

Deccan Chronicle
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‘They are a delight to watch on field’

Names such as Lalsanglen Haokip, Tongmang Kipgen and Zamsei Touthang may be tongue twisters, but with proper guidance and coaching, they could, over time, be among the next big guns that can fuel Karnataka's dominance in foot- ball. On a scorching afternoon at Parikrma Foundation's Sahakarnagar branch, Haokip and Kipgen pranced around with footballs, their every skilled move a spectacle of talent and finesse. The 16-year- olds' faces were writ large with determination and optimism, adding an extra glow to their flaming yellow Karnataka jerseys.

Leading Parikrma to a scintillating win in the inter-school round of Mir Iqbal Hussein trophy championships, Haokip and Kipgen were included in the state squad and played an instrumental part in Karnataka's near victorious run in the National Under-16 sub-junior championship in December last year.

"We (Karnataka) were on a good run and were confident to win the final. But we failed to convert some easy chances and that proved costly," said Kipgen, after they lost by a goal to Jharkhand in the final. Kip- gen was the top goal scorer in the South Zone round with five goals.

Their silent, reticent nature is not uncommon. Most Manipuri kids have long been the victims of insurgency and the following violence that has killed thousands in their state in the last couple of decades.

With several rebel armies fighting for autonomy, most kids are forced to take up arms to fight for their lives. Their ambitions tend to remain just dreams. But not for Kipgen and Haokip and nearly 25 other kids from the North-East who live their dream at Parikrma.

Vasco FC veteran Ravi Babu, along with CIL's Chand Pasha and three other footballers, has been coaching over 60 kids spread across Parikrma's four branches in the U- 12, U-14 and U-16 categories.

"These two are a delight to watch once they are on the field. Once Haokip takes possession on the wings, there's hardly anyone who can match his speed and crossing while fantastic dribbling and skilful footwork are Kipgen's forte," Babu said. "Once they finish their studies, we will try and get them into I- league U-19 teams."

Ardent fans of Xavi and Ronaldinho, Haokip and Kipgen hope to pursue their dream of becoming professional footballers, but without proper backing, they and several other upcoming talents may well be lost. Those interested to sponsor or help can write to vivekr@parikrmafoundation.org.