

State Of Affairs

A roundup of activities from AIFF's member associations



Forty-Four Years On: How Mizoram Turns Independence Day Into a Football Festival

Mizoram Football Association

On August 15, while the rest of India marks Independence Day with flag hoistings, parades and cultural programmes, Mizoram adds something else: football. Not one match or a ceremonial exhibition, but a statewide calendar of competitive tournaments organised by district and zone football associations.

This year, 46 tournaments were staged across 29 locations, involving 424 teams and 622 matches, with a combined prize pool exceeding ₹14 lakh. An estimated 8,000-plus players participated, alongside officials, volunteers and support staff.



It is proof of how deeply football is rooted in Mizoram's social fabric. Some of these tournaments carry no prize money, yet teams and communities show up anyway because the game itself, and the standing it brings to a village or a club, is reason enough.

The MFA has also worked to connect different levels of that pyramid through what it describes as a 'total football' approach, with every initiative, committee and partnership pointing towards the same goal: the development of the game.

At the grassroots end is the Naupang League – Naupang meaning “children” in Mizo – launched in partnership with the Reliance Foundation Young Champs to provide structured football for boys and girls as young as five across four districts. At the other end, open, women’s and veterans’ competitions, like the Independence Day tournaments, keep the door to football open for players well beyond the traditional development years.

This level of engagement is not incidental. It reflects a deliberate effort to build an environment in which players receive the opportunity, support and consistency required to develop, compete and enjoy the game at every stage of their footballing journey.

Perhaps the festival's most distinctive feature, however, is its community-led nature.



District and zone football associations — Bunglemun Zone FA, Zyhno Zone FA, Farkawn Zone FA, Bairabi Zone FA, Sangau Zone FA, Vathuampui Zone FA, and more besides — organise the tournaments, while many participating clubs are village and community teams sustained by local patronage and voluntary public contributions rather than lucrative commercial sponsorship. This model keeps competitive football alive beyond Aizawl and the state's urban centres, placing it directly within the communities where the game is played.

Joseph Lalhmingthanga Chinzah, Honorary Secretary of Lawngtlai DFA, says, ***“The Independence Day tournaments give our local clubs and players an opportunity to compete at home, in front of their own communities. It is an important part of keeping competitive football active throughout the district.”***



The tradition began in 1982, when the first Independence Day Football Tournament was organised in Aizawl. Four decades later, it has continued uninterrupted for 44 consecutive years, becoming the longest-running football trophy tradition in Mizoram's history.

Mizoram Football Association President Lalnghinglova Hmar says, ***"The continued participation in Independence Day football demonstrates the strength of the football culture in Mizoram. Our objective is to ensure that competitions remain accessible and that players have opportunities to develop through regular competitive football."***

Football in Mizoram is not ring-fenced to one age group, gender, or level of the game — this August, every category of player participated across nearly every corner of the state simultaneously. The geographical spread of this year's schedule reflected the accessibility. Tournaments were organised across 29 locations, including Bungle, Tlabung, Rangte, Zyhno, Farkawn, Sangau, Chawngte and Vathuampui. Each location hosted its own tournament.

The competitions spanned age groups and categories: U-14 and U-16 boys' tournaments in Siaha, women's and veterans' competitions in Kolasib, women's and age-group football in Lawngtlai, a U-17 girls' competition in Khawzawl, and open, women's and veterans' tournaments in Aizawl.

For many Mizo footballers, the road to higher-level football begins in competitions such as these — through village and zone teams, district tournaments and, for a fortunate few, state and national representation before professional football. The Independence Day tournaments sit as one of the most consistent entry points to experience competitive football while giving local clubs and academy scouts a platform to identify emerging talent.

That pathway is especially significant for Mizoram, which continues to contribute strongly to the nation's professional game. The MFA recorded 43 Mizoram players in the Indian Super League and 63 players across the Indian Football League in the 2025-26 season — extraordinary figures for a state that accounts for less than one per cent of India's population. These numbers are the cumulative outcome of sustained participation, coaching and competition across the football pyramid, with the Independence Day tournaments serving as one of its longest-standing foundations.





The 2026 schedule also underlines something easy to overlook amid the bigger numbers: this is a genuinely multi-generational football culture. Open tournaments run alongside women's, youth and veterans' categories — not as token gestures, but as full, standalone tournaments with their own teams, matches and prize pools — creating opportunities for players at different stages of their footballing journeys.

Lalrammawia, Honorary Secretary of Kolasib DFA, believes this is central to the tournament's value. ***“The Independence Day competitions allow different generations of players to remain connected with football. The involvement of veterans, women and young players makes the programme particularly valuable to the local football community.”***

For young players, the tournaments provide competitive exposure. For clubs, an opportunity to compete and identify talent. For district associations, it strengthens the base of the local football structure. For communities, it is a rare opportunity to gather collectively around something they built themselves.

Forty-four years after the first tournament in Aizawl, the tradition keeps expanding. C Lalramdinsanga, Honorary Secretary of Hnahthial DFA, says, ***“For almost two decades, despite limited funding, the Hnahthial District FA and our Zone Football Associations, with the support of local NGOs, have kept the Independence Day tournament going. As Mizos and as Indians, we see it as our way of coming together, celebrating our shared identity and paying tribute to the sacrifices of our freedom fighters — through the game we love.”***

This August 15, 46 champions were crowned across 29 locations in Mizoram. Most of the country may never hear their names, but that has never been the point. What these tournaments leave behind, year after year, is proof of a community's enduring relationship with football — that on the day set aside to celebrate the nation's freedom, Mizoram chooses to celebrate it with a ball at its feet. As long as this tournament keeps running, it will keep proving the same thing: come what may, football dreams in Mizoram do not die easily.



HISTORIC **Drema Choiki Becomes** **First Female Vice** **President of Tawang** **District FA**

Arunachal Pradesh Football Association

The historic achievement reflects the belief that football grows stronger when opportunities to lead are open to all sections of society. Inclusive leadership brings diverse perspectives to administration of the game, strengthens institutions, and can inspire greater participation both on and off the pitch.

The inclusion of more women in football administration is not only a step towards greater equality but also a significant investment in the long-term growth and development of the sport.

Drema Choiki's appointment marks an important milestone for football administration in Arunachal Pradesh and sets an encouraging example for greater female representation in leadership roles.

The Tawang District Football Association (TDFA) has created history by electing Drema Choiki as its first female Vice President, making her the first woman to hold the position of Vice President in a District Football Association in Arunachal Pradesh. This landmark election comes in pursuance of the newly adopted provisions of the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, and the National Sports Governance (National Sports Bodies) Rules, 2026.

Flood Relief Initiative

Assam Football Association

The Assam Football Association (AFA) extended relief support to flood-affected communities in Charaideo district, distributing essential supplies across seven villages, including Maoutgaon, Nagaon and Tengapukhuri. Led by President Naba Kumar Doley, Secretary Dr Sangrang Brahma and Treasurer Hiren Gogoi, the initiative reflects football's spirit of solidarity and community service.



Where Nagaland's football story begins: Hundreds of children, one Baby League and a dream

Nagaland Football Association



The footballers were small enough that the pitch seemed enormous. Some chased the ball with the single-minded urgency only children can produce. While others were still learning where to stand, when to pass and how to maintain balance when the game became chaotic. For a few, the idea of football as a career is still little more than a distant possibility.

But on June 13, 2026, at Indira Gandhi Stadium in Kohima, 420 children were given something more immediate: a place to begin.

The Grassroot Football Festival and third edition of the Baby League 2026 brought together boys and girls from across Kohima in four age groups: 5-6, 7-8, 9-10 and 11-12. It is football in its heart-led origin: children, a ball, teammates and the freedom to learn and play.

Started in 2024, the Nagaland Baby League aims to introduce children to organised football at an early age. This year's edition followed a simple philosophy: ***“Catch them young and teach them right.”***



Anthony Ngullie, IAS, Secretary of the Department of Youth Resources and Sports, and special guest at the event, said the idea goes beyond producing winners at a children's tournament.

“We want to encourage the young children to start at a very young age so that as they grow older, they will have much more experience and they will also learn a lot in the course of their journey as a young footballer,” he said.

While mastering the ball is central to the league, it seeks to foster friendship, teamwork, sportsmanship and confidence, qualities that are equally important when children begin navigating competitive sport.

The Baby League's ambitions have received recognition beyond the Kohima stadium. **During the 135th episode of Mann Ki Baat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the Nagaland Baby League while speaking about grassroots football.**

He noted that despite its name, the Baby League is far from an ordinary children's competition. It offers children aged five to 12 a space to play football, build speed, and discover their identity.

For those running the programme, that recognition has added another dimension to what began as a local grassroots initiative. For the children, however, the significance is much simpler.

Nine-year-old Kedi Sekhose, one of the participants, expressed hope that more football events for children would be organised, saying they encouraged both children and their parents.

Nagaland has a deep football culture but its challenge is creating a pathway that allows children's enthusiasm to survive years leading into senior football. The Baby League is an attempt to serve as the first step.



There are no guarantees in children's football. Some will continue with the game, while others may choose different paths. That is why development cannot be measured only in trophies. At Indira Gandhi Stadium, 420 children were not being asked to prove they were footballers. They were simply being given the chance to become them.



Gujarat Super League: A Platform for the Growth of Football in the state

Gujarat Football Association

The Gujarat Super League (GSL), an initiative of the Gujarat State Football Association (GSFA), was launched with the vision to provide players from Gujarat with a structured and competitive pathway to develop and progress within the state.

Since its inception, the GSL has brought together players, coaches and clubs from across the state under one league structure. It provides local players with valuable exposure to high-level competition, allowing them to gain experience and progress in their football careers.



Following the previous two successful editions, the Gujarat Super League will enter its third season in 2026 with six clubs – Ahmedabad Avengers, Gandhinagar Giants, Surat Strikers, Saurashtra Spartans, Karnavati Knights and Vadodara Warriors – competing in the upcoming season.



GSL Season 3 is scheduled to begin on September 1, 2026, and will feature an expanded player development and recruitment structure, including Gujarat players and selected outstation players. The initiative aims to provide local footballers with a greater exposure and strengthen the pathway from district-level football to elite competition.

The Gujarat Super League is part of GSFA's efforts towards developing the sport in the state by creating sustainable opportunities for players, coaches and clubs. and building a stronger football culture across Gujarat. As GSL continues enters its third season, the focus remains on providing more players with the opportunity to pursue their footballing ambitions.

Meghalaya State League: Building A Stronger Football Ecosystem Across The State

Meghalaya Football Association

The Meghalaya State League (MSL), organised by the Meghalaya Football Association (MFA) and supported by the Department of Sports and Youth Affairs, Government of Meghalaya, has become an important pillar for football development in the state.

Now in its fifth edition, the MSL continued to grow in scale, reach and impact. The 2026 season featured 31 teams, more than 100 matches and eight venues across Meghalaya, bringing clubs and football communities from different parts of the state into a unified competitive league structure. By taking matches to multiple venues, the league provided clubs with regular competitive football experience while allowing more communities to engage with the game.

The impact of the MSL extends beyond the players. The competition provided coaches opportunities to develop their teams, referees and match officials with regular assignments, and medical, administrative and competition personnel with valuable match-day experience. For clubs, participation also encouraged stronger administration, logistics, technical teams and match-day operations, contributing to the overall professionalisation of the sport in Meghalaya.



The MSL is part of a wider pathway within the state's football structure. The Meghalaya Youth League (MYL) provides structured competition for U-13 and U-15 players, while the Meghalaya Women's State League (MWSL) provides a platform for women's football. Together, these competitions create opportunities across age groups and categories, strengthening the progression from youth football to senior competition.

The growth of the MSL was reflected in its fifth edition final between Nongkseh SSCC and Langsning FC at the SSA Stadium on June 5, 2026. Nongkseh completed an unbeaten maiden campaign with a 2-1 victory. Langsning took the lead through an own goal in the first-half, before Nongkseh captain Hardy Cliff Nongbri equalised in the 61st minute. Substitute Shano Tariang scored the decisive goal seven minutes later.



Kitboklang Pale of Nongkseh was named Player of the Final, Guidle Syiemlieh was named Best Goalkeeper, Langsning's Nelson Rymbai was the top scorer with 23 goals, and Nongbri was named Player of the Tournament. Nongkseh's title was particularly notable as the club lifted the trophy in its maiden MSL campaign, while Langsning reached their first final.



The final drew more than 10,000 spectators, with the stadium reaching capacity. The Meghalaya Football Association arranged a live screening facility for supporters unable to enter, reflecting the growing interest in state-level football.

The significance of the MSL extends beyond its statistics. Every season creates opportunities for players, coaches, officials, administrators, volunteers and clubs to develop and contribute to the game. As the league continues to grow, it helps build a stronger, inclusive and more connected football structure across Meghalaya, giving more people the opportunity to participate, develop and remain involved in football.



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