

Inside India's first all-girls residential football academy in Zawar

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 Something extraordinary is happening in the quiet mining town of Zawar, Rajasthan. September 2025 marked a historic milestone for Indian women's football. The Zinc Football Girls Academy, the country's first-ever fully residential academy dedicated solely to girls, welcomed its inaugural batch of players. In a state not known for football, and in a country where girls are still too often told that serious sport isn't for them, this academy is writing a new

chapter. One month in, the signs are breathtaking. Twenty trailblazing girls, aged 13–16, now call the academy home. Thirteen are from Rajasthan itself, the others have travelled from Jharkhand, West Bengal and Haryana. More than half come from families earning less than Rs15,000 a month. For them, football was never even a distant dream, until now. Here, everything is free. From world-class coaching, education in an English-medium CBSE school, nutritious meals, accommodation, kits and medical support. Zero fees. Zero excuses for families to say no. The blueprint is proven. It mirrors the hugely successful Zinc Football Boys Academy, whose alumni now play for Bengaluru FC, Mohun Bagan Super Giant and other top clubs. The girls train on the same pristine natural and artificial turfs, sleep in the same modern hostel, and benefit from the same cutting-edge F-Cube technology that tracks every sprint, pass and heartbeat to deliver personalised training plans. But the real magic happens beyond the pitch. Many of these girls had never worn proper football boots before arrival. Some had never played a structured match. Some faced resistance at home with comments like 'Log kya kahenge?' (What will people say?) stopping them from taking action. Yet within weeks, they are mastering step-overs, building stamina and most importantly, discovering their own strength. Speaking on the initiative, Hindustan Zinc Ltd chairperson Priya Agarwal Hebbar said, "Hindustan Zinc's commitment to empowering women and driving inclusive growth is reflected in every step we take — including the launch of our premier residential football academy for girls." "We believe that building world-class athletes begins at the grassroots, with access to opportunity, mentorship, and the right environment. This academy is not just about developing football talent — it is also about shaping confident, resilient young leaders of tomorrow," she added. A dedicated female coach from Kerala, relocated to Zawar, 'is a powerful role model for the girls', said one of the coaches at the academy. The tiered programme nurtures both raw talent and experienced players effectively. With AIFF recognition and a 3-star rating, the girls are on the national scouting radar. How does the management plan to provide opportunities to players? The academy follows a five-season roadmap from 2025 to 2030 to develop players step by step. With AIFF recognition and a 3-star rating, the girls are on the national scouting radar. Tournaments, IKF scouting, and Khelo India programmes provide competitive exposure, while structured training prepares them for progressively higher levels. As the academy grows to 60 and eventually 100 girls, the pathway is designed to enable them to compete at Asia Cup and World Cup levels, shares the management officials. The girls are not just learning to play football. They are learning they belong on the biggest stages, that their dreams are valid and that their state and country believe in them. The quiet revolution has begun. And the best part? It's only the first month.

