

Kerala's Thiruvananthapuram to become a global football hub

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Kovalam FC, a well-known name in the football circuit in the country, is constructing a stadium at Arumanoor near Poovar. International football matches, including I-league games, will be held at the stadium which is being built as per FIFA guidelines.

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The capital district will soon get a significant spot in the sports map of the country with another stadium of international standards coming up on the outskirts of the city.

Kovalam FC, a well-known name in the football circuit in the country, is constructing a stadium at a ground which was owned by M V Higher secondary school at Arumanoor near Poovar, around 30 km from the city. Kovalam FC is the first club in the state to own a home stadium as per FIFA standards. The 'Sports Hub, Trivandrum' at Kariavattom has turned out to be a successful venture in terms of hosting a miniature version of T 20 cricket last year. It had won accolades from the sports personalities all over the country.



Kovalam FC Trainees practicing their moves at the ground | Manu R Mavelil

The new stadium at Arumanoor will be hosting international football matches including I-league matches. Earlier, the Kerala Cricket Association had opened two first-class cricket stadiums at Thumba and Mangalapuram. The stadium at Arumanoor will cheer up the football fans since it is solely dedicated to the conduct of the sport.

The stadium is coming up on a sprawling 3.5-acre plot behind the school. According to T J Mathew, chief patron and president of Kovalam FC, the world-class stadium will become operational by September this year. He said it was decided to build a stadium in order to make Kovalam FC a professional football club.

“The stadium is being built in complete adherence to the FIFA norms. Apart from the stadium, we will also construct a world-class hostel facility adjacent to the ground. The construction of the hostel will begin soon. The air-conditioned facility will have 240 beds. Of these, 40 beds have been reserved for economically backward students. Students from the city will be able to start training during the weekends once the stadium and the hostel get

commissioned,” Mathew said.

He expects the head coach of Arsenal FC Chris Abel to come down in August to give training to the coaches in the state. “Actually, we are on a mission to coach aspiring footballers in the state. This is the first step towards realising our long cherished dream. This stadium will not only benefit Kovalam FC but also help promote football in the district. Of course, it will be a proud moment for the people of Arumanoor since international games will be hosted here,” Mathew added.

Mathew expressed gratitude for the panchayat's and school authorities' support in making this dream a reality. Parassala block panchayat president V R Salooja said the stadium will bring the name of this small village to global attention.

Construction status

The ground leveling has been completed. A two-floor gallery will be constructed around the stadium and the fund for it will be sourced from the MP fund of Shashi Tharoor. A drainage is also being constructed around the stadium as per the FIFA norms.

When Express contacted Geevarghese, the District Football Association secretary and Kovalam FC secretary, he said a summer football camp will be held next month for the school students. "Towards the end of April, the stadium will be closed for two months to fix the grass turf. Once the turf laying is completed, the stadium will look truly international. The construction of the gallery will also be completed by that time," Geevarghese said.



Workers preparing the ground near M V Higher Secondary School at Arumanoor I Manu R Mavelil

Ebin Rose, the coach of Kovalam FC, said he had approached many people to develop the club. Later, everything fell into place when Mathew decided to lead from the front for the uplift of the club both emotionally and financially.

"I am the happiest man now. I can't express my feelings since we are going to own a world-class stadium. A proud moment indeed," said Ebin whose efforts made this project turn into a reality. The land has been allotted to the club by the school authorities on a lease for a period of 15 years. The foundation stone of the stadium was laid in September last year in the presence of Shashi Tharoor MP, O Rajagopal MLA and K A Anselan MLA.

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