

Chandigarh nurseries buoy Indian hopes for World Cup

BIG CONTRIBUTION Four of ex-international Harjinder Singh's wards make it to the U-17 squad

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CHANDIGARH: Every third player in the 21-member India squad for the under-17 World Cup has a strong city connection. And the credit for making Chandigarh a major hub for youth football goes to former international Harjinder Singh. He was the coach of the state-run Chandigarh Football Academy (CFA) since its inception in 2000 till last July.

Four players — skipper and midfielder Amarjit Singh Kiyam, goalie Prabhukhan Gill and medio Jeakson Singh — in the India squad are CFA products. Another three — defender Anwar Ali and midfielders Nongdamba Naorem and Mohammad Shahjahan — are with Chandigarh-based Minerva Football Club. Jeakson switched from CFA to Minerva in 2016. "Three of our trainees are also part of the Under-16 India team. Because of CFA, a football culture developed in the city and which helped a number of players don national jersey," said the 63-year-old coach.

Harjinder Singh, a former JCT and East Bengal star and part of the 1974 Asian All-Star side, is now with Delhi United Club. But he played an important part in making CFA the go-to place for India's young footballers. In 2010, when Chandigarh beat Bengal to win their maiden Dr BC Roy Trophy for under-19 national title, 10 players were from CFA. The 11th was India central defender Sandesh Jhingam. Since the first batch graduated from CFA, 36 cadets have played age-group football for India.

"It was in early 2000 when I read in a newspaper that the new administrator of Chandigarh, JFR Jacob, who was also the governor of Punjab, wanted to open a football academy. The next day, I requested the president of the Chandigarh Football Association to arrange a meeting with Jacob Sir... He was previously the Goa governor and there too he had opened an academy but it didn't work well. So Jacob Sir had only



The Chandigarh Football Academy has been attracting young football talent from all around the country.

SANJEEV KUMAR / HT PHOTO

coach says

Three of our trainees are also part of the U-16 India team. Because of CFA, a football culture developed in the city and which helped a number of players don national jersey

It was only due to the reputation of our academy that (India U-17 defender) Sanjeev Stalin's father travelled all the way from Bangalore to get his son admitted

one condition and that was the academy should be under the control of the state," said Harjinder Singh.

"It was in April-May, 2000 when he made an announcement that the academy will start on August 7. I had three months and, in that time, I visited almost all corners of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. Following trials, we selected 24 players in

the age group of 10-11."

After the first batch graduated, players from the North-east began arriving. It started with Mizoram but soon the state had its own academy, said Harjinder Singh. In 2011, five-six players from Manipur joined, he said. Among them were Jeakson and Kiyam. Till date, around 50 CFA trainees have played or are playing professionally.

CFA & MINERVA STARS

Amarjeet Singh, 16

From Manipur, he joined Chandigarh Football Academy (CFA) in 2011 and graduated in March 2017. Amarjeet's mother sells fish at a local market in their village and his father is a carpenter.

Sanjeev Stalin, 16

From Karnataka (Bangalore), he joined in 2012 and graduated in March 2017. Sanjeev is from a humble family background. His mother sells clothes on a footpath and father works at the Central Government Health Scheme.

Prabhukhan Singh Gill, 16

From Punjab, joined in 2011 and graduated this year. Hails from a farming background. Prabhukhan's elder brother Gursimrat Singh Gill is also a former junior international and now plays for NorthEast United FC in ISL.

Jeakson Singh, 16

From Manipur. Joined CFA in 2011 and left it in 2016 to join Minerva. A cousin of India skipper Amarjeet, Jeakson was introduced to the sport by his father, a coach. His mother began selling vegetables after dad suffered a heart stroke.

Anwar Ali, 17

From Punjab. Joined Minerva in 2016. Comes from a modest farming family. Anwar had missed the probables list, but Minerva FC took up his issue and fielded him against Tata Football Academy in a friendly where AIFF picked him.

Nongdamba Naorem, 17

From Manipur. Joined Minerva in 2016.

Mohammad Shahjahan, 16

From Manipur. Joined Minerva in 2016.



Chile coach Hernan Caputo holds a roadside media conference in Kolkata on Monday.

Humiliation: Chile forced into roadside media meet

FIFA U-17 WORLD CUP
3 days to go

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KOLKATA: The city that is most excited about the under-17 World Cup got its first real feel of the event with the media being barred.

That meant Chile head coach Hernan Caputo and Julio Borquez had their first media interaction in India on the sidewalk of one of the city's busiest thoroughfares. And in the din of a Durga Puja immersion procession. The whole episode seemed to be the doing of the club where Iraq and Chile had their first training session on Monday evening.

The Chile media manager, Waleska Fuchslocher, told jour-

nalists that not allowing them to watch training for the first 15 minutes, "according to FIFA protocol", was "not the team's decision".

And just to show how egalitarian the Calcutta Cricket and Football Club (CCFC) was in its dealing with the media, the 225-year old club ensured that a Chilean journalist too waited outside.

So on the sidewalk outside the club, the coach and his goalie spoke.

TRAINED FOR 6 MONTHS

The team, Caputo said, has trained for six months but has also added four players to the squad that was runners-up to Brazil in the South American championships.

"Our preparation has been good but you must understand that this is an under-17 side. So, my job is to get them to focus on the basics so that the boys gain from this experience," said the

coach. Caputo said he has learnt a lot from Marcelo Bielsa and Jorge Sampaoli, both former senior national team coaches. "They are very important people for Chile football and they are friends so we work well together."

This bunch, Caputo said, has also taken advice from senior internationals such as Alexis Sanchez, Arturo Vidal and others because "they are not just an inspiration to footballers but to the whole country".

Caputo also said that all the teams in group F are tough and he wouldn't like to meet them again. And that they have been truly inspired as a group with the film 'Chak de India'. "We now want to say 'Chak de Chile!'"

Earlier, Iraq trained at the club and a team official said through a social media platform that they were happy with the facilities and optimistic about their chances in this biennial competition.

cup updates

India hold first practice session at JLN Stadium

NEW DELHI: The Indian football team underwent their first practice session at the training pitch at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. The players had a feel of the floodlights at the pitch just adjacent to the stadium which will host all of India's three matches on Oct 6, 9 and 12. They trained for around two hours.

Asian champions Iraq, USA and Mali arrive

KOLKATA: Asian champions Iraq arrived on Monday and underwent a two-hour practice session. They are back in the tournament after missing the previous edition. Iraq will face Mexico in their group F opener on October 8. Meanwhile, a 21-member USA team arrived in Delhi. The team came from Dubai where it had a seven-day camp.

We are underdogs, but can surprise, says Stalin

NEW DELHI: Defender Sanjeev Stalin has conceded that India are underdogs in the FIFA U-17 World Cup but they are ready to surprise everyone. "We are confident in our ability as a team. We will play to win and will give our opponents a tough fight. We understand that we are underdogs, but we have plans to surprise everyone."

INDIA ROUNDUP



Zeel Desai won her first round match in just 62 minutes.

Zeel has it easy but men's seeds face tough competition

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NEW DELHI: Women's top seed Zeel Desai brushed aside the challenge of Harshita Chugh without fuss but men's top seed Suraj Prabhakar faced stiff resistance before prevailing over Ansu Kumar Bhuyan on the opening day of the Fenesta National Tennis Championship.

Zeel dispatched Harshita 6-2 6-0 in a lop-sided women's singles first round but Prabhakar had to dig deep into his reserves to beat Bhuyan 7-6(3) 3-6 6-3 in his men's singles first round.

The seeded players in the men's singles draw had a tough time as fifth seed Prajwal SD Dev was ousted by Manish Sureshkumar 6-3 6-4.

On court number six, eighth seed Faisal Qamar managed to subdue talented Dhakshinewar Suresh 7-6(3) 6-4 to make it to the second round.

Dhakshinewar, who won the Under-16 championship last year, gifted away easy points and also struggled to contain his unforced errors. The lanky player from Chennai plays much better than what he put on display. Faisal, on the other hand, remained calm and grabbed his chances to advance.



Women's Boxing Championship in Vietnam.

After three days of gruelling trials here, during which some boxers ended up fighting two bouts on one day, the veteran duo of Mary Kom and L Sarita Devi (64kg) made the cut despite trying their luck in changed weight categories.

ANAND SIGNS OFF JOINT SECOND

DOUGLAS (ISLE OF MAN): Five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand capped his impressive run with another victory over Chinese grandmaster Hou Yifan in the ninth and final round to sign off joint second at the Isle of Man Chess Championship. Anand took 53 moves to overpower Yifan to finish with 7 points. He shared the second spot with America's Nakamura Hikaru. World Champion Magnus Carlsen won the title with 7.5 points. Vidit Santosh Gujrathi and Swapnil S Dhopade finished at the joint third position at 6.5 points.

Isco double hands Real first home win

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MADRID: Isco scored twice as Real Madrid reduced the gap on La Liga leaders Barcelona to seven points courtesy of a 2-0 win over Espanyol on a day where football was dragged into violent political clashes in Catalonia.

On the field there was far less conflict as Real eased to an 11th consecutive win over Barcelona-based Espanyol for their first home league win of the season.

"We have to be happy. The important thing was the three points after three games without winning here," said Zinedine Zidane.

KLOPP LAMENT'S DRAW

NEWCASTLE: Jurgen Klopp assessed Liverpool's latest failure to win a League game after a 1-1 draw at Newcastle United by saying: "Football is not fair."

"I thought we were the better side and created more clear chances. I think we should have won," Klopp said.

Klopp remains confident, however, that Liverpool, yet to win the English title in the Premier League era, are equipped to mount a challenge at the top of the table.

"I cannot talk about our football and the gap between us and other teams. We are having our

hard moment and other teams will have their hard moment," he added.

NAPOLI WIN, JUVE HELD MILAN

MILAN: Napoli continued their 100 percent start to the season and stretched their lead at the top of Serie A to two points with a 3-0



Isco scored in either half to give Real their first league win at Santiago Bernabeu this season.

win over Cagliari on Sunday. Marek Hamsik handed the hosts an early lead by scoring with a low, angled shot in the fourth minute. Dries Mertens then netted his ninth before Kalidou Koulibaly added a third.

Second-placed Juventus had started the day on the same number of points as Napoli but lost their perfect Serie A record when they were held to a 2-2 draw away at Atalanta. Federico Bernardeschi and Gonzalo Higuain put the juve 2-0 up, but Mattia Caldara and Bryan Cristante scored either side of the interval to earn the hosts a point.

Wenger frustrated by timing of break
LONDON: Arsene Wenger lamented on Sunday that Arsenal's recent upturn in form will be interrupted by next week's international break. "I would have loved to be able to continue to play, but we cannot do anything about that," Wenger said. "Our last break was a nightmare, but this is one is a bit better. Let's hope the players come back in a good shape. I knew that after the game at Liverpool, everybody did write us off. It just depends on us how much we respond."

SHORT PASSES

Barca to join Catalan strike

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BARCELONA: Barcelona will join a strike called across Catalonia on Tuesday in protest at a violent crackdown by police of an independence referendum called by pro-separatist politicians for the region on Sunday.

"FC Barcelona joins the country-wide strike called for by Table for Democracy and therefore the club will be closed tomorrow," Barca said.

Barcelona's Messi had to play behind closed doors on Sunday.

"None of the professional teams or the youth teams at FC Barcelona will train tomorrow."

DEFENDING SERIE A TITLE EASIER: CONTE

LONDON: Chelsea manager Antonio Conte believes that retaining the league title is an easier task in Italy than it is in the English Premier League due to the transfer policies of the leading clubs.

After Chelsea won the league last season their main rivals have made significant investment in their squads.

"It is very difficult for every team in this league. To defend — it is very difficult to win

two titles in a row," Conte said. "We won the title with Juventus and I was expecting a really strong challenge from AC Milan, but instead they sold players, so they became weaker. It wasn't simple second time, but it was easier."

WENGER FRUSTRATED BY TIMING OF BREAK

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Delhi soccer body elections on Nov 19

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NEW DELHI: A week after Hindustan Times did a series of stories on the multiple problems surrounding the Delhi Soccer Association (DSA), including the lack of transparency, the state body on Monday announced that they will hold the general body elections on November 19. The DSA held its managing committee meeting on Monday and, among other things, declared the date for the elections. It also extended the date for various clubs to get registered under the Societies Act to become legal entities to October 22.

"This will be the last opportunity for clubs to get themselves registered. We are doing this for transparency," DSA vice-president NK Bhatia told Hindustan Times.

REAL MADRID vs ESPANYOL			
RESULT	REAL 2 ESPANYOL 0		
Isco (30, 71)			
MATCH STATS	64% 36%		
TOTAL POSSESSION			
GOAL ATTEMPTS	Off target On target Off target On target		
14	8	5	3
8	FOULS	10	
3	OFFSIDES	3	
10	CORNERS	3	
2	YELLOW CARDS	2	
0	RED CARDS	0	

TENNIS BAG

Serena's daughter named after Australian Open



Serena Williams.

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MUMBAI: Tennis superstar Serena Williams has revealed that her daughter's name had been kept in tune with Australian Open, the Grand Slam she had won earlier this year while being pregnant.

In a tweet posted by the American, Williams stated: "Fun fact my daughters initials are AO," before adding, "as in the Aussie open she won with me @AustralianOpen."

Williams had given birth to Alexis Olympia Ohanian Junior last month.

STEPHENS LOSES

BEIJING: US Open winner Sloane Stephens suffered a shock first-round defeat for the second week running, tumbling out of the China Open on Monday at the hands of qualifier Christina McHale. The 15th seed Stephens, saw her match delayed by rain and when it finally got started she failed to fire, going out to her fellow American with a whimper, 6-3, 6-0 in just 62 minutes.

The loss extends Stephens' poor run after sealing her first Grand Slam last month. Last week the 24-year-old similarly fell at the first hurdle, losing to China's Wang Qiang in the opening round of the Wuhan Open.

MUGURUZA RETIRES ILL

BEIJING: World number one Garbine Muguruza retired ill from the first round of the China Open. The Spaniard Muguruza suggested in the build-up that she was not fully fit after a leg injury and she lost the first set 6-1 to unseeded Barbora Strycova of Czech Republic. Muguruza, 23, the reigning Wimbledon champion, called a medical timeout at 2-0 down in second set and then called it quits after having her pulse taken on the side of court.