goals in club football and at the international level. I always try to learn the technical abilities and skills of each team I play against and attempt to implement them in my next games," said Sulanjana.







"I aim to make a significant impact on the international stage and score more goals for my country," the left-winger said.

"I've gathered huge experience from the first round of the qualifiers. Though I didn't start in the first XI initially, getting the opportunity against the Kyrgyz Republic for a few minutes and then being included in the starting XI against Myanmar made me feel like I was on cloud nine."

Not only does she dream of playing for the Senior National team one day, but also admires our Senior Men's National team skipper Sunil Chhetri and dreams of matching his feet in women's football one day.

"Sunil Chhetri is my favourite player. His composure, behaviour and lifestyle are truly remarkable. He's been the captain of India for so many years and has maintained himself exceptionally well. His focus is something I deeply admire.

"I really want to meet him some day and talk about football, his life, and what he likes," laughed Sulanjana.





# Shooting Range

*U17 Women's AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers - Thailand*







# FIFA Football For Schools Capacity-Building Programme conducted in Bengaluru, Pune, Sambalpur

*From NVS, KVS, CBSE to all government-run schools, the F4S aims to spread the beautiful game across every nook and corner of the country*

The FIFA Football For Schools (F4S) capacity-building/Train-the-Trainer programmes were held in Bengaluru, Pune and Sambalpur from October 2 to 6, 2023. The programmes were attended by Ms Fatimata Sow Sidibe - Director, FIFA Football for Schools, Mr Antonio Buenano Sanchez - Program Manager, FIFA Football for Schools, Mr Amlan Kamal - Consultant (India), FIFA Football for Schools and Mr Mulrajsinh Chudasama - Chairperson, AIFF Grassroots Committee, and member of the F4S Executive Committee.

Candidates from across the country participated in the two-day programmes, involving seminars and practical sessions, in each of the three locations. The majority of the participants were physical education teachers from Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas, and State Education Department-affiliated schools.

FIFA President Mr Gianni Infantino had, on October 30, 2022, the day of the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup Final, co-signed an MoU with the MoE, and AIFF, to launch the F4S programme across India with a goal of reaching 25 million school children throughout the country.

FIFA, AIFF, DoSE&L - MoE and SAI are also working alongside the State Education Depts to distribute over a Million Size 4 Adidas footballs in all 789 districts of India ensuring coverage of NVS, KVS, State Education Department-run schools, CBSE-affiliated schools, and other Central Government Schools in all districts of India over the coming months.

The course was mainly based on the FIFA Football For Schools mobile application. The participants were explained how to create the curriculum on the application and conduct practical sessions for the same. They were introduced to several life skills to teach young children while playing/teaching football. The practical session in the ground involved the direct implementation of all the learnings from theory sessions. Basic football drills, skill lessons, warm-up activities, etc. were conducted.

After the end of the programme, Ms Fatimata Sow Sidibe handed the diplomas to each participant. She said, "India is very important to FIFA. We are always ready to help develop football in the best way possible. We have successfully imported 1 million Adidas footballs to India. They will soon be deployed to all the coaches present here and in other parts of the country."

She added, "All participants of this programme will be given assignments to go teach more people what they were taught here in the past two days. The reason we involved Kendriya Vidyalaya, Navodaya Vidyalaya and the local State Government Education Departments is because they have direct reach to the majority of the school-going children in the country. The F4S Programme will cover 211 FIFA member association countries across the world where we are conducting similar programs to help develop the game."







# AIFF President, Secretary General hail Indian National Futsal Team's maiden appearance in AFC Futsal Asian Cup

Saturday, October 7, 2023, was a historic day for Indian futsal. The Indian Men's National team began their campaign in the AFC Futsal Asian Cup 2024 Qualifiers with a match against hosts Tajikistan in the iconic city of Dushanbe. Although it ended in a 3-6 defeat, it was the first time India played a competitive match in futsal.

Speaking on the development, All India Football Federation President Kalyan Chaubey said, "India's participation in the AFC Futsal Asian Cup Qualifiers is truly a momentous occasion. It is yet another example of how the AIFF under the present leadership, has become an organisation, that believes in all-round development. In football, India are making rapid progress in Asia. We will catch up in futsal too very soon and will emerge a major force."

AIFF Secretary General Dr Shaji Prabhakaran said, "Futsal is a popular sport across the world and it is also gaining popularity in India. Like in football, the AIFF is also trying to develop futsal and beach football and make them truly competitive in India. Sending the National futsal team to the Asian Cup Qualifiers is not all about playing a tournament. There is a bigger picture involved in it and it will have a far-reaching effect."



# Of football and passive resistance: Mahatma Gandhi's connection to the beautiful game

*Bapu's love for the game goes beyond the Passive Registers, to a small borough in East London, and a club who still ply their trade in the Premier League*

**MARIO RODRIGUES**

By now, many Indian football fans will be aware of Mahatma Gandhiji's links with football and his pioneering role in setting up three teams of the Passive Resisters Football Club during his sojourn in South Africa from 1893 to 1915.

As the story that has been well publicised in recent times goes, the Passive Resisters football clubs, based in Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Durban, were founded by the 'Father of the Nation' who was also one of the founding members of the Transvaal Indian Football Association in 1896.

The clubs were formed to promote his newly-minted philosophy of non-violent passive resistance to injustice and racial discrimination that Indians faced in South Africa. What triggered Gandhiji's entry into this realm of political activism was his eviction from a whites-only train compartment at Pietermaritzburg station despite holding a valid ticket due to the segregationist laws prevalent in the racist republic at that time.

Gandhiji and his associates often turned up at his club games and impressed upon his players in half-time or post-match speeches, the imperatives of peaceful resistance to oppression and the fight for social change. "Competition between passive resisters does not exhaust them; on the contrary, it ennobles them," he is reputed to have said.

The fact that football was an extremely popular game among the struggling Indian emigrants in South Africa might have prompted Gandhiji to tap into the 'beautiful game' to promote his radical philosophy.



But it is more likely that ‘Bapuji’ may have inherited his love for the game from his earlier association with his mentor and close friend Arnold Hills, the founder of Thames Ironworks FC in 1895 which was renamed West Ham United FC shortly thereafter. The Arnold Hills Hospitality Lounge at the David Moyes-managed side at the club’s current stadium commemorates the memory of its founder.

Despite the Hills hospitality lounge now ironically serving alcohol and non-vegetarian delicacies for its esteemed patrons, Hills was an avowed vegetarian and teetotaler. The all-round sportsman who excelled in athletics, cricket, and football (he once trooped out for Oxford University as a forward in a losing cause in the 1877 FA Cup final against the Wanderers), befriended a young M K Gandhi who had come to London in 1888 to study law and jurisprudence.

Based on their shared beliefs, Hills inducted Gandhiji into the executive committee of the London Vegetarian Society of which he was president as well as its chief financier. They bonded well. Hills was also managing director of the Thames Iron Works shipbuilding firm. A committed philanthropist, Hills launched the football team as a welfare measure after copping flak following a workers’ strike due to poor wages and working conditions. Acknowledged as a pioneer for his innovation of floodlight football, Hills funded the relatively successful football team from his own pocket, but stepped back from active involvement after the club decided to turn professional and was renamed West Ham United. He however remained its largest shareholder.

When Gandhiji visited London for the Round Table Conference in 1931 (Hills had died a few years earlier), he stayed in East London and is reported to have visited the now-refurbished Boleyn Tavern, situated near the club’s old stadium. It used to be a favourite haunt of the Hammers’ supporters in the old days. According to Wikipedia, it is said that Gandhiji attended several West Ham games (though there is no proof to back this claim) and drank cream soda during his visit to the pub while discussing football and radical politics with local people.

Benjamin Roberts claims as much in his book *Bottled: English Football’s Boozy Story* (2019). We will leave it at that. While West Ham United are still alive and kicking in the Premier League, the Passive Resisters gradually faded out after Gandhiji departed South African shores to kickstart his political career in his native country. But Hills and Gandhiji will continue to awe and inspire football fans for their pioneering efforts -- one to promote the welfare of his workers, the other to bring about political and moral change.





# FIFA-AIFF Communications Workshop held in Delhi

A highly engaging and interactive FIFA-AIFF Communications workshop was held at the Football House on October 3 and 4, 2023.

The six-member FIFA delegation comprising Rüdiger Müller, David Noemi, Mazhar Mansoor, Christian Michels, Colin Gibson, Prince Rufus, along with AIFF President Kalyan Chaubey, Secretary General Shaji Prabhakaran and Dy Secretary General Satyanarayana M were present in the workshop.





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