

Life lessons through FOOTBALL

To some people football is a matter of life and death, I can assure you it's more serious than that.

Bill Shankly • FORMER LIVERPOOL MANAGER

Peter Nazareth | TNN

Ahmedabad: While the above quote is normally used to show obsession with the sport, it also throws light on the power the game has to fire up passion in people.

Saamarthya Foundation, an organisation in the city are using the power of football to make a difference in the lives of under-privileged children.

They have taken up a group of 25 children from the Gulbai Tekra slum and are coaching them in football to develop their talent, as well as to give them a way to introduce discipline and focus in the lives of the slum children.

"The kids from Gulbai Tekra have always liked football they would come to the St Xavier's College field and play barefoot — but then they would go back and indulge in harmful behavior. There is a lot of talent in them and we saw football training could introduce discipline and use their pent-up energy to keep them away from harmful things like



The Gulbai Tekra footballers (in red Ts) with some of their friends and (below) one of their coaches Jamshed Chinoy

vices and occasional petty crime," says Jamshed Chinoy, 40, of Samarthya foundation.

They also run the Sharpshooters Academy at the St Xavier's College ground and introduced the 'Soccer Buddy Programme,' where more well-off kids could support a player from Gulbai Tekra, by providing a basic football kit for a small amount. The kit would get them jerseys, shorts, stockings and shinpads and they would train alongside his other students.

The initiative now has a core group of 25 players from the slum, 10 of whom are soccer

buddies. Chinoy also arranged for the use of a vacant municipal plot and footballs for the Gulbai Tekra children to practice.

Although resources are short the initiative is doing well. "We were inspired by Manisha Shah of Kahaani who gave us the idea to develop the talent from the slum. Fidence Lawrence, the property manager of St Xavier's College got the football ground back as it was earlier being rented as a cricket ground. The children are also doing well — Its not only because of this, but they are holding jobs and are disciplined about their practice, so it's good to see the results we are getting," he adds.

