

Sixty years of inspiration

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THE ASIAN AGE

More than a coach, Anthony Rodrigues is an inspiration for many. Even at 60, the spirited man is not ready to slow down. Instead, he wants to go all out to equip his trainees with skills and knowledge that will see them through life.

Earlier this year in April, he completed the English FA Level 1 coaching certificate held in association with Bhartiya Vidyapeeth, where he was the oldest participant to have competed and cleared it.

"I have been playing football since I was a child. After playing on roads and in school compounds, I finally got a chance to play for the Reserve Bank of India team," recalls Rodrigues. However, he began his tenure as a coach only a few years back. "I had taken a break of almost 10

years due to personal reasons. Coaching and interacting with kids gives me a lot of pleasure. I coach about five to six teams right from U-16, 14, 12, 10 and 8 in Sacred Heart school, Santa Cruz," he adds. He also conducts coaching camps at the Mumbai District Football Association (MDFA) grounds for kids U-15 in Kalina and Vakola. Apart from these, he is also associated with the Wellington Catholic gymkhana team.

Rodrigues says that in his time the MDFA, which was then known as the Harvard League, had no elite divisions. Also, it was not the Mahindras that dominated, but the Tatas and Mafatlals who were the leading teams. "It's sad that Mahindras shut down the I-league team. They are a team



Anthony Rodrigues (fourth from right) at the Karnataka Veterans Football final match

PHOTO: Asian Age

that's trying to do some service to the society. And they had the best talents from both India and abroad who dominated a decade of Indian football," he says.

But he feels that now Air India, Mumbai FC are doing their bit, although he regrets that there is no job security for youngsters today, unlike during his hey days. "A feeling of insecurity is slowly creeping into the scenario. As a result of this, more and more players are shying away from their passion. Moreover, even parents feel unsure about their children venturing into sports," says

Rodrigues.

He credits the international media for popularising football in India by telecasting the World Cup and the English

Premiere League. To see the world's greatest players in action is educational and inspirational at the same time, he feels.

Rodrigues wishes that the school sports authorities give proper training to coaches so that they are able to impart the best

training to the future players. "Good training is mandatory to achieve good performances. The FA tutors taught us how to be good to youngsters so that we can get the best out of them, and

make sure that they always come back to playing football. I just want to train the children and let them fly as high as they can," he says.

And like most patrons of the game, Rodrigues too dreams of seeing the Indian team in the World Cup. "I don't know when it will happen. It all depends on how we, as coaches perform and train youngsters all over India. It's going to be really tough, but any amount of hardwork is justified if it brings the national team to the highest level of the competition," he says. Ask him to cite his personal favourites and he picks Baichung Bhutia, whom he credits for his contribution to training youngsters in the game.

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