

Zinc Football Academy's graduate Mohammed Kaif selected in India Under-20 team for SAFF Championship

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Udaipur: Hindustan Zinc, a Vedanta Group company's flagship social impact initiative Zinc Football Academy's graduate Mohammed Kaif has been selected in the India Under-20 national team for the upcoming SAFF U-20 Championship 2026 in Maldives.

India have been drawn in Group B and will open their campaign against Pakistan on March 26, followed by a fixture against Bangladesh on March 28. Group A comprises host country Maldives, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and

Bhutan. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semi-finals on April 1, with the final set to take place on April 3.

Hailing from Makrana city in Rajasthan, Kaif enters the tournament as a treble SAFF champion, having won the U-16 (2023), U-17 (2024), and U-19 (2025) titles.

He is now aiming to add a fourth SAFF championship crown to his name.

Born in 2008, the defender was part of Zinc Football Academy's first-ever batch, which began in 2018. Within a few years at the Zawar-based academy he became the first player from Rajasthan in over 40 years to represent India at the international level, achieving this milestone in 2023 and marking a significant moment for football in the state.

Following his development at ZFA and his international debut, Kaif was signed by Indian Super League (ISL) club Hyderabad FC (now Sporting Club Delhi) in early 2025.

He has since represented Diamond Harbour FC and South United FC, continuing his steady progression in Indian football.

His selection reflects Zinc Football Academy's continued commitment to developing young talent and creating pathways for players to compete at the highest levels.

Since its inception in 2018, Zinc Football Academy – an AIFF 3-star rated academy, has consistently produced players for India's age-group teams, strengthening the nation's talent pool. Alongside Mohammed Kaif, ZFA players Sahil Poonia, Prem Hansdak, and Rajrup Sarkar have also represented India, marking another milestone in the academy's continued commitment to contributing to Indian football's growth.

Recently, the company has launched India's first residential football academy for girls with an inaugural batch of 20 girls from rural backgrounds.

Hindustan Zinc has supported sports for nearly four decades, starting with its football stadium at Zawar in 1976, which continues to host annual National Football tournaments. Extending beyond football to athletics, kabaddi and volleyball, the company nurtures talent at the grassroots. Its Vedanta Zinc City Half Marathon has put Udaipur on the global running map, with sports initiatives impacting nearly 30,000 lives.