



HZL's Football Academy empowers communities

CSR

## Hindustan Zinc unlocks rural talent through sports

*HZL's CSR bridges sports development and livelihood training*

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Hindustan Zinc's foray into football has evolved into one of the most credible grassroots sports movements in the country. Founded in June 2017, the Zinc Football Academy in Zawar, near Udaipur, is a fully residential, All-India Football Federation (AIFF)-accredited centre of excellence that blends modern infrastructure with advanced player analytics like the F-Cube technology. Recognised as 'Sports Academy of the Year' at the Sport India Awards 2024, this venture has produced many young players, who are now competing at state and national levels, demonstrating how structured grassroots support can unlock rural talent.

Building on this foundation, HZL recently launched the Zinc Football Girls Academy in partnership with the AIFF, India's first full-fledged residential academy exclusively for girls. The inaugural under-15 batch of 20 players, drawn from states including Rajasthan, Gujarat, West Bengal, Haryana and Jharkhand, is already training under licensed coaches with access to top-class facilities, nutrition and academic support. The academy's ambition is to eventually host 60 girls, creating a pipeline of talent that will strengthen women's football at a national and international level.

Together, these initiatives form part of a wider sports ecosystem that has touched nearly 30,000 individuals across Rajasthan and beyond. The impact is visible not only in the growing participation numbers but in the aspirations being shaped too – young boys and girls from mining communities who once lacked exposure now dream of professional sporting careers.

“Through Zinc Football, the Girls Academy and our broader sporting initiatives, we are creating opportunities where none existed before,” affirms Priya Agarwal Hebbar, chairperson, HZL. “For us, this is not only about developing athletes, but about empowering communities, inspiring confidence, and building resilient young leaders who will carry forward India's sporting and social story.”

## **Skilling initiative**

Complementing its focus on grassroots sports, the company is also shaping the employment trajectory of rural youth in Rajasthan and Uttarakhand through its flagship skilling initiative, Zinc Kaushal Kendra, since 2019. Under the initiative, industry-aligned skill-based training is given to youth in the communities in HZL's operational areas, thereby ensuring a durable source of livelihood through gainful employment or self-entrepreneurship.

To date, nearly 9,000 individuals have been trained, while over 7,750 are placed in diverse sectors, such as hospitality, retail, solar, security and micro-finance – an outreach that highlights HZL's role in transforming rural aspirations into tangible economic opportunities.

Remarkably, the programme is now exporting talent globally: Deepika Devra, a trainee from Udaipur, now works aboard a cruise ship in Spain,

while Lalit Jangid has secured a technical role in Saudi Arabia. These international placements send a powerful message: with the right skills and mentorship, rural youth need not be confined to local horizons.

The Zinc Kaushal initiative is also deeply inclusive, with 45 per cent of the trainees being women. In one standout achievement, an entire all-women batch in unarmed security saw 100 per cent placement. The programme consciously extends support to differently-abled youth, nurtures entrepreneurial talent and aligns closely with national missions such as Atmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Rajasthan.

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