

Press Release

Khelo India Youth Games once again puts focus on footballing gems from the North East

Pune, January 20: There is no denying the fact that the North-East is on its way to becoming a major talent pool for Indian football. The team for the 2017 Under-17 World Cup hosted in India had as many as 10 players from Manipur and Mizoram in the ranks. These states continued their glorious run at the Khelo India Youth Games where they shared four of the eight medals handed out.

While Mizoram's boys won the Under-21 gold, Manipur bagged the U-21 girls' tournament in dramatic yet identical penalty shoot-outs.

The North-East is extremely football-centric and that shows in their grassroots level programmes. Mizoram has its own football league where young talents are scouted from every nook and corner of the state and trained. According to Hmingsanga, coach of the U-21 Mizoram football team, having the state's own football league has improved the tactics and styles of the players.

"My boys may have not played for the big leagues but they are regulars in the Mizoram Premier League which started in 2012. Football is highly popular in the state and having a televised league gives the players more motivation since they get more recognition," he says.

About the team's performance through the tournament, Hmingsanga adds, "We began training from November and were confident that we would perform well. Khelo India was a big deal for my boys and they showed it till the end. All of them are from small villages and did not expect luxurious treatment from the organisers. That came as a nice surprise."

"They were well rested and content before the matches which helped. And before every fixture we prayed for a good match. I guess all our prayers were answered."

Manipur, on the other hand, has a long history of football champions. The U-17 World Cup team featured eight footballers from the state. The extreme level of passion for football in Manipur has impressed one and all including the sports ministry, which is planning to build a world class football academy in the state.

Players from the state were expected to perform well in Khelo India Youth Games and they did not disappoint.

Their success story was credited to the players' families. Says coach, Shanta Singh, "Manipur is not an economically strong state. But people wish to see at least one national level player in their family. To fulfil this dream they work really hard and support their kids as much as they can."

He adds that even though sports like boxing was getting medals and recognition for the state, kids choose football at a very young age which helps to secure a big pool of talent right from very early on.

With Khelo India Youth Games being a national level platform to showcase young talent, these two states have managed to steal the limelight and will hope to continue this with their passion for football.