

Namdhari Football Club







Mission

The Mission of Namdhari Football Academy is to develop successful, well-rounded individuals who inculcate good sense of discipline, sportsmanship and service to mother-land for coming generations.

Vision

“Our Vision is to create an international level football team, which in coming years should be not only be

participating but also winning leagues in different continents.”

Namdhari Football Club is an Indian professional football club based in Bhaini Sahib, Punjab. Part of the multi-sports Namdhari Sports Academy, it competes in the Punjab State Super League. Namdhari FC bid and joined the I-League, current second division of the Indian football league system.

History

Namdhari XI was first formed in 1975. In 2004 the Namdhari Sports Academy was built in Sri Bhaini Sahib, near Ludhiana. With growing interest in football, the Namdharis established its first football academy in 2018.

Club crest and kits

The primary colour of Namdhari Football club has been white with red stripes from its debut I-League season

Stadiums

The home stadium of Namdhari FC in its inaugural I-League season is Namdhari stadium located in Bhaini Sahib, Ludhiana, Punjab.

Training Sessions

At present there are 40 football trainees between the ages of 10 and 17, mainly from Haryana, who avail the hostel facilities, besides around 60-70 others who come for training daily from within the village or the nearby areas. The latest selection trials were held in March this year.

I-League 2023-24:

Namdhari FC's baptism by fire

19 October 2023



AIFF Media Team

NEW DELHI: Namdharis are well-known for their deep religious beliefs, extraordinary contribution to the freedom movement, and their untiring efforts for the promotion of education.

They are no strangers to sports, either. The Namdhari XI hockey team, established in 1977, were once a crack outfit and excelled in many top tournaments across the country. The Namdhari Sports Academy has a history of producing some top-grade players, not only in hockey but in badminton as well.

Now they have turned their attention to football and have judiciously built up a team, that can challenge the best in the country. Named the Namdhari Football Club, with their home ground at Namdhari Stadium in Sri Bhaini Sahib in Punjab, the team will have their first acid test at the national level in the 13-team I-League 2023-24, where they will participate for the first time.

Namdhari Football Club have the dream of going to the top but have decided to make a cautious start. As Sri Satguru Uday Singh Ji, the spiritual leader of the Namdhari community, said, the ultimate aim is to promote local talents and raise a team that will help the national cause.

“This season, we are playing in the I-League for the first time. We have some local players and have recruited a few players from across the country. But in the near future, we will put more stress on developing

local players that will help Indian Football. It is a great sport, played all over the world. Religion instils discipline in a person and helps to make him a better human being. The game of football is also like that,” he said.



To compete in the I-League, Namdhari Football Club have recruited some well-known players like defender Akashdeep Singh, centre-back Sukhandeep Singh and winger Harmanpreet Singh, who had earlier played for Real Kashmir FC, Sudeva FC and Bengaluru FC etc. The team is currently coached by former JCT and Mahindra United star Harpreet Singh. Spanish coach Francesc Bonet, who had earlier coached two other I-League teams, Rajasthan United and Gokulam Kerala, would soon join as the head coach in the next few days.

“We have also recruited three foreign players,” said Harpreet, who felt Namdhari Football Club would prove to be a highly competitive side in this season’s I-League. The three players are striker Olmes Garcia from Colombia, midfielder Stephen Acquah from Ghana, and attacking midfielder Imanol Arana from Spain. The inclusion of these three players will make Namdhari Football Club a balanced side, according to Harpreet.

The aim is not to raise an all-conquering side in the very first season, but to make the initial impact and slowly but steadily take a firm grip over the situation. The team is currently undergoing training in full swing

on their home turf and also playing in the ongoing Punjab Super League.

“The Punjab Super League is a 15-team championship and we are currently at the top of the league table. So far, we have played 11 matches, won 10, and lost one. Hopefully, we will emerge champions of the league,” said coach Harpreet Singh.





The secretary of the club, Sher Singh, is hopeful that the Namdhari Stadium will soon emerge as one of the best venues in the I-League. "Our pitch is very good and the dressing rooms have been praised by anyone who has had the chance to look at them. I am sure all

visiting clubs will like the arrangements and atmosphere during their away matches here,” he said.

“It is only the beginning. We have bigger plans down the line,” said Sri Satguru Uday Singh Ji. “We have a plan to expand in the future. We have identified some European countries, including Spain, where we may set up our academies or tie up with local clubs. We want to take Indian Football to the top of the world,” he said.

Namdhari Football Club will play their first match in the I-League against Churchill Brothers on October 31 in Sri Bhaini Sahib.

History of Namdhari Sports Academy

Satguru Pratap Singh, former Head of the Namdhari Sect, gave orders to their people to migrate from Pakistan and get settled in the village Jag Malera in Sirsa district during partition days. After that the full Namdhari sect got settled there. They worked a lot for the upliftment of their people. They built schools and colleges in the village. The 1975 World Cup victory

inspired the Head to promote hockey in the village and one year later the local team i.e. Namdhari XI was formed. In 1977, a hockey training centre was established at their village school namely Shri Guru Hari Singh Mahavidalya in which 20 boys were selected for coaching and training by Coach Pal Singh. They got special diet and equipments over there. Namdhari XI won its first reputed tournament i.e. Jawahar Lal Nehru Hockey Tournament for juniors in New Delhi in 1980. Known for their vibrant energy and excellent fighting traits, it soon made a place for itself as one of the top teams in the country. “Namdharis, known for their extraordinary contribution in the freedom struggle, are also set to be the first private organization in the country to have their own Astro-Turf at Sri Bhaini Sahib, near Ludhiana, the sect’s headquarter”.

This turf has been used to train the players as well as to host national level tournaments. Even the C.M. of Haryana, has promised them a dream –“dream of laying synthetic turf at Santnagar in sirsa, the precious hockey nursery of Namdharis” (Gupta), which is ready to use now and Namdhari Sports Academy has shifted to Sant Nagar. The players of the Namdhari Hockey got various jobs in different departments for their exceptional

performance and achievements by the different state and central Governments. “Training from May to February, Namdhari Hockey team plays not only in domestic tournaments but also in tournaments hosted in Canada, US and UK. Non-resident-Indians living in these countries arrange for tournaments like Surrey Cup, Canada, or Cal Cup, US – No other domestic team gets a similar opportunity” (Gupta).

1 Dress Code of Namdhari XI team

Fig. 2 Player in Complete Namdhari Uniform
“Distinguished by their spotless white turbans and playing uniform, the Namdhari Vidyak Jatha hockey team are leading participants in national and International Hockey Tournaments. It is one of the finest hockey teams in India” (Singh). The significance of the team is, this is well followed among the sect. If one come across a few Sikhs dressed in white kurta, white pyjama and white turban on any playfield, it is sure that Namdhari match is going on. Head of the Sect, Satguru Uday Singh Ji, Managing Director of Namdhari Seeds, is a fanatical hockey fan and also played hockey in his earlier years. His passion for Hockey can be assessed by

the fact that he often found on the turf side lines watching Namdhari matches. Various things separate Namdhari hockey team from the other teams in hockey scenario. First thing is that they are strictly vegetarian and live very humble life. They don't eat meat, chicken, beef or eggs for strength and stamina. They start their day with milk, butter, almonds, soaked grams. "Proving testament to the fact was none other than the team's manager Didar Singh, who represented India at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, the first from Sarsa to play for the country. Didar is decked from head to toe in a white kurta pajama and turban. "It's a price you pay to be the best. Every kid who comes to the academy knows what he is getting into. We don't compromise here. The players can't play in their kacchas but we make sure they wear them under the shorts. Our cook, Gurdev Singh, has been with us since 2000. We don't even have eggs. Our diet is full of milk and ghee" . Didar Singh also avers that "The way we train makes sure there is a fire in the belly. We train three hours in the morning, three hours in the evening. Then, we have the strict diet and dress code. All these things instill a lot of discipline in the boys". The coach of the Namdhari XI, Didar Singh, who represented the Tricolour at the 1992 Barcelona

Olympics said about the dress code of Namdhari players that “Earlier, the dress code used to be very strict, with all players having to wear ‘Kachera’. Now the rules have been relaxed, with players wearing shorts. But we still insist on the traditional attire during local tournaments. The entire contingent made sure to follow all rules of their religion. We bring our own cook and only have that food. Milk products are our main source of nutrition,”. Didar Singh also avers that “Everyone in our village is a hockey fanatic. You won’t find kids playing cricket there. We catch young kids with potential and start training them in our own nursery academy. If they prove to be good enough, they are then sent to Namdhari’s centre of excellence — at Bhaini Sahib in Ludhiana — where they hone their skills on synthetic turf. Sports hostel equipped with all modern facilities, including air-conditioned halls and a multi-gym, are also there. We’ve started age-group training to make sure our squad is always full. Santa Singh, a junior international, is our next gift to the hockey fraternity”. Santa Singh, newest flower of Academy also admits that “I have progressed to this stage because of the years of training I underwent in Namdhari. There’s no disadvantage because I am vegetarian. It’s a normal

food choice. It's no big deal. My teammates too know it's not allowed in my culture and are very understanding. I know the captain (Harjeet Singh) makes tea in his room and from the feedback I have got, it must be really wonderful. But I never had the habit of drinking tea since my childhood and I don't think I will start now". He further said "Namdhari (academy) took care of us and ensured we had no difficulties with respect to purchasing balls, kits, sticks etc. The main coach, Uday Singh ji, is very keen on improving the facilities. When I previously went there, he wanted to know what the system is like here so that he can replicate it there. It's a hostel-type environment. We train in the morning, have breakfast, go for studies, have our lunch and start training again in the evening". In an interview he admits that "It's interesting to play under people who have different philosophies. It was difficult to adapt. But I still follow the basics, In Namdhari, we were taught to be unique. Because that's what we do. I won't change my style just to fit in". "Having produced the likes of Indian hockey captain Sardar Singh, Malak Singh, Gurmail Singh, and recent Santa Singh to name a few, the Namdharis can stake claim to being the one of the top hockey academies in

the country” . Along with these stars Namdhari Sports Academy has produced six batches so far.