

Soccer stadium enters synthetic era

Synthetic turf inaugurated at Bangalore Football Stadium; AIFF promises new-look venue with floodlights, roof

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Events at the Karnataka State Football Association are usually, dry mundane affairs. On Wednesday, however, a landmark event was marked by plenty of cheer and liveliness – the much-awaited synthetic turf was inaugurated with a 'friendly' match between a KSFA (Veterans) Veterans XI and a Sports Journalists' XI, followed by a felicitation for some of India's greatest footballers.

The inauguration of the synthetic turf holds plenty of promise for Karnataka, once considered the nursery of Indian football but suffering several crises for a few decades now. With a couple more projects under development – such as the reconstruction of the stadium and the opening of FIFA's goal project at the stadium, the state is likely to become one of the hubs of Indian football once again.

"Synthetic turf was a big necessity here," said AR Khaleel, Vice-President of All India Football Federation. Khaleel promised an overhaul of the existing infrastructure, with ambitions of converting the Bangalore Football Stadium into a world-class venue with floodlights and roof in two years' time. "We tested the structural strength of the existing stadium," said Khaleel. "The eastern wing has to be demolished and re-



The newly-laid synthetic turf at Bangalore Football Stadium was inaugurated with a friendly match between KSFA (Veterans) XI and Sports Journalists XI on Wednesday

Anantha Subramanyam K

constructed. Sajjan Jindal (of JSW Steel Ltd) has offered to reconstruct three stadiums – at Kolkata, Mumbai and Bangalore. The Bangalore stadium will have a capacity of over 40,000. The stadium will be built by Populous,

who built the Soccer City at Johannesburg.

Kushal Das, the General Secretary of AIFF, added that the Goal Project was part of the AIFF's agenda to improve the technical side of football. "The training cen-

tre at Bangalore will be ready in a couple of months," he said. "AIFF has two centres – in Bangalore and Sikkim. We're looking at technical partners from Germany and Holland to develop a curriculum. It's important to have a technical pro-



Some of Karnataka's former footballers, including Olympians and Asian Games medallists, were felicitated by KSFA on Wednesday

gramme – even more than having a (national) coach." The match between the Karnataka Veterans – mostly former state and international players – and the Journalists' XI was a light-hearted affair that went 3-0 to the Veterans, with 1962 Asian Games gold medalist Armanayagam still providing some glimpses of his heyday and scoring the opening goal. Among those felicitated by the KSFA were Olympians Ahmed Khan and Varadaraj, and Asian Games medalists Ethiraj, Armanayagam, Nataraj and Sampath.

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—AR Khaleel,
AIFF Vice-President