

Zlatko Dalic who guided Croatia to 2018 World Cup final interacts with football coaches across India in SAI, AIFF workshop

Says more Indian players should play in Indian local leagues

New Delhi, May 1: Football coaches from across the country had an extremely special guest today as they were joined by none other than the man who guided Croatia to the final of the 2018 Football World Cup Zlatko Dalic during an online session organised by the Sports Authority of India and the All India Football Federation. The 53 year-old who continues to coach the national team shared his coaching experiences for nearly half an hour, Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju and current Indian national team coach Igor Stimac who is also Croatian were present during Dalic's talk.

Croatia famously reached the final of the 2018 World Cup as they beat a number of fancied teams like Argentina and England on the way, Dalic said that his biggest challenge was never the talent and quality at his disposal, but rather getting Croatia to play as a team during the event, "No one trusted our team before the World Cup but we had been performing well over the past decade. When you play for the national team, you don't need motivation, playing for the country is motivation enough. The likes of Luka Modric and Ivan Rakitic, they are fantastic players but my big task was to ensure that this group plays like a team. The key to our success in that World Cup was that we played as a team. During the prize distribution Modric won the Golden Ball but he was very sad because his country could not win the final. Individual recognition was secondary to the team winning." Dalic added that while people think it's difficult to work with star players, that is not true and what they need more than anything is confidence.

Dalic also spoke on Indian football and what he feels needs to improve, he said a greater emphasis on local talent, "I see too many foreigners in Indian local leagues, there should be less foreigners in Indian local leagues because it hampers the development of local players. It is difficult to build a solid base of local talent if too many foreigners play in the domestic leagues."

Dalic stressed on the importance of why a solid grassroots coaching system must exist for top players to emerge, and took the example of the system in Croatia which has managed to throw up top talent despite being a country of just four million people, "We have good coaches in our football system who have been there from the grassroots level. That is what has enabled players like Modric, Rakitic and Mario Mandzukic to break through," he said.

Shedding light on his own experience with Croatia, Dalic also added that football must be seen as a long-term project and a collaborative effort. He said that Croatia had been performing well for the past 10 years and all the coaches who worked with the team during this period contributed to the success of the national side that culminated with their 2018 World Cup performance. He is hoping that Croatia keeps their good work into the European Championships scheduled for next year.

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