

SFA Qualifying for IWL will Usher in a Goan Sunrise for Women's Football, says Armando Colaco, Dronacharya Awardee & ex-India Coach

The Sesa Football Academy (SFA) Senior Women's Team has scripted a landmark chapter in Goan football history by securing its maiden qualification to the 9th Indian Women's League (IWL). It is after a gap of three years that a Goan Team shall be participating in the prestigious event.

SFA are the fifth Goan team ever to participate in the IWL. The previous participants being Panjim Footballers (2019), Bidesh XI SC (2020), Sirvodem FC (2022) and Churchill Brothers (2023). The achievement for SFA, the reigning Vedanta Women's League Champions came after their credible third place finish in the IWL2. With the Indian Arrows withdrawing from participating in the IWL, the persistent effort of Dr Caitano Fernandes, President Goa Football Association (GFA) resulted in SFA qualifying for the 16-team event.

With the rising profile of the women's game in India, the U17, U21 and the senior women's team having qualified for the AFC Champions Cup, it is important to be as close to the action. SFA securing qualification to the IWL allows Goan talent the much-needed window of opportunity to break into the 'big' league. **Speaking on the development, Mr Navin Jaju, CEO, Vedanta Sesa Goa,** *"Heartiest congratulations to the SFA Senior Women's Team for their maiden qualification for the IWL. It is a matter of tremendous pride to see the team take such rapid strides and inspiring many others along the way."*

Dronacharya Awardee and former India & SFA Coach, Mr. Armando Colaco, considers the development to be one beyond a mere sporting milestone, "The SFA Senior Women's Team qualifying for the IWL signifies the revival of women's football in Goa," he stated. "Several years ago, the women's game enjoyed strong grassroots presence here, but over time, it gradually receded from prominence. The SFA's recent accomplishments have reignited that momentum." He further added that "This qualification presents an exceptional opportunity for the players," observing that "The young players exhibit commendable technical ability, temperament, and discipline. This achievement is the beginning of a new phase for Goan football rather than the culmination of one."

Having mentored Champion teams across various levels, Mr. Colaco highlighted SFA's role in creating a sustainable ecosystem for women's football, "SFA has not only nurtured players but has actively restored the pathway for women's football progression in the state," he noted. "It is essential that women's football is viewed not as support-led benevolence, but as a strategic and high-performance sporting avenue. In this regard the role of Vedanta Sesa Goa in consistently supporting the Women's League in Goa is commendable and responsible for this resurgence in footballing fortunes of the State."

He further emphasised the potential long-term impact of SFA's qualification, "If the current momentum is carefully harnessed, SFA has the capacity to emerge as a national

reference point for women's football development." As the SFA Senior Women's Team prepares to compete in the IWL, expectations are high from a performance standpoint as well as for what the development can potentially unlock for Goan football & beyond. "This moment belongs to the players, the academy, and to every young girl who aspires to pursue football professionally," Mr. Colaco concluded. "It is a moment of revival, not just of qualification and the entire football fraternity should stand with the SFA team and support them in all possible ways to make this a Goan sunrise."