

# SAI in for holistic overhaul

Plans to establish 24 Centre of Excellence, upgrade facilities, and recruit new coaches

MIHIR VASAVDA  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

FOR TWO years, Sports Authority of India's (SAI) Lucknow centre had just 11 women's hockey trainees. At the state-of-the-art Imphal centre, of the total strength of 200 athletes, roughly 55 belonged just to sepak takraw, a fringe sport, while trainees in sports like hockey, football, and boxing trained at a different, 'pitiable' centre in Manipur's capital. In Kolkata, meanwhile, a sports ministry research revealed that for the last three years, performance of several athletes had stagnated.

"There was a mismatch. At centres where, for example, we had hockey trainees, we had a kabaddi coach. Where we had a kabaddi coach, we didn't have enough players. We are setting right those things," sports secretary Radhey Shyam Julaniya said.

To 'set it right', the sports ministry and SAI have begun a 'holistic' restructuring of the training institutes across the country. It includes establishing 24 National Centre of Excellence (NCOE) for almost 100 disciplines, recruiting hundreds of coaches and high-performance managers, upgrading more than decade-old equipment, a multi-crore investment in sports science facilities and prioritising meritocracy and performance for athletes as well as coaches.

The sports ministry and SAI officials say such restructuring is taking place at SAI for the first time since it was established in January 1984. "The organisation was designed in 1984. It has to meet the present need and future aspirations. The restructuring is being done keeping in view the spread of sports because of Khelo India Games and the Olympic Games in 2024 and 2028," Julaniya said.

SAI director general Sandip Pradhan added: "It will be a holistic change. The idea is to get structures in place for coaching, sports science, induction of athletes as well as infrastructure."

At present, SAI has 56 training centres across the country where roughly 15,000 athletes train (of them, 10,000 are residential). For most aspiring athletes, admission to a SAI centre is seen as the first step towards making a career in sports.

At the same time, though, there have been allegations that the institutes have not



A file picture of the boxing hall in the National Institute of Sports in Patiala which will become one of the 24 national centres of excellence.

RESTRUCTURING SAI

24

National Centre of Excellence to be created

100

disciplines

50

high performances managers to be appointed

100

chief coaches to be hired

₹75

crore worth sports science equipment sanctioned for 7 centres

8,000

combined capacity of additional hostels

evolved with time, because of its ad-hoc athlete recruitment policies and archaic coaching programmes. The latter, in fact, is believed to be SAI's biggest Achilles heel

with claims that the coaches, most who were recruited back in the 80s, did not adopt modern training methods and stuck to the programmes they learnt decades ago.

Under the restructuring process, SAI will recruit 100 chief coaches in the initial phase along with at least 150 assistant coaches. Additionally, they will hire 50 performance managers, whose duty will include assessing performances of the coaches and athletes as well as monitoring the physical attributes of the trainees according to the sport's requirements.

"A few foreign coaches will also be recruited wherever required," Pradhan said. "The facilities such as kitchen, sports complexes, and hostels are being upgraded. Additional hostels of the combined capacity of approximately 8,000 is being created across National Centre of Excellence."

The National Centre of Excellence will cater to elite athletes, he added, and state-level centres will focus on grassroots. Some

pockets have been identified for the centre of excellence: Bhopal, for instance, could be a national centre for shooting and some water sports; Bhubaneswar for hockey; Ranchi for archery and so on.

"The induction of athletes will not be restricted only to that particular region. So for example, if a wushu athlete is not able to get into a centre in Imphal because of lack of vacancy, she or he can try going to the Patiala centre. Right now, young trainees are not aware there are alternate options available," Pradhan said.

Julaniya said the 'new posts will go by merit and not purely on seniority in SAI.' "It will not adversely impact existing staff. But any benefit that comes from a new position, that will flow strictly on merit and on the basis of performance," Julaniya said, adding that sports science equipment costing Rs 75 crore has been sanctioned for seven Centre of Excellence, including National Institute of Sport in Patiala.

# Liverpool earn a 19-pt cushion atop the table

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
LONDON, JANUARY 30

LIVERPOOL MOVED an incredible 19 points clear at the top of the Premier League as Mohamed Salah and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain secured a 2-0 win at West Ham.

Jürgen Klopp's side have turned the title race into a procession and the runaway leaders saw off struggling West Ham on Wednesday to make it a remarkable 23 victories from 24 league games this season.

Salah opened the scoring with a first half penalty at the London Stadium and Oxlade-Chamberlain wrapped up Liverpool's 15th successive league win after the interval.

Second placed Manchester City are now so far behind Liverpool that the question is not if but when the Reds clinch their first English league title since 1990.

The Reds have won 31 of their past 32 league fixtures, only dropping points in a 1-1 draw at Manchester United in October.

With 14 games left, Liverpool's incredible run has given historic overtones to their impending title coronation.

The European and World champions are now 41 games unbeaten in the league -- just eight away from the 49-match English top-flight record set by Arsenal's 'Invincibles' across 2003 and 2004.

Matching that Arsenal team's achievement in going an entire league season without defeat is within Liverpool's reach, as is Manchester City's Premier League record of 100 points.

Liverpool's latest success on a chilly night in east London will be just a footnote when the full story of their likely title triumph is written, but they still managed to record another small piece of history.

They have now beaten all 19 of the other teams in the league at least once this season -- the first time the club have achieved that feat in the top-flight.

Klopp attracted criticism for announcing he and his first-team players won't be present for the FA Cup fourth round replay against Shrewsbury next week as it falls within the Premier League's winter break.

Instead, Klopp will send Liverpool's youth team to the match, but at this rate they will win the title so early that his stars will have plenty of time to put their feet up



Klopp's Liverpool have won 31 of their past 32 league fixtures. Reuters

in the final weeks of the domestic season.

## Swaggering Liverpool

Faced with West Ham's massed defence and lacking the pace and penetration usually provided by the injured Sadio Mane, Liverpool initially monopolised possession without a cutting edge.

Salah and Jordan Henderson finally combined to open up West Ham for the first time. Andrew Robertson was the beneficiary and the left-back's clip over Lukasz Fabianski was trickling towards the goal line when Issa Diop got back to clear.

It wasn't vintage Liverpool but their pressure eventually produced Salah's opener from their first shot on target in the 35th minute.

Roberto Firmino deftly controlled Trent Alexander-Arnold's pass and flicked the ball into the six-yard box, where Divock Origi was bundled over by Diop.

Jonathan Moss awarded the penalty and, after a lengthy VAR check for a possible handball in the build-up, Egypt forward Salah stepped up to send Fabianski the wrong way for his 16th goal of the season.

Manuel Lanzini wasted a golden opportunity to equalise early in the second half when the West Ham winger scuffed straight at Alisson Becker.

Firmino almost doubled Liverpool's lead when he swivelled onto Robertson's cross and forced Fabianski to save. Liverpool's second goal punished David Moyes' team in ruthless style as they authored a swaggering counter-attack in the 52nd minute.

## 185 goals & counting

Canada's Christine Sinclair has broken the record for most international goals, surpassing American forward Abby Wambach's after scoring her 185th against St. Kitts and Nevis in south Texas on Wednesday.

### THE NUMBERS TALK FOR HER

**4** Number of FIFA Women's World Cups she has worn | the armband for Canada in. She is the only player to have led a team in the global event as many times. She has also scored in five World Cups — a joint-record held with Brazil's legendary Marta.

**39** Sinclair still holds the collegiate record in the NCAA for the most goals in a single season with 39 in 2005.



### TAKING THE AMERICAN ROUTE

Born in Burnaby, British Columbia, she began her club career in 2001 for Vancouver Breakers before moving to the United States where she has been playing for the Portland Thorns. The Canadian star has won four professional championships: The WPS Championship with FC Gold Pride and Western New York Flash in 2010 and 2011 respectively along with the 2013 and 2017 NSWL Championships with Portland Thorns.

### A NATIONAL HERO

She made her mark on the international stage when she led Canada to back-to-back bronze medals at the 2012 and '16 Olympics. In 2012 she ended Canada's 76-year traditional team sports Oly medal drought. She was awarded an Officer of the Order of Canada, and in 2012, she was named Canada's athlete of the year.

### GLOBAL ICON

Sinclair is in elite company when it comes to accolades, being one of two people along with Marta to score in five different FIFA Women's World Cups from 2003 to 2019. She is also the only player to have captained her national team in four FIFA Women's World Cups.

### BACKBONE OF THE TEAM

Sinclair made wore the national team jersey for the first time when she was just a 16-year-old at the 2000 Algarve Cup. She even scored her first international goal in the very same tournament.

She has established herself as one of the best players in the women's game and has competed at two Olympics, including in 2012 where she was the tournament's leading scorer with six of Canada's 12 goals.

Compiled by Rahul Asnani

Thank you to everyone for all the messages...I'm slightly overwhelmed. Thank you to all my teammates, coaches, staff, friends and family. 185 would not have been possible without you."

CHRISTINE SINCLAIR  
ON HER RECORD

She did it! Christine Sinclair is now international soccer's all-time leading goal scorer. Congratulations, @sincy12 – you rock!."

JUSTIN TRUDEAU, CANADA PRIME MINISTER

Tonight, I am celebrating the honor of passing that record, that legacy of our beautiful game, to the great Christine Sinclair: world-record holder for most international goals – man or woman – in history."

ABBY WAMBACH  
THE PREVIOUS RECORD-HOLDER

## City reach League Cup final despite loss to United

REUTERS  
JANUARY 30

CANADIAN FORWARD Christine Sinclair became the all-time top scorer in international soccer, breaking the mark held by American Abby Wambach when she netted her 185th goal against St. Kitts and Nevis in south Texas on Wednesday.

Sinclair, playing her 290th international, scored the milestone goal from close range in the 23rd minute of Canada's opening game at the CONCACAF Olympic qualifiers at H-E-B Park in Edinburg after tying the record with a seventh-minute penalty.

"Just unbelievable," Sinclair said on what it means to be soccer's most prolific goal scorer. "When I first started with the national team I could never have imagined standing here with the number of goals I've scored."

The 36-year-old Canadian captain opened the scoring when she scored from the spot and later tucked away an Adriana Leon cross with a right-footed shot from inside the box to make it 4-0 and take the record.

Sinclair left the game in the 47th minute and Canada ran out comfortable winners 11-0. "Christine: History is made. Your victory is our victory. We celebrate with you," Wambach, who amassed her 184 goals over 255 games, posted on her Twitter account shortly after Sinclair surpassed her total.

"And to every girl coming up in the Pack with a dream to achieve that which doesn't yet even exist: We believe in you. Your Pack is with you. And history awaits you."

Wambach, who retired in 2015 after a 15-year career, had sole possession of the goalscoring mark since 2013 when she broke fellow American Mia Hamm's record of 158.

Sinclair has been the backbone of the Canadian team since making her debut as a 16-year-old at the 2000 Algarve Cup where she scored her first international goal.

She has established herself as one of the best players in the women's game and has competed at two Olympics, including in 2012 where she was the tournament's leading scorer with six of Canada's 12 goals.

"We have watched her grow from teenage star on the local grounds to international superstar who is adored around the world," said Canada Soccer President Steven Reed.

CONCACAF President and FIFA Vice-President Victor Montagliani also offered congratulations and thanked Sinclair for her contribution to the sport.

"To have scored an all-time international record goal haul, and to still be going strong, is truly outstanding. Christine's achievements have made her an icon in Canada," said Montagliani.

## WHEN EXPERTS TAKE STOCK OF THE BUDGET

Understand what Budget 2020 truly holds for you and the economy as it is analyzed by some of India's most insightful minds. Corporate heads, leading economists, sector experts together with senior FE editors de-code the Union Budget and its implications.

Edition dated 2nd February.  
Only with India's finest financial daily.



financialexpress.com  
www.facebook.com/thefinancialexpress  
twitter.com/FinancialXpress

DOWNLOAD APP

