

AIFF TECHNICAL DIRECTOR BAAN SAYS IT'S TIME TO IMPLEMENT CHANGES

'Academies will fuel India's progress'

Yash Sawant • MUMBAI

Rob Baan, the All India Football Federation's (AIFF) technical director, was impressed when he visited the first FIFA-AIFF Residential Academy at Father Agnel's in Vashi.

For the uninitiated, the AIFF has decided to set up four regional academies in India to scout talent. Thirty players in the 14-17 age group will be inducted into the academy full-time every two years.

Eight days into the job, Baan said it was time to implement changes in Indian football. He feels having residential academies is a step in the right direction.

"It is important to catch the players young and ensure that the top talent gets perfect training in order to become professionals," he said.

He believes that strong I-league clubs are the feeder for the national team.

"Kids in India watch a lot of football on television but only English football. They should be interested in Indian football if it is to progress. That can happen if the Indian players play good football," he said.

"In my country (Holland) they watch a lot of English football as well but they are interested in how Ajax (or whichever is their local club) is doing.

"Of course, it will take time before India emulates Japan who set up a similar system 20 years ago. Today, they are a very strong football team," Baan said.



AIFF technical director Rob Baan inspects the FIFA-AIFF Residential Academy at Father Agnel school in Vashi on Tuesday — Nandkishore Kurne DNA

PLAYING FIELD IS EXCELLENT: BAAN

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How did you find the facilities and infrastructure here?

The most important facility is the field, which is excellent out here. The green pitch is the only one that's in good condition in Mumbai. The accommodation, food and other facilities also are quite good which will facilitate students' development. This is the best infrastructure we have in the country (better than the other three centres). Four months of monsoons, too, cannot play spoil sport, thanks to the artificial turf.

What's the stature of this academy?

The FIFA AIFF Academy will be operational from March 2012 and will be a residential academy wherein students will be trained in football. They will also pursue their education at the Fr Agnel's Multipurpose School.

Thus, we would prepare future footballers in a place conducive to everything. There will be three coaches who will be appointed to train the players: a head coach, assistant coach and a goalkeeping coach. There will be nutritionists in charge of their diet plans such that their all-round development as a sportsman is taken care of.

What age group the academy will focus on?

The academy will focus on four main age-groups — 14, 15, 16 and 17, who will be trained to secure their positions in the senior national teams. Once admitted into the FIFA-AIFF Academy, the players will be trained for two years. After analysing their overall development, they will be sent to the Elite Academy for further training. Those not up to the scratch will be trained for another two years at the regional academies.