

## National team should comprise of I-League players: Houghton

India's chief football coach Bob Houghton said Wednesday that the professional I-League should be organised properly to get a big pool of players for the national team.

The 60-year-old Briton said that players for the national team should not be selected on the basis of performance in the National Football Championships for the Santosh Trophy or state leagues.

'We have to select players for the national league from the professional league that we have. How can we have players for the team from amateur tournaments like the Santosh Trophy. I have seen the standards of that tournament and I am sorry to say it is very poor,' said Houghton after the team's first practice camp at the Ambedkar Stadium here.

The coach was referring to Santosh Trophy's highest scorer S. Raleng from Services not being called for the national camp here.

'Can you tell the English or the Italian coach that please select a player for the national team, who has done well in an amateur tournament?' he asked.

He went on to add that it is very important to give the I-League, which will be in its second season this year, a proper shape so that maximum number of players get a chance to play.

'It is very important to have 16 teams in our I-League. Then only we will have maximum players to select from for the national team,' he said.

On India's loss in the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Cup final to lowly ranked Maldives, Houghton said: 'There were lot of issues. Some players were injured and the fixture was very cramped. We played three games in five days and that was ridiculous. Nowhere in the world a team should play three matches in five days. But the loss in the final was our third defeat in 18 matches.'

Ten players out of 31 in the national camp are still injured and that is a matter of concern for the chief coach. The team will leave for a trip to Portugal next week for preparation for the AFC Challenge Cup next week.

'Some players will recover before leaving for Portugal while some still need time. I can take only 27 players and some of the injured players will be there because they have to be rehabilitated,' he said.

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