



STADIUM ECHO

The Indian Football Magazine

KARIM'S POPULARITY AND THE INFLUENCE OF FOOTBALL

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INTERVIEW WITH
MANOJ JOSHI,
AFC A LICENSE
COACH

BABY LEAGUES:
SHAPING THE
FUTURE OF INDIAN
FOOTBALL?

PREMIER SPORTS
LEAGUE: DELHI'S
ANSWER TO THE
SUNDAY LEAGUE

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Editor's Note

Things are in motion now. In both Indian football and this magazine. The stagnation due to the pandemic promises to be over soon with dates and venues being set for the ISL. There have been takeovers of some of the biggest clubs in the country and new clubs have been launched and the sense of the impending excitement has only gotten stronger. Similarly, the magazine is now two issues old and the positive response from the first issue has motivated us to keep working for Indian football.

Stadium Echo is a humble attempt by a group of young people to cover the fascinating transition of Indian football from a footballing minnow to hopefully an Asian force to be reckoned with in the coming years. As we patiently await the resumption of football in India, we cover stories that have shaped the sport in the country over the past century or so. Quality coverage of the sport is a prerequisite to building a culture and this magazine aims to achieve that to an extent.

It is of great personal pride that we publish this first issue less than two months after the conception of the idea. I am grateful to the writing team and my co-editor, all of whom worked very hard on this project to bring the readers engaging pieces and I would like to thank the designing team which has given this idea an aesthetically pleasing form. Lastly, I would like to thank you, the reader, for taking time out of your life to read and support Indian football

Ritwik Khanna



Karim's Restaurant near Jama Masjid

Karim's Popularity and the Influence of Football

Ritvik Khanna

The world largest religion, Christianity, has 2.2 billion followers. Football has over three billion. The biggest religion in the world is technically not even a religion. It's a symbol of love, peace and unity in its purest form. This is one such story. This is not a story about football. This is a story of how the beautiful game brings people together.

Tracing Indian Football's legacy back to the 50s when India was dubbed as the "Asian Brazil", a poor man's team - Hyderabad City Police Football Team, commonly known as City Afghans - was on the rise. Founded in 1939, the institutional club consisted of policemen who would represent the city in various sports such as Cricket, Badminton, and Track and Field, for which they were given an insignificant monetary compensation - a mere Rs 40 per month. However, their sheer grit, determination, and love for the game soon saw them evolve into "the champion of the masses". They earned the title of national champions by winning the Durand Cup three times during their golden era, prevailing over Kolkata's rich Big Three: Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting. They celebrated a nationwide fan following and especially enjoyed all the rage in the capital.

Elsewhere, outside the walls of the Red Fort in Delhi, a restaurant with an imperial heritage dating back to the Mughal dynasty spread

its "Shahi Dastar-Khwan" (Royal Tablecloth) under the shadow of Jama Masjid. This hidden gem in the 50s, called Karim's, is now one of the finest restaurants in the country - all thanks to the Hyderabad City Police Football Team.

At the time, along with its Mughlai food, Karim's offered rudimentary and cheap accommodation to those who couldn't afford a more deluxe stay in the Capital. The local Hyderabad Mughlai cuisine, affordable prices, along with its proximity to Jama Masjid made it an ideal place for Hyderabad City Police Football Team to lodge during tournaments. Ever since 1950, when it played its first Durand Cup, the team has chosen Karim's as its home in Delhi. Even after becoming one of the best teams in the country and featuring international superstars like Syed Khwaja Azizuddin (Aziz), the humble upbringing and down to earth characteristic of the team made them accept such elementary amenities.

The restaurant became quite the hub for player-fan interaction in the 50s as fans raided the hotel to chat with their favorite superstars. The benevolent players rarely shied away from exchanging ideas or singing their favorite tunes with their loyal supporters. While doing the same, the fans would order food from the Mughlai restaurant. The hidden gem was discovered, and it wasn't long before the praises of their lip-smacking food spread all throughout Delhi. For any foodie, Karim's is unarguably Delhi's favorite culinary destination and has still managed to preserve its most cherished quality: its heritage.



Hyderabad City Police Team

From Bollywood stars, sportspersons and prime ministers, to journalists and historians, Karim's has become a Capital landmark for all. As of today, there are over 20 branches all over Delhi-NCR, but eating at the original Old Delhi branch is an experience like no other.

The owners and directors of Karim's duly recognize Hyderabad City Football Team's role in commercializing their restaurant. When their legendary head coach, Syed Abdul Rahim, died in 1963; one of the owners personally flew out to Hyderabad to attend Rahim's funeral. Ex-players, staff and Rahim's family are still provided with a 50% discount every time they choose to visit the streets of old Delhi. Such is the impact and connection that the Hyderabad City Police Team has had on the restaurant. The team does not exist today, but has played a vital role in laying the foundations of a greater legacy, and perfectly exemplifies how Football has the ability to unite people like nothing else.

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Premier Sports League: Delhi's Answer To the Sunday League

Ritwik Khanna

What does one think of when they hear the phrase 'Sunday League'? It might evoke an image of middle-aged men attempting to play football, occasionally pulling off a neat turn or sweetly catching a volley, which finds its way to the trending chart for football pages on social media. It is perhaps an accurate representation of Western countries, but Premier Sports League (PSL) in Delhi NCR bucks that trend comprehensively. The league has created a safe haven for a wide range of football enthusiasts - from college students to working professionals and more.

In terms of popularity and engagement, football is dwarfed in comparison to other sports in India, and this was apparent to Aakash Bajaj when he couldn't find a Sunday league like the one he was used to in the USA, where he got to get together with friends to play well-organized football matches every weekend. Along with his brother Prithvi Bajaj, he decided to gather some friends and family for small games on Sundays, and this eventually became a regular thing. Slowly, a large number of people including those from embassies and corporates got interested in playing and it reached a point where different teams were formed for simple weekend kickabouts. Seeing this increasing interest, Aakash and Prithvi organized a few friendlies in late 2016 as a litmus test and the positive reaction led to

the launch of a competitive amateur league in January 2017: the Premier Sports League.

Resources for the first season were largely crowdsourced. Kits were procured from a friend's garment start-up, sponsored prizes were raised via close family connections, and media content was managed by a friend's organization.

Friends and families got together to build squads and as the word got out, team registrations received an overwhelming response. The plans had been set for a 14 team league but by the time it was ready to start, 24 teams were interested in participating, which gave birth to Division 2 of PSL. The league was an instant hit. Who wouldn't want to play well organized football under the warm sun on a chilly Delhi Sunday?

Aakash and Prithvi were taken aback by the explosive growth and took some time getting used to managing operations and employees. It soon became apparent, though, that they had a knack for it. They pulled off a huge trophy reveal at a sports bar where the top teams and individual award nominees were awarded by the sponsors at the event.

PSL undoubtedly offers the best quality of competitive amateur football in Delhi NCR when it comes to Sunday leagues. With 4000 participations and counting, the league now has premium sponsors, who award weekly prizes to players along with social media shootouts. The league also has a tie-up that provides match stats, but the only tie-up that players are interested in is with the biryani-wala which they can share with their opponents after the match, thanks to DJ Bhaiya.

Previously, there was a huge gap in the amateur football circuit that was just waiting to be filled. Initiatives like PSL play a big role in creating a culture of the sport in the country. Despite the exponential growth, the Bajajs have not forgotten the purpose of the league - making memories with friends and family, and to continue having a positive impact on the football communities in India.



In Conversation With: Manoj Joshi, AFC A-License Coach

Speaking to Ritwik Khanna

Manoj Joshi is an AFC A-license coach with Delhi FC who play in the Delhi League Senior Division. He has in the past coached teams across Delhi at various age groups. He is a former professional player having played for Mohun Bagan, ND Heroes, Railways, and the Delhi state team.

The Interviewer: What got you into football in the first place?

Manoj Joshi: I belong to a sporting family so it kind of runs in the blood. My grandfather played football for his Air Force unit and my father was a district level footballer. I was really athletic as a kid and I used to play all sports but I had an edge in football. There was a local club where I grew up in Dehradun and my neighbour was one of the officials of the club. He saw me playing and he got me into the club and that's how it started.

T.I: How did you decide you wanted to become a coach? Was it something that became clear to you during your playing career?

M.J: It became apparent to me early on that I wanted to remain in touch with the sport regardless of my age. I think it's the moral duty of every player to give it back to the game which one can do that in a lot of ways - by becoming referees, by joining administration, running a football club and so on. I was told by so many teammates during my playing days that I should be a coach as it suits my personality. Later, I realised I also had it in me and here I am.

T.I: So what are some of the major challenges that you've faced in your time as a coach in India?

M.J: Obviously administrative issues are always there but apart from that, I feel that football in India is not a top tier sport in the eyes of the general public. So getting people involved becomes a challenge. Similarly, most parents aren't very supportive and convincing them to let their child play football and pursue a career in it is one of the toughest tasks. Parents want a guarantee that their child will make it to the top. So making them understand that they need to give their child more freedom and let them play is a huge task.

T.I: Along similar lines, considering your work has been largely with age group teams and younger players, what are some improvements needed from that perspective?

M.J: I think policy makers need to make changes in the education policy and give more importance to sports in general not just football. We need to add it in the curriculum because of its physical, mental and social benefits. Sports adds a lot of positivity to our personality and teaches us the importance of teamwork and togetherness. Also, irrespective of gender, mass participation by kids is needed. We need to dedicate more time and resources to women's football. Above all, instead of blaming the players for what they lack in various aspects when it comes to becoming good footballers, we coaches need to improve in order to lift the standard of the game. I firmly believe that only good coaches can produce good players.

T.I: What are some of the structural shortcomings that you face as a coach in Indian football?

M.J: I think a lot of work has to be done in this context. Few players in India get have access to good training facilities like good pitches, modern equipment, latest curriculum, qualified coaches and more. Infrastructure is something we definitely need to improve upon. You can't expect players to stay motivated every time and perform when there's a lack of proper infrastructure. Apart from this, lack of knowledge about nutritional requirement, injury prevention and rehabilitation are some areas of concern.

T.I: Coming to things on a broader level, what are your thoughts on the proposed roadmap by the AIFF?

M.J: I think it's a visionary step. Some changes are very positive and will give fruitful results in the future like the rule change in Santosh Trophy to have five players in the squad and three in the starting eleven who are U21 compulsorily. Similarly, in the youth leagues, there were a lot of cases of age fraud. AIFF has become stricter in this matter and a few years back they penalized a few teams for the same reason. They have also changed the criteria in the Youth leagues. So if a kid now has to play U13 I-league then he has to actually be 12 years or younger. This has given an extra year gap which will make a huge difference in development. Coming to the ISL, reducing the number of foreigners is a great step according to me. It will allow homegrown players to get more game time which I believe is a rally constructive move and the need of the hour.

T.I: Moving back to your playing career, you've played for institutional teams like Railways and also for dedicated clubs. How would you compare the two?

M.J: If I compare the standard of football then clubs definitely come out on top. Clubs are more structure and professional and having a few foreigners in the squad definitely gives them the upper hand on the field. They have a base, a proper training programme, fixtures for the entire season, and they have fans among other factors. When it comes to institutional clubs then football is just a part of the whole thing. However, I think a major evaluation comes when a player gets injured. Not many clubs bother at that point because they have your replacement ready. When you are playing for institutional teams there is definitely more security. I have personally experienced this during my playing career also. Railways was always beside me during my difficult days. There's salary issues when a player gets injured also in clubs but you won't find that in institutional teams. Take the pandemic, top clubs from Europe have cut salaries but institutions like Railways haven't at all. They have done a commendable

task giving jobs to so many players. I consider myself very fortunate that Railways acknowledged my efforts and offered me a job and that is something that I am proud of to this day.

T.I: So do you think these institutional teams have a role to play in the new look Indian football pyramid?

M.J: I am optimistic about this issue. Every player dreams of playing at the highest level but not everyone can make it for whatever reason. So there is definitely a need for security for players who are not playing at the top level and need to get a job. AIFF needs to sit down and sit down with these institutions and figure out something positive and constructive. Institutional teams have the potential, passion and the resources to help the game.

T.I: Do you think that Delhi has lagged behind the rest of the country when it comes to football considering you've spent most of your career in the capital?

M.J: I think Delhi has huge talent and I think that the stakeholders are trying their best. I believe execution of plans is the area we need to work upon the most. There should be more sincerity, honesty and accountability when it comes to executing plans.

T.I: You've played with Sunil Chhetri in your career for the Delhi team so do you have any insight on what that was like?

M.J: Actually many people don't know that it's not just the Santosh Trophy, we played for the same team in Delhi League for two years and later we were scouted by Mohun Bagan together in 2001. He always had that extra finishing touch and he was a fighter on the pitch since the start. I think that fighting spirit shows in his aerial ability. He's not that tall but he is an exceptional header of the ball with his big leaps and perfect timing. We can still see that same quality even now. And he is also exceptionally hard working and disciplined. He was respected and loved by his teammates because he was always the

first one on the field and the last one to leave.

T.I: My last question to you is about your current role. Delhi FC has recently tied up with Punjab FC from the I-league so what are your plans and goals at this club?

M.J: So we have set some realistic goals for the upcoming season like you do when you join any team and we will give our best to achieve them. Obviously my duty is to strengthen the squad in the required areas and make a team that can not only win matches but also some hearts by playing good football. We want to increase the fanbase of the team in Delhi and hopefully we can work hard and meet the expectations of all the stakeholders.



Joshi's current club Delhi FC recently announced a merger with Minerva Punjab



Aizawl FC celebrating the I-League title

Revisiting Aizawl FC's Triumph: India's Own Leicester City

Siddhant Agrawal

Underdog stories. Who doesn't love them? Who doesn't love to see a small team from the middle of nowhere fight the odds and take on the big boys? It's like a mystic tale which you never thought could be real unfolding right in front of your eyes. Underdog stories are one of the most lovable and amazing parts of football and regardless of how many there are, each new one warms the heart.

Of many of these stories, the most notable one has to be the 2015-16 campaign of Leicester City. It's still hard to believe that a team which had miraculously escaped relegation the previous season somehow "dilly ding dilly dong"-ed their way to the Premier League title. Leicester's dream campaign only proved what Johan Cruyff once said, "I have never seen a bag of money score a goal". While all the PL fans in the country were invested in this Cinderella story, no one had any idea that another team from Mizoram was writing its own fairytale. This team was Aizawl FC.

In the 2015-16 season, the team was playing its first ever season in the first tier of Indian Football and it could not have gone worse. A disastrous campaign ended with relegation back to the second division of the I-League after finishing second from bottom. But their fates

miraculously took a turn for the better when at the end of the season it was announced that Dempo and Salgaocar FC would be withdrawing from the I-League next season due to disagreements over the roadmap of Indian Football with the AIFF. This caused spots to open up in the I-League and thus no relegations were made that year. Aizawl FC was handed a lifeline to play in the I-League for another season. And boy did they take that opportunity up with open arms.

The team hired Khalid Jamil as their head coach for the season. Khalid was not new to surviving relegations. His previous job at Mumbai FC, where he was the coach for 6 years, he successfully avoided the drop in each of those seasons. Despite overachieving with the limited resources at the club, he was sacked. It would prove to be a pivotal decision - catastrophic for Mumbai FC and cathartic for Jamil. Mumbai FC was relegated in the first season after his departure while Jamil went on to lift the I-league trophy. Always an influential coach, Jamil believed in creating strong bonds with his players to bring out the best in them. His impact on the players was such that players like Jayesh Rane and Ashutosh Mehta, crowd favorites at Mumbai FC, took a pay cut to follow him to Aizawl FC.



Khalid Jamil Celebrating

Building a team on a shoestring budget, Khalid's team did not play stylish, flamboyant football. In fact, in their title-winning season, Aizawl FC managed to score only 24 goals, which was the least amongst the top six in the league that year.

Even put on paper and compared man to man, the team stood no chance against the likes of Mohun Bagan, East Bengal, and Bengaluru FC. Yet what the team lacked in swagger and individual brilliance, they made up for in resilience, grit, and mentality. Late goals were a regular part of their campaign and the team never lost back-to-back games in the season thus showing the confidence and belief that the team had in themselves.

None of the games provided the team with easy wins, they had to fight hard for each goal and each victory. They scraped six 1-0 wins throughout the season and won none of the games by a margin of more than two goals. The team also proved their resilience and solidity at the back as they conceded only 14 goals throughout the whole season. Another very important aspect of their game was their home fans and the support they received there. The team was undefeated at their home ground winning eight matches and drawing one.

There was a fair share of drama towards the end of the season. With two matches left, Aizawl FC was tied on points with Mohun Bagan at the top of the table with away

matches against the mighty Mohun Bagan and the Northeast Derby against Shillong Lajong left to play. The team put in one of their best defensive performances of the season against Mohun Bagan and scraped out a 1-0 victory. This meant that they only needed to avoid defeat in Shillong to be crowned champions. They did just that despite falling behind early in the game. In the final two games, Aizawl FC showed what they stood for throughout the season - mental strength and a never say die attitude. The team went on to lift the I-League trophy and became the first team from North - East India to ever lift the coveted trophy.

It was vindication for Jamil, a validation for his football philosophy. People had called his football negative and not fun to watch but in that season with Aizawl, he gave more joy to Indian football fans than they had seen in a long time. Aizawl's triumph gave hope to the small

clubs in Indian Football and it provided a breath of fresh air to the I-league. Khalid and many of the players, after their impressive run, were lured away by big clubs (Khalid himself going to East Bengal) but none of them could emulate the level of performance they reached at Aizawl FC.



Aizawl Fans Celebrating the league title



Golden Baby League in Meghalaya

Baby Leagues: Shaping the Future of Indian Football?

Saurabh Nagpal

A top-down approach for the betterment of a sport sounds bewitching, and to be just, it does hold certain merit. Exemplary players and miraculous teams can and do inspire multitudes. However, for such players and teams to not be a once-in-a-blue-moon phenomenon but a regular occurrence instead, a state or a nation requires an ecosystem that is conducive for discerning and developing players – a bottom-up approach.

For instance, in cricket – a monolith of a sport in India – the production of generational players has remained constant for decades, and the quality of the team has only increased with time. From the era of the Kapil Devs and the Sunil Gavaskars to the Sachin Tendulkars and the Rahul Dravids, and now to the MS Dhonis and the Virat Kohlis, the transition has been smooth and upwards.

The long-standing presence of an organized and/or semi-organized system of identifying and promoting cricketers from a very young age in most parts of the country has been instrumental in making cricket what it has become today. The scores of school, club, and association tournaments organized for wide-ranging age-groups almost on an everyday basis have been essential for the cause.

A telling survey conducted by Cint showed that 42% of the sampled population played

cricket regularly in 2018; however, only 4.69% preferred playing football.

Crystallising a culture of football in the country should be the pressing priority for the sport if it is serious about its advancement, and the aim of entering the fascination of kids early in their childhood would be a stride towards that end.

In 2018, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) took a positive step in that very direction when, in association with FIFA's development programme – FIFA Forward – it launched the Golden Baby Leagues (GBLs) for kids between the ages of 6 to 12.

Explaining the rationale behind his initiative, Kushal Das, the AIFF General Secretary, said: "The formative years of a child have always been the bedrock of a successful footballing culture. The AIFF is now stressing to popularise the sport among the kids. We aim to have every kid playing football, especially from ages U-6 to U-12. The more they play, the more Indian football will benefit."

Isac Doru, the AIFF Technical Director, shed more light on the subject, and told PTI: "We needed to create a competitive environment in which the players are developing their creativity, self-expression, passion of the game and discovering the value of friendship throughout the team. That was the idea of these Baby Leagues."

Recently, Sunando Dhar, the AIFF CEO of Leagues, provided further insight into the role of the Golden Baby Leagues from a scouting perspective. "We intentionally tried to lower the age. Catch them young and help them grow. We started at the U-13 level and we realized that we have to start much earlier. "This is the age we want players to start playing the game and taking it seriously. The Golden Baby Leagues project is an ideal platform for scouting talent, which will go hand-in-hand with the AIFF youth leagues structure already in place beginning from the Sub Junior League.

"If we look at the developed football countries

by the time the players are 13, you will know whether they will be able to make it professionally or not. Out here, the likes of Bhaichung Bhutias and Sunil Chhetris start playing football seriously from 15," he said in an online chat on grassroots development of football in India.[v]

The response that the GBLs have received is impressive. In their initial year, over 21,000 children participated, over 21,000 matches were conducted, and more than 5,300 registered teams featured across the seven age-group categories, viz. U-6s to U-12s. According to AIFF's figures, these numbers hiked considerably in 2019. More than 43,000 kids played in the GBLs that were organized in 21 states by over 100-plus operators.

The format of these leagues has been structured with delicacy, keeping in mind the capacities and capabilities of kids from different age-brackets. The U-6s play three-a-side matches which are divided into four quarters of six minutes each with a two-minute interval in between. For U-7s and U-8s, teams of four or five each play a game of two halves of 12 minutes with a four-minute break at half time. The number of players in each team can rise up to 11 in the age-bracket of U-11 and U-12, and they play a game of 50 minutes with an eight-minute intermission at halfway.[vi]

Vis-à-vis baby leagues, India and the AIFF have taken a leaf out of Uruguay's book – the most successful footballing country in the world, per

capita. Unlike India, the population of Uruguay is merely around 3.45 million but there are many similarities regarding certain economic realities of the two nations.

However, La Celeste are a commanding force in world football and an endless pipeline of world-class talent, for which Baby Futbol (fittingly) gets a lot of credit. Every weekend, around 60,000 children between the ages of 6-13 play organized football in Uruguay.



Baby Futbol in Uruguay

Óscar Tabárez, the fabled head coach of Uruguay National Team known as El Maestro, said in a video posted by FIFA TV in 2014: "I can't imagine Uruguayan football becoming as good as it is if Baby Futbol didn't exist. Every footballer in the current team played it, as did those from all the important teams, going back to the 90s and before. (Enzo) Francescoli played Baby Futbol, (Jose) Batista played Baby Futbol. They all did. Paolo Montero came from Baby Futbol."[vii] Adding to this list, superstars like Luis Suarez, Jose Gimenez, Lucas Torreira, and Diego Laxalt have also been shaped by baby football.

Roberto Pastoriza, president of the federation that oversees baby football leagues in the region of Montevideo, commented: "Many of these leagues are linked to professional teams and are the source of their players. Many professional teams help financially, covering some of the leagues expenses, especially in matches related to the representative teams. This is where you find the best players of each league."





Golden Baby League in Kolkata - Promoting Gender Equality and Sportsmanship

Seeds of a similar trend are also being sown in India. Although many big clubs have set up their own grassroots set-ups, they have now started promoting the GBLs as well. ISL clubs like Odisha FC and Jamshedpur FC have become the torchbearers, while smaller clubs like Guwahati City FC are also actively encouraging the cause.

However, it must be acknowledged that India has only begun the strenuous, long journey which Uruguay has championed. Baby Futbol has been functional and successful for decades in the Latin American nation.

Going stagnant is a major threat to an endeavor that doesn't yield instant success. For the GBLs to take charge of making structural changes and harvesting a culture of football, it is necessary that the stakeholders not only continuously nurture this project by injecting money, effort, and infrastructure, but also ensure that this initiative remains an evolving, dynamic one.

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Iain Hume playing for ATK

Foreign Flavour in ISL: A Short Timeline

Ishaan Takkar

ISL, India's cash-rich football league, has constantly attracted high quality foreign players. There has been no shortage of top foreign players in ISL which has ultimately led to development of domestic talent and improvement in the standard of the game. The role of foreign players has changed over the years from marquee figureheads intended to attract crowds to forming the core of each title winning team. One of the reasons for ISL's huge success has been various clubs investing huge amounts to bring top foreign talent to the country and the popularity that comes along with the big names. Here we look at some of the best foreign players to have played in ISL who have had a big impact on the league.

Bartholomew Ogbeche has had a huge impact on the performance of his team from his debut season. Ogbeche played for Northeast United in his first season and has been consistent with scoring goals with his amazing awareness of the game and goal scoring abilities. He bagged 12 goals in 2018-19 with the Highlanders before moving to Kerala Blasters where he raised the bar further. He was the joint top-scorer in the 2019-20 season with Roy Krishna and Nerijus Valskis, scoring 15 goals. Ogbeche has certainly made his mark in ISL as one of the best strikers to ever play in the league, scoring goals despite not necessarily playing in the top teams.

There has been no shortage of great Brazilian talent in the league but the two Samba boys

who have been the most successful in ISL are Marcelinho and Elano Blumer. Marcelinho has played for Delhi Dynamos and Pune City FC (now Hyderabad FC) and has been an influential figure in the league. Despite struggling with Hyderabad initially, he holds the all time record for most number of assists and is on number three on the list for top scorers across seasons. He's a versatile player and can play on either of the wings and possesses the abilities of a goal scoring striker which is evident from the golden boot he received in the year 2016 bagging 10 goals in 15 games while playing for Delhi Dynamos. Blumer was the first ever winner of the ISL golden boot honor scoring eight goals in 2014 representing Chennaiyin FC. In the next season, Blumer helped Chennaiyan to win ISL contributing four goals and assisting a further four.

Columbian Stiven Mendoza became a fan favorite with the Chennaiyin faithful with his consistent standout performances. Mendoza won the Golden Boot in the year 2015 bagging 13 goals. He was also named Most Valuable Player in the same year. Combining with Blumer, that season was one to remember for him as he scored the winning goal in the final against FC Goa, handing the Chennai side their first ever ISL trophy.

Former Leicester City player Iain Hume featured in ISL for 5 seasons representing ATK, Kerala Blasters and FC Pune City. Hume started his journey in the yellow of Kerala Blasters moving on to ATK where he won the cup in year 2015-16. He surely played a central role in ATK's victory winning the Player of the Season award. He is one of the most highly rated strikers in ISL history, scoring 28 goals in 69 games, sitting fourth on the list of all time top scorers.

ISL has had its fair share of Spanish players over the years but here we focus on three Spaniards - a defender, a defensive midfielder and a striker. All of them have won ISL titles playing important roles for their respective clubs. Tiri has played in ISL for the past five seasons, forming the bedrock of the ATK defence that helped them win the league in 2016.

Tiri made a move to new entrants Jamshedpur FC in 2017 and has since helped the club to three very respectable finishes. Borja Fernandez spent 3 seasons in ISL playing for ATK in defensive midfield. A combative presence, Borja made the most tackles (63) in the first season in 2014, lifting the trophy in the same year. He won the league a second time in 2016. Ferran Corominas popularly known as Coro is ISL's all time leading scorer with 48 goals in 57 games. Coro won the Golden Boot in both 2017-18 and 2018-19. Coro has been one of the main reasons for FC Goa's success in recent times with his phenomenal goal scoring ability. He was also part of the FC Goa squad that made history qualifying for the AFC Champions league group stage - the first ever Indian club to do so.



All Time ISL Top Scorer Coro

Big name foreign players coming to India is one of the main reasons for ISL's success. Legends like Robert Pires, Alessandro Del Piero, Roberto Carlos, Alessandro Nesta, Lucio, and Marco Materazzi have all played in the league for different clubs. These are the players who've represented the best clubs in the world, winning everything that a footballer can dream. The fact that they played in ISL when the league was in its nascent stages helped in its promotion not only in India but also all over the world. It also had a positive impact on the domestic players who gained so much experience playing with some of the greatest in the world.

Looking at some of the major transfers of foreign players that have been completed until now, the move from Chennaiyin FC to

Jamshedpur FC of 2019-20 Golden Boot winner Nerijus Valskis stands out. Another significant coup is the signing of Igor Angulo for FC Goa from the first tier of Polish football following Coro's departure at the end of last season. Angulo is no less having scored 77 goals in 106 matches for his previous side in Poland. Hugo Boumous moved from FC Goa to Mumbai city fc and it can be one of those transfers that has the potential to signify a power shift in Indian football. Mumbai paid Goa a hefty sum of Rs 1.6 crores to secure the services of the Frenchman.



World Cup and UCL Winner Alessandro Del Piero playing for Delhi

ISL is still a young league and the best is undoubtedly yet to come. There are some exceptional young Indian players coming through and complemented by astute and experienced foreign players, the league is destined to reach great heights.

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Techo Swades United: Hope in the Himalayas

Arnav Chawla

Himachal Pradesh is no stranger to football - the land of passionate fans whose cheers and chants resonate through the valleys. There is no shortage of talent either as exemplified by Vishal Kaith, the Himachal born goalkeeper who has represented India at the senior level and currently plies his trade in the ISL for Chennaiyin FC.

It is the lack of investment & infrastructure, in addition to an inefficient football structure that has halted Himachal football's progress. The state, devoid of a professional club until now, has often failed to encourage its youth to take up football as a career. The paucity of opportunities has been a huge stumbling block for aspiring footballers. Uncertainty with respect to prospects and security is perhaps the biggest hindrance in taking the leap to professional football for most players. Himachal's dismal record in the coveted Santosh Trophy is a testament to the inadequate performance of the state's football association.

Given this history, the launch of Techo Swades United - the first professional football club in Himachal Pradesh is a very welcome step. The club was digitally launched across all social media handles on August 29, fittingly enhancing the celebration of National Sports Day across the country.

It has a unique fan based model in India under which more than 50% of the shares plus one

must be owned by the supporters, who pay nominal fees to be members of the Supporters' Trust. The trustees are elected by the members on a one member one vote basis and are responsible for day-to-day running of the club.

The core purpose behind the decision is to empower and include the fans to take decisions for the benefit of the club and fans alike - something that is becoming rather scarce in modern football owing to profit driven owners. It is bound to create a sense of belonging among supporters who form the foundation of any club.

This kind of model has been used frequently even by some of the biggest clubs in world football- Barcelona, Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund to name a few. TSU could perhaps draw inspiration from Dortmund who diligently apply the model in practice. Prudent management and shrewd scouting, with a special focus on grassroots development has paid huge dividends - rescuing the club from the brink of insolvency and making it competitive again. Besides playing a pivotal role in decision making, the fans routinely show up to the Signal Iduna Park forming the popular 'Yellow Wall' consisting of more than 80,000 to cheer the players on. The atmosphere and the noise is unparalleled and perhaps stems from the sense of belonging that the fans feel as part owners of the club. Any club would be envious of the relationship between the fans and the club at Dortmund.

Apart from the fans, TSU is co-owned by Ranjit Bajaj and Neeraj Kholiya. Bajaj's contribution to Indian football cannot be overstated - he has revolutionised Indian football with the help of his former club, Minerva Punjab FC. Under his ownership, Minerva won all there was to win across age-groups barring the Super Cup. Most importantly, the club through its academy has nurtured and produced a plethora of talents ready to take on the world.

Meanwhile, Kholiya is now the youngest owner of a football club in the country at the ripe old age of 20. His football journey started back

in 2014 through his YouTube channel, Techtro, that streamed matches of all age groups of the Indian football team. His rise to prominence has been nothing short of remarkable.

TSU offers a much needed ray of hope; it makes Himachal dream again. Budding footballers now have a benchmark to aim for and a platform to showcase their talents; they no longer need to subdue their passion or move away to fulfill it. TSU doesn't need to look beyond co-owner Ranjit Bajaj's last stint at Minerva Punjab for a model to replicate.

Focus on grassroot development and nurturing of players are going to be prerequisites for TSU's success. Financial sustainability and community support will also be vital for the club's future.

TSU couldn't have asked for a better person to take care of the club than Ranjit Bajaj. The two partners aim to make football a household sport in Himachal and turn the state into a footballing giant. The road ahead is long but with the expertise & ambitions of the co-owners in addition to the involvement & enthusiasm of the fans, the club's future seems to be in safe hands.



Vishail Kaith, hailing from Rothu in Himachal Pradesh, playing for India