

Kashmir girls create history - set football pace for future

Their faces glowing despite the hot summer sun, a group of young Kashmiri Muslim girls clad in sportswear practise football for hours at a ground here - creating a history of sorts in Jammu and Kashmir that has never seen such a women's sports event.

The group of 45 school girls is practising hard to get selected for the state's first under-19 soccer tournament that will be held in the first week of June.

The ground where the girls are playing hardly looks like a football ground with its uneven surface, coarse grass and lack of proper dimensions, but that does not deter them.

The girls, from different schools of the city, are being trained by coach Mushtaq Ahamd Dar at the uptown Rajbagh Girls' Higher Secondary School ground, and could well become trendsetters of a new tradition in the Valley.

It is rare to see Kashmiri girls even evince an interest in sports, much less participate in a game of football.

'Girls are excelling in various fields and there is no reason why we should not participate in games like football to try and win laurels for ourselves,' a very confident Shazia, a participant at the coaching camp along with her friends Hina, Rusksana, Nazia and others, told IANS.

The girls are clad in sportswear, another very unusual sight in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state. Many families are encouraging their daughters to participate in sports events.

'It is a part of the overall personality development of young boys and girls and there should be no discrimination in this regard,' Muhammad Shafi, a sports teacher here, told IANS.

The girls toil for several hours daily under the summer sun and they are hardly given any refreshments.

'The regular refreshments and other benefits will start once we select the 18 participants who will form the team for the state championship,' said the coach.

Commenting on the bumpy practice ground, the coach said: 'The ground is bumpy and there is coarse grass all over. We wanted to organise the camp at a better ground in another school, but practice sessions for the forthcoming Santosh Trophy championship are going on there.

'We had no option but to organise the Valley's first ever such camp under such conditions,' he said.

With hardly any funds available for sports with the local government schools, some of these pioneering participants can be seen wearing old shoes and some are even without any proper sportswear.

However, that has not brought any blemish on these young radiant faces. The spirit of the game is too high to be dampened by lack of facilities.

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