

# *Triumphs and Disasters: The Story of Indian Football, 1889–2000*

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Football in India has a continuous history that stretches back into the nineteenth century. Many clubs can trace their origins back to the 1880s and competitions still exist that have been contested ever since that period. This study will act as an introduction to this history and aims to outline the key events and figures in the story of football in India.

## DOMESTIC FOOTBALL: THE GLORIES OF THE INDIAN GAME

Football was introduced to India by British regimental teams and missionaries during the period of colonial rule. As Calcutta was at the time the capital of the British government in India, the game became popular in this eastern metropolis and the first clubs in the country were formed there in the 1880s and two of them are still the most famous clubs in India: Mohammedan Sporting and Mohun Bagan. The exact date when Mohammedan Sporting was founded is unknown but it is believed to be around 1891. However, Mohun (meaning 'sweet') Bagan (meaning 'group') was formed in 1889. Mohun Bagan is the only Indian club that has won every major domestic tournament and in 1989, as part of centenary celebrations, it was declared the National Club of India and special postage stamps were released on the occasion by the government.<sup>1</sup>

Since its inception, Mohun Bagan has not just been a club but an institution in Bengal. It was formed to develop the competitive ethos and fighting spirit among the youth of Bengal (in undivided India) by playing football and other games as recreation.<sup>2</sup> To this day, Mohun Bagan runs football teams (senior and junior) as well as cricket, hockey and athletic squads. For years there was a special ethos about Mohun Bagan and the youth of Bengal aspired to play for this elite, prestigious club. The intelligentsia and aristocrats of Bengal all supported Mohun Bagan financially and emotionally. The aim of the club was to produce strong but principled athletes. A player who failed in a school or college examination was not allowed to play for Mohun Bagan and smoking and drinking were forbidden in the clubhouse.<sup>3</sup> Mohammedan Sporting was formed with the same principles but most of their players were young Muslims. In those days players received only their expenses and playing kit but no monetary reward.

Many of the players started as college students and later the clubs helped them to get jobs which gave them time off to play football.

Both these clubs, along with some others now defunct, started playing competitive football with British regimental teams in the Calcutta League (held in the summer months) and contested the three major domestic tournaments: the Indian Football Association (IFA) Shield in Calcutta, the Rovers Cup in Bombay (now Mumbai) and the Durand Cup in Simla. Of these, the last is the oldest in India. It was started in 1888 and is the third oldest football tournament in the world after the FA Cups in England and Scotland. British football lovers in Bombay and Calcutta started the Rovers Cup in 1891 and the IFA Shield was founded in 1893. This trio of tournaments is still held annually. For a little over a century they were the mainstay of Indian football and provided adequate competition and exposure to clubs from all over the country. To win the Triple Crown – the Durand, Rovers and IFA Shield (known as the Blue Riband tournaments) in one season – was the ultimate aim and only Mohun Bagan in 1977 and East Bengal (formed in Calcutta in 1924 by football fans from that region) in 1990 have achieved this feat.

A critical moment in Indian football came in 1911 when Mohun Bagan (playing barefoot) won the IFA Shield, beating the East Yorkshire Regiment 2–1 in the final in Calcutta. A crowd of over 60,000 assembled on the Maidan to witness the final. Special trains were organized for it and people also came by ferry and ship from nearby East Bengal (now Bangladesh). Many who witnessed this match barely saw any action since there were no proper stands. People in the front rows communicated the score by flying kites and sending messages tied to the toes of pigeons.<sup>4</sup>

This win by Bagan on 29 July was a significant sporting triumph. It was the first time an Indian team had overcome a renowned British regimental side to win such an important tournament. The win was hailed even in the British media. The *Manchester Guardian* on 4 August wrote,

A team of Bengalis won the IFA Shield in India after defeating a crack British regimental team. There is no reason, of course, to be surprised. Victory in association football goes to the side with the greatest physical fitness, quickest eye and the keenest intellect.<sup>5</sup>

However, the victory had wider implications. Since the protest movement against the Partition of Bengal in 1905 and the organization of the *swadeshi* campaign,<sup>6</sup> Calcutta had been the centre of the growing Indian nationalist movement that had as its ultimate objective to overthrow British rule. The IFA Shield triumph therefore took on political significance, as an inspirational symbolic victory for the oppressed over their oppressors. It also challenged fundamental views on the racial superiority of white Europeans over south Asians. Legend has it that some supporters certainly saw the victory in the context of the freedom struggle. The triumphant Mohun Bagan players were leaving the ground when a well-dressed

supporter tugged at Sudhir's sleeve and, pointing to the East Yorkshires' colours and the Union flag aloft on nearby Fort William, said, 'This one you have done but what about that?'

Besides Calcutta, other regions where football developed in British India were the garrison towns of Madras (now Chennai), Bangalore, Hyderabad, Ambala, Delhi, Peshawar and Dacca. The last two cities were then part of undivided India. Bangalore, then capital of Mysore state, produced some exceptional talents. The Bangalore Muslims club was the first Indian team to win the Rovers Cup in 1937 and repeated the feat in 1938. In 1937 in an all-India final they upset Mohammedan Sporting 1–0, and the following year beat the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders 3–2. By the 1940s players from Mysore dominated the international team and the 1948 Olympics team had six players from this region. They were K.V. Varadraj, S.A. Basheer, B.N. Vajravelu, Ahmed Khan, Dhanraj and S. Raman.<sup>8</sup> However, the best players from the city tended to be lured to the big clubs of Calcutta so players such as Ahmed Khan played for East Bengal or Mohun Bagan rather than stay in Bangalore. As such, the area never developed as a rival regional power to Calcutta and Bengal. Nowadays Bangalore football is dominated by institutional sides such as Indian Telephone Industries (ITI), Chief of Inspectorate Lines (CIL) and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), and the popularity of the game has declined.

It was in the city of the Nizams, Hyderabad, that football really took off in the 1920s. Football there received the patronage of royalty, especially of the Nawab of Tarband and the Maharajas of Kakinada and Rajmandri.<sup>9</sup> The Hyderabad FA was formed in 1939 and the famous coach S.A. Rahim, who guided India to two Asian Games gold medals, was the secretary from 1943 until his death in June 1963.<sup>10</sup>

The most famous team to emerge from this city was the black and yellow shirted Hyderabad City Police. They were known as the 'City Afghans', the name of the police force during the reign of the Nizam of Hyderabad.<sup>11</sup> The team had a string of triumphs in the pre-Independence era. One famous game, which established Hyderabad City Police's reputation, was the Ashe Gold Cup final in Bangalore in 1943. They won 2–1 against the Royal Air Force, a team that included England's double international Denis Compton. The City Afghans trailed by a single goal for much of the game but rallied to win with two late penalties by the defender Norbert Andrew Fruvall.

It was the 1950 Durand football tournament final, the first after Independence in 1947, that established Hyderabad City Police as a legend in Indian football. In that memorable final they trailed Mohun Bagan 0–2 until ten minutes before the final whistle but equalized through Laiq in the last seconds. This dramatic fightback won the hearts of the crowd. Thousands of fans invaded the ground and mobbed and chaired Laiq. Some enthusiastic fans even kissed him and an over-exuberant one in his eagerness to congratulate his hero bit him on the cheek. Poor Laiq reached the dressing room with blood flowing down his face. The wound meant that he missed the replay which his team went on to win 1–0.<sup>12</sup> The

club won the Rovers Cup for five years in a row, from 1950 to 1955, and the state league championships for 11 consecutive years. In 1950, 1957 and 1959 Hyderabad City Police participated in 12 national tournaments and won all of them, playing in the 2-3-5 system.

N.A. Fruvall, as captain of the Hyderabad City Police, began to shape the club in the 1940s. At that time teams in Hyderabad did not have coaches, so it was the responsibility of the captain to mould his players into a coherent unit. It was Fruvall who helped to recruit star players such as Noor Mohammed, Laiq and Susaih Jr. By the time of his retirement in 1951 he had moulded Hyderabad City Police into one of best teams in the country. Syed Abdul Rahim took over from Fruvall and continued to develop the squad. A teacher by profession, he was a great tactician, motivator and disciplinarian. Above all he will be remembered for popularizing football in Hyderabad by his innovative coaching methods,

He used to organize non-dribbling tournaments so that teams could improve one-touch passing and combination. There were also weaker leg tournaments where a player was only allowed to kick and tackle with his weaker foot. This enabled players to become two footed. For juniors he organized height restricted tournaments, five a side and seven a side games in local parks. Thus the flow of talent in Hyderabad football was consistent for over three decades.<sup>13</sup>

Rahim ensured that his players' conduct on the field and dedication were exemplary. Jamal, Aziz, Susaih Jr and Noor Mohammed did not miss even a single match for five long years. Noor and Jamal even played a match for their team on the same afternoon that their mother died.<sup>14</sup> The team was also renowned for its discipline, cohesion, team spirit and never-say-die attitude. The players were the epitome of sportsmanship and never questioned a referee's verdict even in the midst of a tense match.

The team was an institutional side and players got no monetary rewards. The late Noor Mohammed, who played in every national match between 1950 and 1958, once said, 'Often at practice we had just one football and for refreshments afterwards just a cup of tea but our hard practice, will to succeed and excellent coaching from the late Rahim Saheb, enabled us to become a successful team.'<sup>15</sup> Playing with exemplary manners and receiving few rewards for their performances, the club was popular all over India and came to be identified as the team of the common man, in opposition to the elite clubs of Calcutta. In the period just after Independence, Hyderabad City Police came to symbolize the ethos and spirit of the age, the will to sacrifice, overcome odds and work for great ideals and their popularity transcended regional and religious identities.

Until India started a semi-professional National League in the 1996-97 season the Durand Cup was the most prestigious tournament on the Indian circuit. The winners received three trophies, the Durand Cup, the Viceroy's trophy (after Independence called the President's Cup) and the Simla trophy (donated by

citizens of Simla when the competition was held there in the days of the British). The Durand tournament is conducted annually by a special society nominated by the Services Sports Control Board of India. In 1987 they were the first to introduce prize money in Indian football. The winning team was then presented with Rs150,000 (about £7,500 by the exchange rates of 1987), the runners up received Rs100,000 (£5,000) and the top goal scorer and best player were rewarded with Rs5,000 (£250) each. In 1997 the winners of the Durand tournament were FC Kochin of Kerala (India's first professional club) and they received Rs500,000 (about £8,300 by 1997 exchange rates) together with an Ambassador car for each player. In the 2000 season the AB Electrolux Company sponsored the Durand tournament and Alwyn was the title sponsor. The winning team won Rs400,000 (£6,600), the runners-up Rs200,000 (£3,300) and the defeated semi-finalists Rs100,000 each (£1,600).<sup>16</sup>

The Durand tournament has always been held at the seat of government, so since India's Independence it has been played at Delhi. Between 1941 and 1949 the Durand football tournament was not played due to the Second World War, the struggle for Independence and the Partition riots. During British rule the Viceroy himself always presented the trophies. After Independence the President of India carried on this tradition until the threat from terrorists in the 1980s made it too dangerous. The far-sighted Durand committee was also the first to introduce an age-group football tournament in India, when they started the Subroto Mukherjee Cup in 1960 for champion school teams from each state and the union territory of India.

The first Indian team to win the prestigious Durand tournament was Mohammedan Sporting in 1940 when they beat the Royal Warwickshire Regiment 2–1 in Delhi. Centre forward Hafiz Rashid and inside left Saboo scored the goals for the winners. One hundred thousand people witnessed the final, with seating on only one side of the ground. Eminent Muslim politicians flew in from far off cities such as Calcutta, Dacca, Hyderabad and Bhopal for the match and people came in trains from across India. This victory by a team consisting of 11 Muslim players was a massive boost to the Muslims' separatist movement.<sup>17</sup>

The final was played on 12 December at the Irwin amphitheatre, supervised for the first time by an Indian referee Capt Harnam Singh. He was a civilian sergeant in the Army Office in the Delhi Cantonment. Recalling that special day, Singh remembered that he had a police escort from his house in the Cantonment area to the National Stadium. Upon arriving at the ground, he was dismayed to find that there was a major problem. The British linesmen, Warrant Officers Oliphant and Greene, refused to officiate as they said it was below their dignity to be linesmen under a comparatively junior referee such as Singh. They felt slighted and threatened to back out from the match. The Durand Society organizers tried in vain to persuade the recalcitrant duo. The Viceroy, then Lord Linlithgow, arrived at the Stadium to inaugurate and attend the final. When informed of the crisis, Linlithgow let it be known that he would court-martial Oliphant and

Greene if they continued to behave in such a way. The pair suddenly decided that they could work with the Indian referee after all. Musing on the incident, Singh said, 'This tension only added to my pre-match nervousness. I felt better when Maj Porter gave me a hot cup of cocoa laced with brandy.' The match went off smoothly and Harnam recalled, 'I must say that the British linesmen, once they had agreed, did a competent job and gave me full cooperation.'<sup>18</sup>

The victory in the Durand tournament was the culmination of a memorable decade for Mohammedan Sporting. They won the Calcutta league for five years in a row in the mid 1930s (a record which remained unsurpassed until East Bengal won the same title for six years in a row from 1970 to 1975). Their successes led to mass support and Muslims in every city of undivided India were fans of the team. They had an abundance of money and were the first Indian team to play with boots and to focus on a proper diet and physical fitness for their players. Due to their widespread support, Mohammedan Sporting was the first to attract talent to Calcutta from all over India. Full backs Juma Khan and Bachi Khan came from Peshawar and Quetta in the North-West Frontier Province. Goalkeeper Usman Jan was from Delhi and the ace centre forward Rashid hailed from Ajmer in Rajasthan.

In 1924 East Bengal football club was formed by fans who had come to Calcutta for work from the region that is now Bangladesh. The East Bengal club became a social, political and geographical rival of Mohun Bagan. The older and more established club, Bagan was supported by the original inhabitants of West Bengal and the club had an elitist, middle-class ethos. East Bengal received dedicated support from people who came from the eastern region of Bengal, as well as from the lower-middle and the working class. Through the years immense rivalry has developed between Mohun Bagan and East Bengal akin to that between Rangers and Celtic in Glasgow as the basis of the relationship is a fierce clash of identities and loyalties. Any game between these Calcutta giants arouses immense passions. When Mohun Bagan failed to beat East Bengal for six years (1970 to 1975) a teenage fan of the former club committed suicide as a sacrifice to the gods to change the club's fortunes. The fans of Mohun Bagan celebrate a victory over their traditional rivals by eating prawns (known as *chingri*). Similarly East Bengal fans celebrate a win over Mohun Bagan by eating a river fish *hilsa*, which is a symbol of their club. It is also a tradition that the fans of the club that has lost go to bed hungry on the evening of their defeat. East Bengal supporters also celebrate victory by lighting paper torches and swinging them in the air. These paper torches are known as *mashals* and they are a part of the East Bengal flag. East Bengal supporters first used this method of celebration in the 1970 IFA Shield final, after their historic 1-0 win over Pas Club of Iran.<sup>19</sup>

In the post-Independence era East Bengal club has achieved some of the most memorable results in Indian football. It is the only club with more wins than losses against foreign clubs in home matches.<sup>20</sup> The most famous triumphs were the win against Pas Club, mentioned above, the 3-1 victory against Pyongyang

City Club of North Korea in the 1973 IFA Shield final and the win over the Dok Ro Gang club of North Korea in the 1973 DCM final.

In the early 1970s the North Koreans were regarded as the best in Asia due to their 1966 World Cup success, when they beat Italy 1–0, and reached the quarter-finals, when they led Portugal 3–0 before conceding six goals. The North Korean club that contested the DCM tournament final against East Bengal in Delhi in 1973 had six players that took part in the 1966 World Cup. However, East Bengal, cleverly coached by the astute motivator P.K. Banerjee, out-thought the North Koreans by using a flexible 4–5–1 system. Mohammed Akbar was the lone forward and East Bengal's packed midfield enabled them to dominate play. The North Koreans were so impressed with East Bengal's display that their embassy in Delhi made recordings of the Calcutta team's matches and sent them back to Pyongyang for careful study and analysis. The North Koreans feared that India, with six East Bengal players in their ranks, would be their most dangerous opponents in the 1974 Asian Games. However, India fared poorly and lost 4–1.

#### INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL: GOLD MEDALS AND GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES

Indian teams started touring Malaysia, Singapore, China and Japan in the late 1930s. The 1948 London Olympics was India's first major international tournament outing. A predominantly barefooted Indian team played on a wet and cold surface in London and lost 2–1 to France. India created more scoring chances but because of the cold conditions the forwards could not shoot properly and Raman and Parab missed a penalty each. 'After the match was over, hundreds of appreciative spectators congratulated the Indian players on their sporting manner on the field and regretted that the better team had lost.'<sup>21</sup> At the 1952 Helsinki Olympics the Indian team froze in the cold and were trounced 10–1 by Yugoslavia, a team that had won the silver medal in the 1948 Olympics and would go on to win it again in that year's tournament. One result of this was that the All India Football Federation (AIFF) thereafter made the wearing of boots compulsory for all Indian players.<sup>22</sup>

India qualified regularly for the Olympics until 1960, and in 1956 at Melbourne India finished a respectable fourth. They lost in the semi-finals to eventual runners-up, Yugoslavia, after leading 1–0 until the final ten minutes. In the same tournament they beat the hosts Australia 4–2 in the quarter-finals with centre forward Neville D'Souza scoring a hat-trick.<sup>23</sup> India's performance in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics should be evaluated within the standing of Asian football during that time. The other two Asian countries made no impression in these Olympics: Japan lost in the first round 0–2 to Australia and Thailand was routed 1–9 by the United Kingdom. Compared with other Asian nations, India performed creditably and coach Rahim fielded the team in an embryonic 4–2–4 formation. Renowned soccer critics and officials such as Dr Willy Meisel and Sir

Stanley Rous appreciated India's performance and congratulated the coach for making his team play modern football.<sup>24</sup> In the 1960 Rome Olympics India again performed creditably, losing 2-1 to powerful Hungary, drawing 1-1 with France and losing 1-3 to Peru. Both Hungary and Peru scored the match-winning goals in the closing stages of their games. France also equalized just five minutes before the final whistle. Domestic matches in India in those days were still limited to 70 minutes and so the players were not used to playing a full 90 minutes.<sup>25</sup> Since the 1960 Olympics, however, India has failed to qualify for the football tournament.

India also qualified for the 1950 World Cup at Brazil. However, a lack of foreign exchange, the long sea journey and the problem of barefooted players forced India to pull out of this tournament. This was a major setback. Until the mid 1960s India was considered to be one of the top three in Asian football. In both the 1951 Asian Games at Delhi and the 1962 Asian Games at Jakarta India won the gold medal in football. In a regional competition known as the Quadrangular tournament, India were unbeaten champions for five successive years. Rahim took his successful experience with Hyderabad Police on to the international stage as India's coach. Due to his prowess, India was one of the first Asian countries to play in the then modern 4-2-4 formation. In the inaugural 1964 Asia Cup at Tel Aviv India finished runners-up, narrowly losing 1-0 to Israel in the final. In the mid 1960s four Indian players (goalkeeper Peter Thangaraj, centre back Jarnail Singh, left back Altaf Ahmed and roving midfielder Yusuf Khan) figured in the Asian All Stars XI that played Leicester City in exhibition matches at Malaysia and Hong Kong. After this period international successes were limited. In the 1970 Asian Games India won a bronze medal when Syed Nayeemuddin, who went on to coach the national side, was the captain. The team was then coached by G.M.H. Basha and P.K. Banerjee. In the 1974 Asian Junior tournament India, coached by the former Olympians M.A. Salaam and Arun Ghosh, were joint champions with Iran.

The 1962 Asian Games gold medal remains one of the greatest achievements of Indian football because of the difficult circumstances in which it was won. The head of the Indian contingent G.L. Sondhi had criticized the hosts, Indonesia, for excluding both Israel and Taiwan for political reasons. As a result, the crowds were hostile to India.<sup>26</sup> The late Jarnail Singh, India's ace defender, who also captained the Asian All Stars XI in 1966 and 1967, experienced the atmosphere of hostility in Jakarta. As a devout Sikh, Jarnail always wore a turban which made him conspicuous. To avoid the attention of the passionate crowds, Jarnail always had to travel sitting on the floor in the team bus. Recalling the final against South Korea Jarnail said,

The capacity crowd of over 100,000 booed us and did not even pay respect to our national anthem. When the ball came in our half, such was the din that the referee's whistle was not audible. When we attacked there was pin-drop silence. As most of the Indian contingent had returned home, we had

limited support. We were grateful to the Pakistan hockey team [they had beaten India 2–0 in the final the day before], which cheered for us throughout the match.<sup>27</sup>

The Indian team showed remarkable dedication and adaptability to win the final 2–1 against the favourites South Korea. Because of injuries, coach Rahim improvised with the playing 11 for the final. Jarnail, the centre back, had a bandaged forehead and so was not used in his favourite position. Rahim experimented by using him as a bustling centre forward to harass the Korean defence into errors. The ploy was successful as Jarnail scored in the first half. Right winger P.K. Banerjee scored the other goal and, while the Koreans pulled one back, India managed to hang on to win the Asian Games football gold medal for the second time.

The players were so motivated that some of them overcame sickness and injuries to play in the final. Goalkeeper Peter Thangaraj had barely recovered from a bout of influenza but played because coach Rahim felt that his height gave India a psychological advantage. Trilok Singh, the right back, was in pain because of a cut toenail but played with grit and courage. Towards the end of the match, Jarnail was again bleeding at the forehead but refused to come off. The team had left Calcutta for Jakarta on Independence Day, 15 August, 1962. Many of them considered this to be a good omen. Rahim's clever tactics of using Yusuf Khan as a withdrawn forward and playing the 3–3–4 system also bemused opponents who favoured the traditional 2–3–5 system.<sup>28</sup>

To provide international exposure for Indian players, the AIFF started the Jawaharlal Nehru International Tournament in 1982. Uruguay, Argentina, the USSR, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Poland are some of the major nations to have participated in this competition. Uruguay won the inaugural Nehru Cup in 1982 and their team included Enzo Francescoli. In 1984 Argentina had Burruchaga and Nery Pumpido in theirs and the Polish one, the champions that year, had several World Cup stars such as Smolorak and Wajeicki. The USSR, champions from 1985 to 1988, had stars such as Rinat Dessayev, Vassily Rats, Oleg Blokhin and Alexei Mikhailchenko in their team. In the 1990s the AIFF's lack of foreign currency, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the fall of communism in eastern Europe are factors that have caused the Nehru Tournament to become a biennial event. Previously India had cultural exchange agreements with the socialist governments of eastern Europe and so football teams from there participated without demanding payment in dollars.

From 1982 (the year the Asian Games were held in Delhi) to 1996 India experimented with five different eastern European coaches. Dietmar Pfieffer, who came from East Germany, Milovan Ciric, who was a Yugoslav who had also coached Red Star Belgrade, Josef Gelei of Hungary, who had played as goalkeeper in the 1966 World Cup, Jiri Pesek of the Czech Republic and Rustam Akhramov of Uzbekistan. None achieved notable success. There have been foreign coaches

for the age group level teams also. Ivo Sajih-Scheich of Slovenia was coach of the India Under-21 team at the third Rajiv Gandhi International Tournament (U-21 years) at Goa in 1998, but heavy defeats saw his contract terminated after the tournament. Islam Akhmedov of Uzbekistan was appointed coach for the India sub junior (U-16 years) team in April 2000. However, he was unable to guide India to the final rounds of the Asian championships.

In 1997 India's most successful club coach of the 1990s Syed Nayeemuddin was appointed national coach until the conclusion of the 1998 Bangkok Asiad. Nayeemuddin, a stern disciplinarian, developed a physically fit, tactically alert and confident national team that dominated regional competitions. India beat the Maldives 5-1 in the 1997 South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Championship final and won \$50,000, their highest ever prize money. In the same year they reached the semi-finals of the Nehru Cup International Tournament for the first time. Nayeemuddin was succeeded by Sukhwinder Singh, who was also the coach of JCT Phagwara. Under his guidance, India retained the SAFF championships in Goa in April 1999, beating Bangladesh 2-0 in the final.

#### RECENT HISTORY AND THE CHANGING INDIAN GAME

The more recent history of Indian football has been one of change and this section will review many of the recent developments, further analysis of which appears elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> Until the 1996-97 season there was no national league in India. In the decades after Independence the game was popularized by state leagues and a range of tournaments in which teams from several states in India were invited to participate. These tournaments often overlapped. The AIFF officials in the early 1990s felt that the standard of the national team was declining since playing excessive domestic tournaments fatigued players. They thus restricted each tournament to a fortnight with the limited participation of just 12 teams.

Concerned at India's declining standing in international football, FIFA sent a three-member committee in February 1995 to investigate and suggest methods of improvement. One suggestion that was implemented within a year was the establishment of a semi-professional National League. This started in the 1996-97 season and eight teams participated in the inaugural National Football League (NFL) sponsored by Philips. JCT Phagwara (Punjab) were the champions and Churchill Brothers (Goa) finished as runners-up. In 1997 the Philips League was expanded to include ten teams. Matches were played on a home and away basis from December 1997 to March 1998. Mohun Bagan emerged champions and received Rs5 million as prize money (£83,000). They also got a share of the gate money collected in home matches and so in total earned about nearly Rs5.5 million. East Bengal finished runners up and Salgaocar finished third. Prize money was given to the top six teams. However, each participating team got Rs750,000 (£12,500) as preparation money before the league started.

In 1998 a second division of the NFL was also started but without a sponsor. In order to cut costs, the second division was played at three centres: Bangalore, Guwahati and Cuttack. Indian Telephone Industries (ITI) Bangalore and Tollygunge Agragami (Calcutta) were promoted to the first division. Since then the second division has been held in the same fashion.

Philips ended their sponsorship of the NFL after two seasons and for the following two Coca-Cola were the sponsors. As sponsorship from Coca-Cola was reduced for the 1999 NFL, the format was changed to cut costs. The 12 participating teams were divided into two equal groups and matches were played on a league basis. The top three from each group played a double leg final round held in Goa and Calcutta. Salgaocar from Goa emerged as champions with East Bengal runners-up. Salgaocar, formed in 1956, were the first club from Goa to win the NFL. In the last few years Salgaocar have become one of the best clubs in India. Their results have been very consistent. They won the KBL-Federation Cup in 1997, beating East Bengal 2–1 in Calcutta. They also became the first club from Goa to win the Durand-Rovers double crown in one season in 1999.

Mohun Bagan's win in the 2000 Coca-Cola NFL was the greatest comeback in the history of Indian football. Before the start of NFL 2000 the club was not even tipped to finish among the top six (who were entitled to prize money ranging from Rs4 million [£66,600] to Rs500,000 [£8,300]). Yet they won the league by the widest margin to date. They finished with 47 points from 22 matches and the runners-up, Churchill Brothers (also runners up in the inaugural 1997 NFL), with 41 points. In the three previous NFL competitions the favourites always emerged victorious. In the 1997 Philips National League JCT Mills had a team full of the superstars of Indian football, Baichung Bhutia, I.M. Vijayan, Jo Paul Ancheri and Carlton Chapman along with five talented foreigners. As overwhelming favourites they duly won. In the next year Mohun Bagan, with the Nigerian Chima Okorie in sparkling form, were the best in the country and also won the league. In 1999 Salgaocar were favourites and carried off the championship.

Before the start of the 1999–2000 NFL Salgaocar (winners of both the Durand and the Rovers Cup), East Bengal and Churchill Brothers were highly fancied. The Goa clubs finished second and third, respectively, but East Bengal came seventh their worst performance ever. With their success in the NFL in 2000 Mohun Bagan established itself once more as Indian football's premier club. In 1911 they were the first Indian team to win a major domestic tournament, and in the new millennium they are again trendsetters: the first to have won the NFL twice, and the winners of the first major domestic tournament of the new century.

There were three factors behind Mohun Bagan's triumph. The first was the successful recruitment of four talented foreign players, left back Dusit Chaiersman of Thailand (who played for Asian All Stars), striker Igor Skhvirin of Uzbekistan (who won the Asiad 1994 gold medal), winger Stephen Abarowei of Nigeria (who played for his country's age group teams) and Jose Ramirez Baretto of Brazil. The foreigners scored 22 of the club's 36 goals and Skhvirin

was top scorer with 11 goals in 14 matches. A settled midfield that included R.P. Singh, the player of the 1999–2000 NFL, was a second contributing factor. Finally, the emergence of goalkeeper Sandip Nandy helped to bolster Mohun Bagan's fragile defence. The squad has several players who have won the NFL both in 1998 and in 2000. They are the goalkeeper Hemanta Dora, left back Lolendra Singh, midfielders Satyajit Chatterjee, R.P. Singh, Debjit Ghosh and Basudev Mondal and winger Abdul Khaliq. Stephen Abarowei is the only foreigner to have won the NFL twice, with JCT in 1997 and Bagan in 2000.<sup>30</sup>

The AIFF had started the Federation Cup in 1977 as an annual tournament for the leading dozen clubs of India. This tournament was expanded to an all-India knock-out competition in the 1996–97 season with the advent of sponsorship. It was sponsored by the makers of a prominent brand of Indian whisky and was called the Kalyani Black Label or KBL-Federation Cup. The winners were East Bengal in 1996, Salgaocar in 1997 and Mohun Bagan in 1998. Since 1999 this tournament has not been played due to the withdrawal of the sponsors. The winners received Rs1.5 million (£25,000) and the runners-up Rs1 million (£16,600). In the semi-final of the 1997 KBL Federation Cup tournament a crowd of over 131,000 turned out at the Salt Lake stadium at Calcutta to watch the clash between arch rivals East Bengal and Mohun Bagan.<sup>31</sup>

In 1996 the AIFF signed a ten-year agreement with Rupert Murdoch's satellite TV channel in Asia Star TV, for the sole telecast rights of the Philips League, KBL Federation Cup and India's international matches. The deal was negotiated by IMG who collaborated with Leisure Sports Management (LSM) who were the marketing agents for the AIFF. Trans World International (TWI) was the production company for Star Sports. The deal was worth \$1 million per year to the AIFF. IMG had also procured the sponsors Philips and KBL for the league and the knock-out tournament. However, due to the government's stringent licensing laws, Star TV was unable to get uplinking facilities for live telecasts of the matches. The deal was broken off by the AIFF in January 1998. At present the AIFF has a contract with the national terrestrial television network Doordarshan. According to the terms of this contract, Doordarshan pays the AIFF Rs500,000 (£8,300) for a stipulated number of domestic matches per annum. In this manner many of the national football league matches get televised live on Doordarshan's Sports Channel, known as DD Sports.

Though professionalism in Indian football is still embryonic, 'under the table' payments to players have been common for almost 50 years, primarily in Calcutta and more recently in Goa. This has usually been tolerated by the authorities. Until the 1980s institutional clubs such as Salgaocar or JCT hired players by offering them jobs for life with the company but now it is more common for players to be put on annual football contracts. East Bengal's brilliant quintet of forwards in the 1950s, Venkatesh, Appa Rao, Dhanraj, Saleh and Ahmed Khan, played for the small sum of Rs3,000–5,000 per season. The Asian All Star defender Jarnail Singh moved to Mohun Bagan from Rajasthan Club for just

Rs6,000. Mohammed Habib, who played for the Calcutta clubs from 1966 to 1984 and was hailed as the 'King of Kings' by India's most successful domestic coach P.K. Banerjee, similarly never received large sums of money. At his peak he was paid Rs40,000 for the season.

The first player to receive Rs50,000 per season was Shyam Thapa when he left East Bengal for Mohun Bagan in 1977. The first to get Rs100,000 was the Iranian international Majid Bhaskar (who played in the 1978 World Cup for his country) when he came to study in India and ended by joining East Bengal in 1980. He was paid this sum for the 1981 season. The burly Nigerian striker Chima Okorie received the then record payment of Rs300,000 per season when he left Mohammedan Sporting and joined East Bengal in 1987. He managed to beat this when he moved from East Bengal to Mohun Bagan for Rs500,000 in 1992.<sup>32</sup> This transfer was also historic for other reasons. Mohun Bagan followed traditions similar to those of the Yorkshire County Cricket Club or Athletic Bilbao as they had previously only ever recruited Indian players.<sup>33</sup> During the Second World War, Denis Compton was posted to Calcutta and appeared as a guest player for Mohun Bagan, but they had never actually signed a non-Indian player. By completing the 1992 transfer Okorie became the first foreign player to be signed by the club.

With the advent of TV coverage and increased sponsorship, transfer fees have rocketed. In the 1997–98 season the highest paid player was the young striker Baichung Bhatia, who received Rs1.5 million (£25,000) for switching from JCT to East Bengal. In the 1998–99 season Mohun Bagan signed India's ace striker I.M. Vijayan (who holds the Indian record of 31 goals for his country) for the handsome sum of Rs2.7 million (£45,000).<sup>34</sup> The entire fee goes to the player and clubs do not receive any compensation for their loss.

In Indian football there have thus been several rags-to-riches stories, but the most remarkable is that of I.M. Vijayan. He was born in a mud hut in Thrissur in Kerala and could not afford a pair of shoes until he was 12 years old. His father died when he was young and his mother worked as a floor cleaner in nearby houses to support the family. To supplement the family's income, Vijayan sold bottles of soda water at the nearby football stadium. Watching matches there he developed an interest in the game, practised barefoot and developed into a skilful player. At the age of 15 he enrolled in the three-year football camp in Kerala. There his skills were spotted and he joined Kerala Police and throughout the 1990s established himself as one of India's most successful forwards. He has played for the leading clubs Mohun Bagan, JCT and FC Kochin and to date is the only Indian with two hat-tricks in international football.

Such is his fame that a 35-mm colour documentary drama entitled *Kalo-Hirin* (The Black Stag) was made about his life. In the film the story of his remarkable career is recounted in the form of a ballad accompanied by the popular folk dances *Thoukalli* and *Vattakalli*. Directed by Cherian Joseph, the 30-minute film cost Rs500,000 and took eight months to make. Vijayan's first coach T.K.

Chatunni and friend Chima Okorie also made cameo appearances.<sup>35</sup> He is now acting in the Malayalam film *Shantham* directed by Jayarajan. Vijayan plays the role of an innocent youngster (Velayudhan) who is haunted by feelings of guilt after committing a chance murder.<sup>36</sup>

While Vijayan is a rags-to-riches icon, Baichung Bhutia is the middle-class hero of Indian football. Born in a small village in Tinkitam (five hours' drive from Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim) Baichung was spotted as a rare talent at the age of 16 when East Bengal signed him. Initially he was used sparingly but his quicksilver reflexes have made him India's most feared striker. Articulate and smart, Baichung is the first Indian footballer to attract sponsors and have an all-India corporate image. Reebok are among his backers and he has advertised products for brands such as McDowell's whisky and Coca-Cola. Baichung's desire to improve his game by playing abroad sets him apart from other Indian players. He made several attempts to get a contract with a club in either England or Major League Soccer in the USA. He had trials with Fulham and West Bromwich Albion in 1999 and in September became the first Indian to play in the English league when second division Bury FC signed him.<sup>37</sup> His contract has been renewed for the 2000-01 season.

The money earned by top level football players in India is considerably higher than the national average of Rs5,000 (£83) per month or Rs60,000 (£1,000) per annum. In the 1999-2000 season over 50 players earned Rs500,000 (£8,300) per annum. The month for transfers in Indian football is April. The start of the new season varies in each state but it is generally in full swing from September to March. However, as Table 1, showing players' payments, reveals, the financial status of Indian football in the last two seasons is not encouraging.

TABLE 1  
PLAYERS' EARNINGS (RS LAKHS)

Player	1998-99	1999-2000	% change
Chima Okorie	27	14	-48
I.M. Vijayan	27	12	-56
Jo Paul Ancheri	20	9	-55
Basudev Mondal	12	8	-33
Dipendu Biswas	12	8	-33
Ranjan Dey	14	8	-43
Raman Vijayan	11	7	-36
Tushar Rakshit	14	5	-64

Note: figures are approximate; Rs10 lakhs is Rs1 million, although it has fluctuated, the conversion rate since 1998 has been about Rs60 to £1.

The loss of earnings for players is due to the declining income of the clubs. In the first years of the NFL, sponsors were eager to promote football. In the 1998-99 season, with the entry of Vijay Mallya's United Breweries Group into the management of Mohun Bagan and East Bengal and the success of two

competitions for the Philips National League, financial investment in Indian football reached a peak. Mohun Bagan and East Bengal received Rs2.50 crores per season (1 crore is 100 lakhs). Chima Okorie and I.M. Vijayan were both paid Rs27 lakhs and Jo Paul Ancheri received Rs20 lakhs from Mohun Bagan for that season. Baichung Bhutia negotiated Rs24 lakhs from East Bengal.

This corporate interest lasted for just a year. Philips withdrew from the National League and the Kalyani Black Label Group stopped sponsoring the Federation Cup. Prices fell for the 1999–2000 season. The AIFF has received much of the blame for this. In an article in the *Durand Journal* of 1999 Jaydeep Basu, sports correspondent with New Delhi's leading newspaper the *Hindustan Times*, wrote that, 'Football officials in India are yet to learn the tricks of sustaining the flow of sponsors. The recent history shows that their callous attitude has resulted in many enthusiastic sponsors turning hostile.'<sup>38</sup>

Uncertainty now looms over Indian football in the new millennium. Declining sponsorship, dwindling team budgets and cash crises in newly formed professional teams such as FC Kochin and Bengal Mumbai Football Club (BMFC) are discernible after the interstate transfers concluded in early May 2000. With the AIFF unable to organize a domestic calendar for the season and the officials getting embroiled in factional politics and monetary disputes, the outlook for the 2000–01 season is bleak. Players' prices have slumped even further. Vijay Mallya has slashed the annual budgets of both Mohun Bagan and East Bengal from Rs2.50 crores to Rs1 crores<sup>35</sup> and only reluctantly increased these to Rs1.50 crores after the clubs protested. Both Salgaocar and Churchill Brothers have cut their annual football budget by about 30 per cent. FC Kochin, despite floating shares, is struggling to survive. Several of the club's key players have sought interstate transfers and only I.M. Vijayan and Ancheri remain as senior players.<sup>39</sup>

The only club to buck this trend has been Mahindras from Mumbai. The club has now renamed itself Mahindra United to gain an identity as a professional body instead of a company team. Their international striker Mohamed Najeeb is the highest paid player in Indian football this season as he receives Rs1 lakh per month. Striker Raman Vijayan from East Bengal is being paid Rs75,000 per month. The club has also bought the midfielders S. Venkatesh and the Nigerian Habib Adegunle from Salgaocar, as well as wingback Anthony Pereira from Churchill Brothers. In addition to this they have managed to retain their previous season's team and have engaged a new coach, the astute Shabbir Ali, who guided Salgaocar to the National League title in 1998–99.<sup>40</sup>

For a few seasons the money in Indian football was generous. But even now, since the game is not very physical and payment is reasonable, many foreign players are attracted to play in India. In the inaugural year of the National League there were about 20 foreign players. In the next two seasons this number increased to over 30 and by 1999–2000 the league contained about 35 foreigners. Except for corporate teams such as State Bank of Travancore (SBT), Border Security Force (BSF) and JCT, which have consciously adopted policies of the

non-recruitment of foreigners, all of the other nine teams had their quota of four by 2000. The majority of the players were Africans, mainly Nigerians but with others coming from Kenya, Ghana and Zimbabwe. In addition to this, players came from Brazil, Jordan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The trend of Brazilian players coming to Indian football started in the 1997–98 season. During that season Dempo Sports Club of Goa recruited three Brazilian players from Sao Paulo and had a Brazilian coach. These players quickly ranked themselves among the highest earners so that, for example, in 2000–01 Mohun Bagan retained Jose Ramirez Baretto for the whole season by paying him an estimated Rs20 lakhs.

The professional club has also become a feature of Indian football. In the 1997–98 season FC Kochin, a newly formed club in Kerala, became the first real professional club in India. All of their squad were insured and the players were registered as professionals. In other leading clubs many players are paid to play, but they also retain jobs in banks or public sector firms. In their first season FC Kochin used a Scottish coach George Blues, who had considerable experience of coaching in Africa and western Asia. FC Kochin was formed by a trio of non-resident Keralites who had profited from business interests in the Gulf and were keen to develop football in their home state by setting up a professional club. In its first season the club was sponsored by the whisky makers KBL and later by Coca-Cola.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly a group of non-resident Indian jewellers formed a professional club in Mumbai. In the 1998–99 season they started BMFC by recruiting many prominent Indian players along with some Nigerian and Iranian stars.<sup>42</sup> Their success in the Mumbai league ensured them an entry into the second division of the National League. However, in the absence of regular and sustained TV coverage BMFC have not been able to attract many sponsors. Within two years of their formation the club are struggling to pay their playing staff and have dismissed all foreign players.

Traditional clubs such as Mohun Bagan and East Bengal have also realized that money secured from members, from prize money or from donations is insufficient to develop a top class team for the season. Hence both clubs organized lucrative corporate sponsorships with the names of the sponsors being displayed on the club shirts and track suits. They have also become public limited companies in order to cash in on their image and popularity.<sup>43</sup> The Goa FA is also trying to ensure that some of its best clubs become fully professional. The top six clubs of Goa compete in a semi-professional local league on a double leg basis in September and October each year. Birla and AT&T are sponsoring the venture. Churchill Brothers of Goa have obtained a club sponsor this season, Zee TV, and have adopted the name Zee-Churchill Brothers. By thoughtful promotion of the game Goa has now emerged as a major centre in Indian football to rival Calcutta.

## INDIAN CLUBS INTO THE NEW MILLENNIUM

After a century of football and coming at the end of ten years of turbulence and change, Indian football is made up of a range of clubs and institutions. Some of these have long histories but others are little more than a couple of years old. This section will briefly introduce the key clubs as the sport enters the new millennium.

1. *Mohun Bagan* (Calcutta; maroon, green and white; founded in 1889)

Currently sponsored by the United Breweries group and previously sponsored by Tata Tea. India's most historic and successful club, it has won the National League twice in four years in 1997–98 and 1999–2000. It became the first Indian club to be chosen as Asian Club of the Month in January 1998, an honour it achieved for its remarkable unbeaten sequence of 11 matches in the Philips League. The club plays in a 4–3–3 formation with a flat back four or with a 1–3–4–2 formation.

2. *East Bengal* (Calcutta; red, yellow and white; founded in 1924)

Also sponsored by United Breweries. It has the best record against foreign teams in home matches. It had in its ranks Baichung Bhutia, who was the first Indian footballer to be sponsored by multinationals such as Reebok and Coca-Cola. He is also the only Indian player looked after by the International Management Group (IMG). East Bengal play in either the 4–3–3 or the 4–4–2 formation, with a flat back four.

3. *Salgaocar Sports Club* (Goa; green; founded in 1956)

This is the football team of a major corporate house in Goa that has interests in shipping, mining and iron ore. Its president Shivanand Salgaocar is committed to football and has consistently invested money to make his team one of the best in India. The players are hired on an annual or biennial contract basis. Salgaocar is noted for its strong defence and employs India's goalkeeper Juje Siddi who started his career as a boxer. Previously coached by the former international skipper Shabbir Ali the club plays in a 3–5–2 formation and often uses a sweeper back. It was the first team from Goa to win the National League in the 1998–99 season.

4. *FC Kochin* (Kerala; red and black; founded in 1997)

FC Kochin is the first fully professional club in Indian football. In just one year from its foundation it has achieved remarkable success and now receives massive support from Keralites living all over India and in the Gulf region. The team was trained by the Scottish coach George Blues and has recruited players from Ghana and Nigeria, including the goalkeeper Abubacker who played for the former in the Junior World Cup in 1997. For the 1998–99 season it recruited the entire group of trainees from the Tata Football Academy (TFA). Lively in attack but vulnerable in defence the club plays in a 4–4–2 or a 4–3–3 formation.

5. *Air India* (Mumbai; red and black; founded in 1952)

The only team that has never used a single foreign player because of company policy. Players either have jobs with Air India, the premier international airline of the country, or are on a contract basis. The team is traditionally a defensive, hard tackling unit that relies on the counterattack and a strong team spirit. The Wimbledon of Indian football, the club achieves success with a low budget and strong motivation. Its wily coach Bimal Ghosh has a reputation as a great motivator and was chosen as best coach of the 1997–98 Philips League.

6. *Dempo Sports Club* (Goa; white; founded in 1961)

Another team supported by a family that has shipping and mining interests in Goa. It was the first to bring in a Brazilian coach, Gonsalves, and three Brazilian players for the 1997–98 season. The team uses a slow, passing game and has maintained a tradition of trying to play skilful football with one touch, short passing build-ups. The club has also imported talented players from Nigeria and Sudan. The team usually plays in a 5–4–1 system or a conventional 4–4–2 formation.

7. *JCT Phagwara* (formerly known as *JCT Mills*; Punjab; red; founded in 1971)

JCT is a leading industrial house dealing in fabrics and electronics. Its young managing director, Samir Thapar, takes part in national level motor rallies and supports bodybuilding. JCT has the best gymnasium in the country. Thapar is keen on football and so provides the money to develop a successful team, which is also an important marketing ploy to spread the image of the company. It is the only major team from the northern regions of India where football is not so popular. As this is the case the club has not been able to develop much talent from the Punjab region and has relied on Nigerian players to survive in the National League. The team is coached by the former internationals Sukhwinder Singh and Parminder Singh and plays in either the 4–4–2 or the 4–3–3 formation.

8. *Indian Bank* (Chennai; blue and white; founded in 1958)

A company team financed by the largest bank of southern India. The club is unable to pay large sums of money and so is able to attract foreign players only from nearby Maldives and Sri Lanka. The bank employs many of the players. Its coach Albert Fernando, who is also a priest, excels at developing young talent. At home the team is always difficult to beat because of its spirit and well-organized midfield and defence. The team plays in the 1–3–4–2 or the 1–3–3–3 system.

9. *Churchill Brothers* (Goa; white and purple; founded in 1988)

A new club formed just over a decade ago and entirely funded by the football loving Alemao brothers who have made their fortune through restaurants, agriculture and shipping. Two of the brothers, Churchill and Joaquim, have been successful in politics. Churchill Alemao was twice elected as Member of the

Lower House of the Indian Parliament (Lok Sabha). Joaquim Alemao was a member of the Goa Legislative Council. The club was the first to get players from outside Goa to play in the state. The brothers increased payments to players in the early 1990s, thereby breaking the cartel-like monopoly in Goa of Dempo and Salgaocar. The club has imported talent from Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Sudan and Iraq. The departure of the Scottish coach Danny McLennan just before the Philips League 1997–98 season and of an Indian coach after two matches put the team in disarray. Runners-up in the inaugural Philips League, the club was relegated in the next season in March 1998 but is now back in the top division. The team plays in either the 4–3–3 or the 4–4–2 system, and has employed Grigory Schietsen, an Uzbeki coach, for the 2000–01 season.

10. *Mahindra United* (Mumbai; red; founded in 1962)

Another company team from Mumbai. The firm Mahindras manufactures jeeps and machinery. The club relied on young talent and a few imports from Nigeria and Nepal but finished last in both Philips League competitions. In consequence it frequently changes its coaches and there have been four in three seasons. Mahindras play in the 4–4–2 formation; however, the current coach Shabbir Ali has also experimented with the 3–5–2 system.

11. *Tollygunge Agragami* (Calcutta; orange and white; founded in 1943)

This club was established as the Russa Agragami Samity on Moore Avenue in Calcutta in August 1943. It remained an ordinary one till the late 1950s when the dynamic Bhairabb Ganguly took over as president. The name of the club was changed to suit the changing atmosphere. In 1961 the club entered the Calcutta League and had progressed from the fourth to the first division by 1970. In the late 1990s it replaced Mohammedan Sporting as the third force in Calcutta football. It qualified for the National League in 1999 by winning the 1998 second division national league. Based in south Calcutta, the club has local support and has attracted sponsorship as a result of its success. Its football budget has expanded to Rs15 million and it has recruited some Nigerians and Indian junior internationals from Tatas Football Academy. The former India junior coach Shanker Maitra started as team coach for the 2000–01 season but was replaced by the veteran Amal Dutta midway through the season. Both coaches have opted for a flexible 4–4–2 or 4–3–3 system.

12. *Indian Telephone Industries (ITI)* (Bangalore; blue and white; founded in 1956)

This is the football team of a public sector undertaking. Since the 1970s ITI has dominated football in Bangalore. Its greatest triumph was winning the inaugural Federation Cup in 1977 when the team beat the favourites Mohun Bagan 1–0 in the final. For many years it recruited players by offering them jobs and through this method produced several international stars, including India's finest winger of the 1970s, N. Ulaganathan. Now it has begun hiring players on contract and

has set a budget for football. It has recruited players from Nigeria, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The club qualified for the National League in 1999 by finishing second in the second division. ITI just managed to avoid relegation in the 1999–2000 season. For the 2000–01 season it has hired the dynamic Mohammed Habib, a former Tata Football Academy and India junior player as coach. Habib is using either a 4–5–1 or a 4–4–2 system.

13. *Vasco Sporting Club* (Goa; white and black stripes; founded in 1956). Vasco was the first club from Goa to participate in India-wide tournaments, playing in Delhi in the Durand Cup in 1963. For the 2000/01 season, Vasco was sponsored by the Chowgule Group, and was coached by former international Derek Pereira for the second season. The squad was strengthened for this season by the arrival of three Brazilian and two experienced Uzbeki players. Vasco vary their playing systems and have recently used a sweeper system as well as the more traditional 4–4–2.

#### INDIAN FOOTBALL AND THE 2000 VISIT TO ENGLAND

The Indian national football team visited England in July 2000 for a three-match exhibition tour. This was the first such visit since 1948 and, although the official reason given for the tour was that it was a good opportunity to prepare the Indian team for the forthcoming World Cup qualifiers, the tour had a range of other objectives.

First among these was the introduction of Indian players to examples of good practice in the professional game. The national coach Sukhwinder Singh said that the tour was a learning experience for his players and commented that, ‘The exposure helped the players to understand the need for better physical conditioning, the ability to play under pressure and that professionalism is commitment and not just money.’<sup>44</sup>

The second objective was to introduce the players to the standards of football played in Europe so as to encourage them to look at their own game. Singh claimed that the main conclusions reached by the squad after the tour were that players had to be faster on the ball and that Indian teams required more physical presence in midfield. However, the record of one win, one draw and one defeat was felt to be encouraging. India scored a solitary goal, Jo Paul Ancheri’s match winner against Bangladesh at Leicester, but conceded just two in three matches. Both the goals were scored by the former German World Cup striker, 34-year-old Karl Heinz Riedle for Fulham FC in the opening match of the tour (which India lost 2–0). The 0–0 draw with West Bromwich Albion was seen as India’s best performance and the win against Bangladesh was a positive result, despite some disappointment with the quality of the performance.

Analysing the results, Singh and the technical director P.K. Banerjee praised India’s back four of Prabhjot Singh, Roberto Fernandez, Mahesh Gawli and Daljit Singh for their consistency and determination as they kept clean sheets in

two successive matches. Considering the overall performances of the players, Banerjee felt that the defensive midfielder Ancheri was India's best player in the three matches. The injury to his left knee in the closing stages of the game against Bangladesh was a cause for concern. Ancheri hopes it is not a reoccurrence of the injury that plagued him earlier in his career.<sup>45</sup> The captain Baichung Bhutia was happy with the results of the tour but felt that India could have played much better. He concluded that 'We lost the ball too often by erratic passing'<sup>46</sup> and felt that, despite the win against Bangladesh, the fluency and rhythm in the team was missing in that game.

The final objective of the tour, however, was to establish links between football in India and among the south Asian communities of the United Kingdom. The tour was seen as successful in this respect as well. The largest attendance was in the second match at the Hawthorns, where a crowd of over 12,000 witnessed India play West Bromwich Albion.

Harpal Singh, a British Asian who is in the reserve team of the Premier League club Leeds United attended one of India's training sessions and greatly impressed P.K. Banerjee. This meeting led Banerjee to advocate the inclusion of non-resident Indians in the national team and he made it clear that he felt that 'the AIFF should tap these unknown sources of talent as it may hasten the development of Indian football.'<sup>47</sup> The Indian players also felt that the tour had been a success. Renedy Singh said that, 'I have never been made to feel so important and heroic before in my football career.'<sup>48</sup> The young players Prabhjot Singh and Hardip Saini were popular with the predominantly Punjabi section among the Indian spectators and both said, 'We are more popular in England than in Punjab.'<sup>49</sup>

#### THE SEASON OF REVOLT

The formation of the nine-team Indian Premier Football Association (IPFA) on 18 November 2000 led to an initial boycott of the National League and the delay of the start of the tournament. The members of the IPFA modelled themselves on the pattern of the G-15 (the top clubs of Europe) and acted as a pressure group. Years of frustration at inept marketing, inadequate resource mobilization and lack of a proper calendar of events had led to an internal revolt against the AIFF. The leading clubs of India were also exasperated with the constant politicking and bickering within the AIFF which had again erupted when Ranjit Gupta of the IFA (the controlling body of football in Bengal) filed a case against the AIFF president for embezzlement of funds.

The clubs that formed the IPFA were Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting (all supported by companies owned by Vijay Mallya's United Breweries group); Mumbai league champions Mahindra United; two clubs from Goa, Salgaocar and Zee Churchill Brothers; Tollygunge Agradami; JCT Phagwara; and FC Kochin. This move was seen as an important phase in the

corporatization of Indian football as the business magnates challenged the politician-bureaucrat nexus that had controlled the game for decades.

The president of the IPFA Vijay Mallya said that, 'Our plans are simple: to popularize the NFL and raise the standard of Indian football at the international level. The IPFA want a player-friendly, spectator-friendly and sponsor-friendly National Football League.'<sup>50</sup> At present the NFL, which involves 12 teams playing on a home and away basis, is held in a period of just four months with teams travelling across the country and often playing twice in a week. The IPFA wanted the NFL to be spaced out over a period of from five to six months, with matches only on weekends to ensure proper TV coverage which would, in turn, attract sponsors. There is also a demand for repeat telecasts and a concerted effort to market the NFL. Mallya is adamant that the old formats of Indian sports need to be changed and that proper marketing is vital. At present the NFL is televised by Doordarshan, which has the rights for five years starting from 1998. The IPFA has promised a Rs6.5 crores deal with either Zee TV or Sony Max, both of which are confident of getting uplinking facilities on a shared basis with Doordarshan.

The IPFA's main aim was portrayed as an attempt to arrest the dangerous stagnation in Indian football. This may can be measured in the tournaments organized across the country. In the 1980s there were about a hundred domestic tournaments held annually and, indeed, in the 1960s and the 1970s there had been up to 125 such events. In Kerala alone nine major All India tournaments were held each year. In the new millennium there are barely two dozen tournaments held annually. The AIFF is just not able to attract sponsors. Thus the Federation Cup, billed as the knock-out Cup of India, has not been held since 1998. The Nehru Cup, started with much publicity in 1982 to provide international exposure for Indian players, has not been held since 1997.

The AIFF is seen as at best badly organized and at worst inscrutable and unaccountable. Prize money for the clubs in the National League is paid in instalments, months after the conclusion of the events. Mohun Bagan won the fourth NFL in March 2000 but got Rs3 million of the promised prize money of Rs4 million only in mid November. In fact none of the other clubs have been paid their full amount so far. The AIFF has been unable to attract a sponsor for the fifth NFL competition. Previous sponsors Philips (1996-98) and Coca-Cola (1998-2000) have backed out due to inadequate exposure and poor organization by the AIFF. Indeed, the AIFF was not the only target of the IPFA's criticism and the organization made it clear that it felt that only seven of the 31 state associations in the AIFF conduct a state league and organize football properly.

The revolt lasted 25 days and after protracted negotiations a truce was reached. The IPFA forced a compromise in the composition of the NFL committee and in the sharing of revenue. Representatives of the first six clubs in the annual NFL will serve on the League committee for the next season. The representative of the champion club will henceforth be vice-chairman of the committee. Shivanand Salgaocar of Salgaocar FC was included in the AIFF finance committee with

cheque-signing authority. After deducting expenses for organization and conduct of the NFL, the premier clubs will get 80 per cent and the AIFF 20 per cent of the revenue. It was also decided to improve TV coverage and hold as many matches as possible in floodlight. It was decided to arrange corporate sponsorship worth Rs15 crores, but so far there has been no progress in this direction.

This truce helped Priya Ranjan Das Munshi's re-election as AIFF president for a fourth term. In the elections held at Delhi on 16 December 2000 he defeated Samir Thapar, managing director of JCT, in a straight contest. Alberto Colaco of Goa became the new AIFF secretary, beating the incumbent Kedarnath Mour in a close contest by 17 votes to 14. Mohammed Khaleel was retained as treasurer. A new post of executive president was created to accommodate P.P. Lakshmanan of Kerala. The industrialist Vijay Mallya, representing Pondicherry, was inducted into the AIFF as vice-president. The AIFF promised to set up a permanent office in Delhi by February 2001. It has appointed the former international referee Melwyn D'Souza as assistant secretary for coaching and refereeing. Three other appointments including two assistant secretaries, to look after 'administration' and 'finance and sponsorship', were to be announced. The outcome seems therefore to be an uneasy compromise. Some of the main movers behind the IPFA and behind the corporate interest in Indian football such as Vijay Mallya now hold posts in the AIFF. Administrators such as Alberto Colaco, with excellent reputations for organization, have been incorporated into the national structure. But representatives of the old order such as Priya Ranjan Das Munshi continue to hold power. The season of revolt may have only just begun.

#### NOTES

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