



The Bangladesh Under 16 football girls provided the only delight in a rather depressing year for the country's football fans when they won the AFC Under 16 regional qualifiers. As a result of the win they have now made it through to the AFC Under 16 Cup where they will be battling it out with the best football teams.

Developing young athletes

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The importance of building a good pipeline that continuously supplies fresh talent can perhaps best be answered by a mere glance at the two most popular sports of Bangladesh.

Back in 2011, when Mohammad Mofizuddin of the Kalsindur Government Primary High School set out to form a girls' football team, he didn't really expect his girls to surpass boundaries and go all the way to play for the national team.

Back then, he just wanted to form a team for the Bangamata Gold Cup, a football tournament for school girls that was just about to make its mark. He used to be a good football player as a youngster and all he wanted to do was pass on something that he understood well to his girls.

It wasn't easy. He faced threats, parents weren't keen on sending their girls to play a 'man's game,' and then there were the perennial pessimists around the region who never missed an opportunity to discourage Mofizuddin and his girls.

However, Mofizuddin received plenty of support from his school. The school's principal ensured that they kept the programme running, and at the end of the first year, they managed to make a small group of 17 players.

These girls defied traditional norms and practiced day and night. They even practiced on Eid and refused to take holidays. Their determination surprised Mofizuddin himself. The school from a remote corner of the country ended up winning the Bangamata Gold Cup in 2013 and in 2014.

The seeds of the glorious moment that the Bangladesh girls enjoyed later on were sown in this corner of the country. It's true that girls from several other schools and areas went on to represent Bangladesh, but a huge portion of today's Bangladesh national team has come from this school.

After winning the Bangamata Gold Cup, the children became a lot more encouraged. They saw football as a means of escape from their miseries, miseries that could have been anything from poverty to child marriage.

And as the years passed by, the number of students willing to play football increased. From the Kalsindur Government Primary School, these

girls went on to play for Bangladesh's Under 14 and then the Under 16's, winning trophies at both levels. Eventually they ended up in the national team and continue to dominate there.

The case of the Kalsindur Government Primary School destroys a popular concept, which states that the most populated regions around the world are more probable to produce

better talent.

Kalsindur is just a small school located in one of the most remote areas of the country. However, with enough support and encouragement, they managed to change, in a sense, the entire meaning of football.

This is essentially what happens in the pipeline. It's quite difficult at the start, but once you get the cogwheels churning, it will take a lot of force to

stop it. Once the girls from Kalsindur started winning and receiving public acclaim, everybody wanted to take up that path. Football encouraged them and gave them a sense of hope. And with Mofizuddin ensuring a skilful programme, the hunger never died.

Cricket witnessed a similar turnover in Bangladesh back in the day. Yes,

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The Under 16 football girls team were undoubtedly the most popular team in any sport this year in Bangladesh. They were bold both off and on the field and the entire country smiled along with their smiles.