



P-ISSN: 2394-1685  
E-ISSN: 2394-1693  
Impact Factor (ISRA): 5.38  
IJPESH 2017; 4(4): 91-94  
© 2017 IJPESH  
www.kheljournal.com  
Received: 18-05-2017  
Accepted: 20-06-2017

**Dr. Vijay Bahadur Singh Bisht**  
Assistant Professor (Physical Education) Rajendra Prasad Degree College Meerganj (MJP Rohilkhand University) Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, India

## FIFA U17 World Cup 2017: Gateway of hopes for Indian Football

**Dr. Vijay Bahadur Singh Bisht**

### Abstract

India will be hosting its maiden FIFA tournament 'FIFA under 17 World Cup 2017' from October 6<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> across six cities. By virtue of being the host, India is an automatic qualifier for the tournament, this way India got a chance to play in its maiden FIFA world cup tournament. Football is the most popular sport on this planet but sadly reputation of India in world football is near pathetic. Currently India stands at 100<sup>th</sup> place in FIFA ranking which is India's best ranking in period of more than two decades. FIFA too is interested in rejuvenating football in India as FIFA can't afford to ignore second biggest population of the world. Organizing FIFA U17 World Cup in India is a part of FIFA's plan to boost football in India from junior level and help India to grow and come in main stream of world football. FIFA U17 World Cup has opened a flood of expectations and hopes not only for India but for FIFA also.

This FIFA U17 World Cup It may help Indian players to get recognized worldwide as they will be visible to the world audience and they will get opportunity to play alongside the best youth football talents from powerhouse of world football such as Brazil, England, France, Germany, Spain, Chile, Colombia, Mexico etc. and same time it also will be a great opportunity for India to prove its capabilities to organize sports event of global magnitude. For Indian fans also it will be a lifetime opportunity to witness future global superstars of world football evolving on Indian soil. During this tournament many agents of many top clubs from different parts of the world will be in India to screen through the talents and for Indian players it will be a massive opportunity to display their talent and get noticed. If one or two players may get scouted by the foreign clubs, it will open the new horizon of hopes for Indian players. Success of this event can bring a positive change the approach of Indian people towards football. A big football revolution is waiting to happen in India. FIFA U17 World Cup has potential to make football a household game in India. It can further encourage the governments and corporate to nurture and sponsor football and invest more and more in football. Better football education, stadia, training facilities, better sport managers and rejuvenated passion for football in the India could be some of the lasting legacies of the FIFA U17 World Cup.

**Keywords:** FIFA U17 world cup, AIFF, U17, I league, ISL, football, soccer, academies, stadium, football powerhouse

### Introduction

Football is the most popular sport on this planet. No other ball game is known to trigger such extreme responses in so many millions. Other sports can only aspire to match the status of football. What is it about a simple ball game that makes it so popular, cutting across all barriers? What is the key to its special allure, it's near hypnotic appeal? <sup>[1]</sup>

It's football's simplicity which makes it so special. Growth and popularity of football can be assessed by the fact that number of member countries of FIFA is more than member countries of United Nation <sup>[2]</sup>. Football is a truly global sport. FIFA world cup is the biggest single game competition whose stature is not less than Olympics. Revenue generated from one FIFA world cup is enough to stage around 30 FIFA competitions for next four years and \$ 550,000 are spent every day to fund football development programmes in the needy member countries around the world <sup>[3]</sup>.

India may not be a global power house of sports but India has all the required elements to become a strong sporting nation. Huge population, dependable economy and stable democratic political system what else a nation needs to excel in any field? India has all this but most important thing which is preventing it from achieving the excellence is that India could not organize a fair coordination among its economy, scientific growth and ever increasing human

### Correspondence

**Dr. Vijay Bahadur Singh Bisht**  
Assistant Professor (Physical Education) Rajendra Prasad Degree College Meerganj (MJP Rohilkhand University) Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, India

resources. After the independence India kept making progress in economy, science and agriculture but failed to grow at desired pace in field of sports. India could not convert its huge human capital into a dependable sporting asset which resulted in ever decreasing sports performance at world level. Since the start of the modern Olympics in 1896 India has just managed to win only 28 Olympic medals and out of these 28, 11 has been won in hockey alone and the last hockey medal was won way back in Moscow 1980. However in recent years some noticeable improvement has been seen in Badminton, Wrestling, Shooting, Archery etc. Total 8 medals has been collected from last two Olympics of 2012 and 2016 but that doesn't match with the reputation of India who aspire to be a global super power in near future and if we talk about football then we find that situation is near pathetic. Last time India had qualified for football in Olympics was way back in 1960 Rome Olympic and India have never participated in FIFA World Cup. Recently in June 2017 India just managed to stand at 100<sup>th</sup> place in FIFA ranking which is India's best ranking in period of more than two decades. Further little improvement in ranking is expected in near future due a recent promising victory of India over Kyrgyzstan in AFC Qualifiers on June 13<sup>th</sup> 2017 but still the tag of underachiever is prominently associated with India when overall sports performance is talked about, especially football.

#### **Why India need to excel in sports especially in football**

Every nation aspires for greatness, supremacy and glory, and excelling in sports is one of the ways to achieve it. So far India's achievements in international sports especially in Olympics and different World Cup Games (except cricket) have not been remain as impressive and consistent as it should have been.

The Olympic Spirit emphasizes on participation rather than winning but in reality however, the success of a country's athletes is considered to be an important source of nation's prestige. Mighty international presence in sports reflects the potential of a nation. Since Olympics and World Cup Games performances are closely connected with national prestige and performing well in these competitions can help India to obtain recognition internationally as well as stimulate sense of pride and patriotism in countrymen. International recognition and patriotism are extremely valuable to any nation as it boosts the feeling of unity, integration, peace and political stability domestically [4]. For India with its diversity, domestic issues and challenges, improved international sports performances can be a potential solution. Besides being the carnival of human capabilities, good international sports performances are also an advertisement of nation's progress. So India must do anything and everything to become a successful nation in sports at international level.

After Olympics, FIFA World Cup is the biggest sporting attraction of the world. Global status and popularity of football is the landmark for other sports to which they can only wish for. In terms of popularity, participation, viewership and revenue generation FIFA World Cup is almost parallel to the Olympics. Football, a game like no other, a sport whose quadrennial summit – the World Cup – brings the whole world together in a sort of tribal bounding that all the greatest statesmen of our times together cannot achieve. It is a coming together of the sort that the human seldom experiences. Neither a crucifixion nor a coronation, and surely no other single sporting event including the Olympics, might command such attention from the human race. There are religions, and then there is football [5].

Football rules the world, India too is not an exception but sadly India doesn't rule in the world of football. India is the home of world's second biggest population after China. Every sixth person on this planet is an Indian. Domination of any game worldwide can't be said complete without its expansion in the world's two most populated countries, China and India. Huge population is a valuable asset for FIFA which it can't afford to ignore. India always aspires to excel in football at world level but desired results still seems to be very far. India is not a big force in world football but India is a nation full of potential which remains to be realized. Former FIFA chief Sepp Blatter, in the answer of a question in an interview, during his visit to India in 2007, had expressed his concern for Indian football and called India a sleeping giant which needs to be waken up [6]. FIFA recognizes India's potential so FIFA too is desperate to see India grow in football and come into the main stream of world football. Besides Olympics FIFA World Cup is the most recognized sports event on this planet and success in these games is the instantly recognized and admired worldwide.

Success in sports is also an indicator of country's progress and development. Top ten medal winning nations of last three Olympics vindicates this. In Rio Olympic 2016 too top ten medal winning nations are those that are listed as 'high income' by the World Bank. So the connection between wealth and sporting performance still remains very strong. But wealth alone cannot predict medals. Health, literacy and standards of living are all important factors too. So it's not surprising that the top ten countries in medal standings, with the exception of China, are also in 'Very High Human Development' category in UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) [7]. It can be said that prosperity of a nation and success in sports are complementary to each other. So India's dream of becoming a developed nation can't actually be realized until India becomes a convincing force in sports especially in football. So India must do everything and anything to excel in sports specially in football.

#### **FIFA U17 World Cup 2017: India's maiden entry to a FIFA competition**

Impressed with popularity of football and huge human resources in India FIFA is very keen to bring India into main stream of world football. Huge sum and attention is being invested by FIFA in India through various schemes and programs. Granting organization of 'FIFA Under17 World Cup 2017' to India is also a part of big plan to enable India to grow in global football.

In its executive committee meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013 FIFA revealed that India would be the host of 17<sup>th</sup> edition of biennial 'FIFA U17 World Cup' to be held from 6<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> October 2017. This will be first major FIFA tournament of any kind to be hosted by India and by virtue of being the host India is an automatic qualifier for the tournament. Though it's only an age group tournament but for India this may prove a game changer opportunity to transform the standard of football not only in India but also in whole South East Asia Region. All India Football Federation (AIFF) has already indicated to bid for FIFA U20 World Cup and FIFA Club World Cup if this tournament goes on the expected lines of success [8].

Since hosting of FIFA U17 World Cup is awarded to India, it has opened a flood of expectations and hopes not only for India but for FIFA also. Level of expectations is so high that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also throwing his weight behind this U17 World Cup Football. In a statement

PM spoke about how the competition can spark a monumental change in India. In a statement posted at official website of All India Football Federation the Indian Prime Minister said, "India is going to host the FIFA U17 World Cup in 2017, but successful hosting of the event alone can't be our final objective. FIFA U17 World Cup India 2017 must be a catalyst for change, the topping point for football in country, which can only be done by creating a mass movement around it [9]. Hope this FIFA U17 World Cup will be a stepping stone towards big desired outcomes.

### **Hopes and Expectations Associated with FIFA U17 World Cup 2017**

#### **Worldwide Recognition to India**

So far India is mainly known as a good worldwide provider of IT Professionals and Doctors. Most of the developed nations of the world consider India's huge population as a big market for their products. So far India is not a recognized global sporting power, neither in achievement nor in organizing big events. In past India have organized world cup tournament of Cricket, Hockey, Kabaddi etc and Asian and Commonwealth Games successfully but India has never organized an Olympic or FIFA World Cup, the biggest global sporting events. Though it's only an age group world cup tournament but for India it's like a dream coming true. It will be biggest-ever football tournament on Indian soil, and world's third biggest, from October 6<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>. [10]

FIFA too is very optimistic about this event. After just concluded FIFA U20 World Cup (held in South Korea from 20 May to 11 June 2017) the focus of world's football fans has shifted towards India. Some of the top footballing nations such as Brazil, England, France, Germany, Spain, Chile, Colombia, Mexico etc. are going to compete in the tournament, the first FIFA event in the country so India too is to remain in the spotlight of world media as these games will be televised worldwide. So this event will be an exhibition not only of India's football talent but also of organization capabilities to organize a global event which will further strengthen its claim to organize bigger events in future too.

FIFA has already recognized India as a sleeping giant of football. This FIFA U17 World Cup is perfect opportunity for India to show the world that India is not sleeping anymore in the oblivion. Passion for the beautiful game in India is unparalleled to anywhere in the world and that has been acknowledged by the greats like Pele, Maradona, Oliver Kahn, Leo Messi when they visited India. All of them were happily surprised to see the support and passion for football in India and same time they were also sadly surprised to see that there is no special credit is in the name of Indian football. Hope this FIFA U17 World Cup will be a transformation exercise for Indian football to evolve and get recognized globally.

#### **India will see what it has not seen in football so far**

FIFA U17 World Cup's tournament director Javier Ceppi says India will see a brand of football it has not witnessed so far, in the upcoming mega event. It is a great moment to be a football fan in the country, as the best youth national teams and players across the world will be in India and will show a quality of football that has not been seen in India before [11].

There will be many firsthand experiences for Indian football players. First time Indian football team will be grouped with world's best teams and will be visible to global audience. Indian players will get an opportunity play against world's best youth teams. Indian fans will be able to witness future

global stars of world football evolving on Indian soil. Looking at past records of Indian football it will not be fair to expect too much from Indian team. It will be more than enough if Indian team manages to progress beyond the group stage. Anyway still a big dream of Indian football players and fans is going to come true very soon and maybe it's just beginning of happening of good things in Indian football.

#### **Professional opportunities for Indian players**

During this tournament many dignitaries of football and agents of many top clubs from different parts of the world will be in India to screen through the talents and for Indian players it will be a massive opportunity to display their talent and get noticed. Possibility is there that one or two players may get scouted by the foreign clubs, and if this happens then it may prove a life changing break for Indian football.

#### **Creating platform for better future prospects**

Sustainable progress in sports chiefly depends on how a game is being nurtured at grass root and junior level to ensure a continuous availability of talented players for higher stages. India got late in formulating comprehensive youth development plans for football. In 2013 with FIFA's initiatives AIFF Regional Academy was setup in Goa for Under 14 age group players with aim to search and develop players for FIFA U17 World Cup, and winning the bid for FIFA U17 World Cup has given further boost to develop football at grass root and youth level. Besides AIFF many I-League and ISL clubs are also taking initiative in developing their own grass root and youth academies. This will certainly provide a broad base of talented players for future Indian team. Seems this FIFA U17 World Cup will change many things positively in Indian football forever.

#### **Development of FIFA prescribed football infrastructure in India**

It's an essential condition to have FIFA prescribed football infrastructure at all venues for organizing a FIFA tournament. It is a fact that before India was declared to host the FIFA U17 World Cup none of the I-League venues was fit to organize any FIFA tournament. So unprecedented renovation work were started to transform all the six host venues namely Salt Lake Stadium Kolkata, JN Stadium Kochi, DY Patil Stadium Navi Mumbai, IG Stadium Guwahati, Fatorda Stadium Goa and JN Stadium New Delhi into world class sports center. FIFA officials have expressed their satisfaction over the progress in development of match venues and training sites. These centers will be landmarks for further development of football infrastructure in the country and after this tournament similar world class infrastructure and facilities are bound to be developed in other cities also which will be a big encouragement to football in India and this will further consolidate India's claim for hosting bigger FIFA competitions in near future.

#### **Changing the face of Indian football and approach of Indian people towards football**

Absence of a sports culture at local level is one of the biggest hindrances in our way of becoming a sports power. Large Indian population belongs to middle or lower middle socio-economic status and sports is not among the priorities of their life. Most of the school going school kids dream of becoming a doctor or engineer and most of the time it's their parents' forced choice on them. Parents spend money on their coaching and tuition beyond their resources. Every year huge

number of students appearing for the engineering and medical entrance indicates that what the prime choice of our young generation is. On other hand number of students seeking admission in physical education and sports courses is too meager to feel happy or satisfied. Very few students think about a career in sports or physical education. In schools and colleges too sports is never a priority. Sports and physical education do not figure in the list of subjects for India's civil services exams also so it's a very legitimate question to ask that why any parent should feel motivated to encourage their kids to take sports seriously.

In India cricket is the only game which is known to people in the name of sports. Despite some recent commendable performances by Indian players in international Badminton, Wrestling, Boxing, Archery, Tennis, Golf and Fencing very few people recognize a non cricket face as a successful player. So it's very hard to imagine that football will emerge as a prime choice sports in India in which India stands at 100<sup>th</sup> place in FIFA ranking which is its best ranking in period of more than two decades [12]. But still hope is there as very significant part of TV viewership for European football and FIFA world cup comes from India. It means that in India people want to see quality football which Indian players and clubs clearly lack.

Seems this FIFA U17 World Cup is a small step in right direction to transform Indian football positively. A sense of excitement can be felt in Indian football fraternity to see our own homegrown players competing with world's future soccer stars and this is bound to give people a reason to believe and cheer. If a single player is able to attract the attention of a big club or coach then it may open the gate of new horizons for Indian football players. It's encouraging to know that in India too club footballers have started earning handsome salary and now their interests are being protected by FIFA. This FIFA U17 World Cup may also improve the quality and approach of Indian players and their game. We may discover many new stars from this. Emergence of young talented players will make India's domestic football more competitive and qualitative. This could be the best condition where more and more corporate houses can feel happy to extend their support towards football development. Quality of a player is a decisive factor in determining his value. It is very much possible that new benchmark of players' financial worth will be created in India after this event. This will have an overall positive effect on players' financial worth and status across all levels and categories. The way Indian clubs are transforming themselves as per FIFA's guidelines and leagues are being organized for age groups and women football too, it definitively going to present football as a career option for our young football players. Whatever is the result of this FIFA U17 World Cup one thing is sure that this event is going to give big boost to our players and to our governing body and this is bound to change the opinion of Indian parents too and they will happily encourage their kids to try football as a career option. This will be one of the most important outcomes from this mega event what we can hope for.

It can be concluded that in 2017 a big football revolution is waiting to happen in India. FIFA U17 World Cup has potential to make football a household game in India. It can further encourage the government and corporates to sponsor football and invest more in football. FIFA also is looking at this event with great expectations and FIFA is doing the needful to make it a big success. FIFA's head of events Jaime Yarza has promised to deliver a 'magnificent' U17 World Cup. He optimistically added that better football education,

stadia and training facilities, better sport managers and rejuvenated passion for football in the India could be some of the lasting legacies of the FIFA U17 World Cup [13].

## References

1. The Sportstar. 1998, 9-12.
2. Fifa: Six facts about world football's governing body, [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com)
3. [www.fifa.com/about-fifa/who-we-are/explore-fifa.html](http://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/who-we-are/explore-fifa.html)
4. Using Sports in National Development, B Mike Boit, [www.playthegame.org](http://www.playthegame.org)
5. Ibid 1
6. Press Conference and Interview with former FIFA President Mr. Josheph Sepp Blatter, [www.kolkatafootball.com](http://www.kolkatafootball.com)
7. Sen Rononjoy. What dertermines Olympic success? A nation's wealth health, HDI ranking and quality of institution all matter, The Times of India, New Delhi/Bareilly. 2016, 12.
8. [http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017FIFA\\_U-17\\_World\\_Cup](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017FIFA_U-17_World_Cup)
9. <http://indianexpress.com/article/sports/football/fifa-u-17-world-should-be-catalyst-for-change-in-indian-football-says-prime-minister-narendra-modi-4479118>, 2017.
10. <http://hindustantimes.com/football/fifa-promises-to-deliver-magnificent--u17-world-cup/story>
11. 'India will see what it has not seen in football so far', The Times of India, New Delhi/Bareilly. 2017, 15.
12. [www.fifa.com/fifaworldrankingrankingtable/men/index,page=3.htm](http://www.fifa.com/fifaworldrankingrankingtable/men/index?page=3.htm), as on 30.6.2017
13. <http://hindustantimes.com/football/fifa-promises-to-deliver-magnificent--u17-world-cup/story>