

Kicking Off the Second Set – MIT's Women Show Resilience on the Sports Field

A Footballing Fable



Courtesy: Department of Photography, BITS Pilani, Goa

In the wee hours of morning, while walking along the road adjacent to the football ground, you can see the men's football team toiling hard. Next to the football ground, you can also see a football player sitting on the hockey field, plopped in front of the goal post. With pair of muddy studs, a football, and two bags marking the goalposts, the player seemed to be waiting for her team to arrive.

The team turned up, and drills commenced. Shots were taken, dribbling exercises were completed, and sometimes even a match was played. The team tried, and eventually hung up their boots and went back to the hostel. This was the daily practice routine for the women's football team until March 2016. From not knowing where the football field was, to winning a trophy in Spree'16 at BITS Goa, the team has come a long way. A self-made team – barring a few occasions when members of the men's team taught them the basics of the game – these women did not even have a coach.



Courtesy: MIT Football League

Football isn't a stroll in the park



Courtesy: Department of Photography, BITS Pilani, Goa

Unaware to most of the college, a friendly Inter-Mahe Women's football tournament was organised between MIT, SOC, and MCODS during the latter half of 2015's even semester. Interestingly enough, only MIT could send a team with eleven players. Eventually, the tournament (now consisting of 7v7 games) was won convincingly by MIT. Despite a thumping win, the lack of a vacant ground caused the enthusiasm to abate. Without recognition, only *one* player turned up for selection.

"Out of a squad of fifteen players, four turned up for practice one day. It is illogical to walk up to the students playing there and ask them to pack up their bags – because we are the official team. It was later made very clear that no matter how unfit you are, your presence is imperative on the field. Don't train, sit and learn."

– Anam Ahmad, current Captain of the Women's football team



Courtesy: Department of Photography, BITS Pilani, Goa

Such was the lack of awareness that only one player turned up for selections held in odd semester. The distraught team, on the verge of being disbanded, got together for Spree'16. Two weeks prior to the fest, the team began intensive training. The training, which included basic drills and stamina-building exercises, paid off as the team defied all odds and manage to clinch the trophy at BITS Goa.

Light at the end of the Tunnel



At Spree'17 – Second Place: MIT Women's football team (Right),
First Place: BITS Women's football club (left)
Courtesy: Department of Photography, BITS Pilani, Goa

The win at BITS Goa was extremely important because it reaffirmed the administration's faith in the team. The women's football team was finally given permission to train on the football ground. Scratch that, *they earned the permission to play*. The next semester saw an even more promising turnout, with sixteen players turning up for selection. The team has been training hard ever since, managing to finish second in Spree'17. It has been quite a journey for these women, and they have exceeded expectations.

In the wee hours of morning, while walking along the road adjacent to the football ground, you can see the men's football team toiling hard. Next to the football ground, you can now see the women's football team matching the men step for step.

A Tennis Tale

For every student living in the west-facing rooms of 14th block, waking up to a blast of white light at 5:45 in the morning has become a common occurrence. The floodlights overlooking the tennis court are blaring, and members of the MIT tennis team seem to be hard at work. The MIT men's tennis team has made a name for itself, and watching the women's team work with equal dedication convinces you that the women are but a few steps away from success.

A New Set



Courtesy: MIT women's Tennis Team

While the women's team was sweating it out on the football field, the newly constructed tennis court was harbouring the rise of another women's sports team. The success of the

women's football team served as a source of inspiration for the formation of a revitalised women's tennis team. In a move initiated by the former women's tennis team captain, Seeulee Upadhyaya, selections for the women's tennis team were held in January, 2017, and four of the best female tennis players were selected to represent MIT.

The newly minted team had to undergo a crash course in practising and bonding over a short span of two weeks. Matches were played against the men's tennis team in this timeframe as well. The team took part in their first tournament, the Inter-MAHE Cup, as a well-oiled unit, steamrolling supposedly stronger teams on their way to the final. The team may have lost to KMC in the final, but their success certainly caught the eye of the administration.

"Ants were a constant problem at Sharada. We have also asked for the courts to be opened early in the mornings on Sundays, but even this has not been implemented yet."

– Mili Singh, a member of the women's tennis team

A lost game, but a victory overall



The team captain, Seeulee Upadhyaya (left), and Neha Peri (right)

Courtesy: MIT women's Tennis Team

According to the Neha Peri, a member of the women's tennis team, there were a multitude of positives to take away from their performance in the tournament. Neha and her compatriot, Mili Singh, felt that more gruelling training sessions would help them in achieving better results. At Spree '17, the annual BITS Goa fest, Seeulee Upadhyaya nabbed first place in the women's singles. This win was not only a huge leap for women's tennis at MIT, but a source of inspiration for every woman trying to pursue sports in MIT.

"The recent construction of tennis courts in MIT, right beside the 9th block, has saved us the trouble of traveling to Sharada Courts beside KMC. Even then, we think the administration could still do more. We have written many letters, asking for improvement in lighting on the MIT courts, but all our requests have fallen on deaf ears."

– Neha Peri, member of the women's tennis team

If you are woken by the floodlights overlooking the tennis court early in the morning, look out of the window. You are sure to find the women's tennis team pounding the pavement, well before the day begins.