The first Persian Football League

Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief society

Summer 2015
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Football League for propagation of peace and friendship
Nowadays the peaceful coexistence based on accepting each other has become an unattainable dream for human beings. We unfortunately witness a lot of religious and ethnical differences around the world which result in cruelty and war. It seems that the arms dealers and war merchants at the time of famine are the ones to take advantage of the conflict between differing beliefs and ethnicities; while the common people are prone to get harmed.

It’s been about sixteen years since Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief Society has started their work to provide comprehensive emotional support to vulnerable children living in the most critical slums of Iran. The slums are subject to deep religious and ethical differences as well as fighting, devastating poverty and wide-spread addiction. The support provides an invaluable means of making peace and encouraging peaceful coexistence amongst the inhabitants.

Having focused on “Football against hatred and war” the Persian football league was founded by 18 teams, for children and young adults, from the deprived districts throughout Iran. Around 400 kids from different Iranian ethnicities and religious backgrounds were gathered and trained together in football teams for 7 days as a way of promoting tolerance and respect despite vastly different backgrounds. As many as four different nationalities, ethnicities and religions were assigned to each team. Despite the diversity within the teams, players successfully cooperated and competed with each other in a peaceful atmosphere; a very different situation from the daily lives of each child within some of the most violent of slums.

This brilliant achievement was the outcome of years of counselling services working to promote sport. Football, considered as a group activity that increases the regular interaction and collaboration among team members, proved to be a great way of reducing tension and conflict despite generations of hate and hostility. Both competitors and spectators alike were treated to a tournament grounded in mutual respect and appreciation of all those involved.

The cooperation and coordination among team members developed gradually during the football matches and also through their common accommodation: camping in Tehran. This friendship depicts an amazing picture of strong companionship among hundreds of children from different beliefs and cultural backgrounds.

The football tournaments proved that it is probable to gather people, from a huge variety of beliefs and backgrounds, in a calm and peaceful manner despite a world that is moving towards war and insecurity.
The Background

**Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief Society**

The activities of this society date back to 1990s. At that time, Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief Society commenced their work by establishing their first office at Sharif University of Technology in Tehran, acting as the first active student society that aimed to reduce the social vulnerability and harm. Having officially registered at Iran’s ministry of Interior, this society was known as a non-governmental organization, which extended its work to all over the country since then. The members inaugurated their first official place in 2005 on Molavi neighborhood located in Southern part of Tehran and called it “Iranian House” to symbolize the significant attempt of Iranian university students for Iran’s developments. After ten years of constant social activity, Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief Society could gain the counselling position in Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations’ organ.

**Iranian Houses founded by Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief Society**

“Iranian House” is the centre for most of the counselling activities where there is a direct contact between the social worker and the client and aimed to take big steps towards improving the status of vulnerable children and women by providing appropriate education and making a strong connection between an issue and its solution. In other words, Iranian house provides psychological and counselling services for an individual and groups; school-education, art-related, cultural and sports classes for kids, Training female-headed households for self-employment, and medical treatments for families.

Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief Society has established thirty-four Iranian houses throughout Iran out of which twelve are located in Tehran.

**The establishment of Persian Football team by Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief Society**

It was in 2006 that Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief Society founded the football team from the deprived families covered by them in Farahzad neighbourhood in Tehran and called it: “Persian Football team”. Persian team started its work in 2006 and took part in Tehran Municipal League’s matches in the same year. This team had regular training in even days at Farahzad football field which led to be considered as one of the outstanding teams in division one football league of North-east district of Tehran. This team could gain the championship of this league and the second place in Ramezan Cup Futsal matches. One of the conditions for playing in teams was the study of the players that resulted in the kids’ study after a long gap.

In this respect, Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief Society could officially register the Persian football team in football association of North-east of Tehran in 2006 and attempted to expand their sports activities to all covered neighbourhoods, which led to inauguration of other football teams with the name of “Persian” in other neighbourhoods and cities in Iran in the past years.
The objectives of establishing football teams in the slums

After actively working on issues in the slums, Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief Society decided to embark on a special program for changing the atmosphere of the insecure and problem-prone districts to a secured place for all kids and residents. Therefore, the society stipulated a comprehensive program for improving these districts in terms of educational, cultural, sports and hygienic issues. These actions would be undertaken in these areas and they could advance the social circumstances by increasing the literacy and cultural level of the kids and their families.

Considering the significance of sports for the youngsters and particularly the slums where kids and youngsters got stuck with addiction, poverty and crimes, the sports teams were founded to motivate the children and give identity to them by the attention received in professional football matches as well as introducing appropriate patterns instead of the devastating ones.

Since having a fair access to sports facilities is regarded as one of the child’s rights, Persian teams are determined to assist the children in vulnerable districts in achieving this goal by providing football training opportunities.

As a result, the coaches of sports teams focus on football training along with stimulating children to play sports, improving the social relations, helping the recovery of the players who left addiction, and teaching sports conducts and group work principles.
The Inauguration of First Persian Football League
After years of active working of Persian teams all over Iran, Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief Society held a football league among the Persian teams of different parts of the country.

This league was held to propagate the message of friendship and peaceful coexistence among people from different religions, ethnicities and nationalities. Throughout this league, Children and young adults from the slums, where there is a lot of religious and ethnical prejudice, compete with each other in a fair and friendly manner over a week.

The other objectives of the league was giving the identity and increasing the self-esteem of kids and young adults by playing in a professional league. In this regard, they become motivated and find the right route for living by being away from the critical issues in their neighbourhood. In addition, the media coverage of this issue and the support from football figures could raise the awareness of people regarding the social issues and child labour in particular. Moreover, the influential role of sports in decreasing the social harm and the role of responsible organizations were highlighted.

Football League Conduct
Persian Football league in two age groups of kids and young adults was held at the same time over a week period of Sep19-25, 2015.

On Tuesday Sep 15th, the draw was made for Persian league teams. Ten teams of kids’ age group and eight teams of young adults took part in this league where teams were divided in to two groups in each age range.
Having made the draw, the teams from the neighbourhoods of other cities moved to Tehran and resided in the dormitory. Teams were practicing in the morning and the matches were held in the afternoon from 6:00pm to 10:30 pm on Fadak football field.

The team matches were made in the first four days and the final matches were done in the following two days. For any matches in kids tournament, two time sets of 12 minutes (24 minutes in total) and for young adults’ range, two time sets of fifteen minutes (thirty minutes in total) were allocated. In addition, 10 minutes break was considered between halftimes.

The inauguration of the league was on Sep 19, 2015 and all teams marched along with the spectators’ encouragement.
Tournaments for Kids
The games for the kids’ age group of Persian Football league was categorised into two groups of “A” and “B”, each consists of five teams.
In group A, Mahmud-abad Kooreh team got the first place. Then, Mashhad team took the second place with better goal difference than Molavi team and reached the semi-final along with Mahmud-abad Kooreh team. Molavi team, Lab-e-khat and Malekabad teams got the next places in this group.
In group B, Zanjan and Farahzad teams went up to the semi-final as the first and second teams. Darvazeheqaar, Amol, and Shahr-e-ray teams reached the next places.

In the semi-final, Mahmud-abad Kooreh team defeated Farahzad team by 1-0. On the other hand, the match between Zanjan and Mashhad ended up with no goals and went to penalty shootout that resulted in the win of Zanjan team with the result of 6-5.
In the third place playoff, Mashahad team reached the third place by winning 1-0. Zanjan team got the same result by beating Mahmud-abad team and got the first place in the first Persian football league.
At the end of the matches, HasanHasani from Persian team of Mahmud-abad Kooreh was selected as the best goal scorer of this tournament.

**Tournaments for young adults**
The football matches for young adults’ range was divided into two groups of “C” and “D”, each consisting of four teams.
In group C, Farahzad and Lab-e-khat teams got the top places in the table. Farahzad team went up as a first team by the better goal difference than Lab-e-khat team. Malekabad and Khaksefid teams reached the following places in the group.
In group D, DarvazehQaar team got the first place. Afterwards, Gorgan team took the second place. Saari and Mahmud-abad Kooreh teams got the next places after those two teams.

The semi-final match of Farahzad and Gorgan teams was finished with equal result of 1-1. Finally, Farahzad team defeated Gorgan by 4-2 in penalty shootout and went up to the final game.
In other semi-final match, darvazehqaar team could win Lab-e-khat team with the result of 6-1 and went to the final round.
In the third place playoff, Lab-e-khat team defeated Gorgan with the result of 2-1 and reached the third place.
In the final match of young adults’ tournament of Persian football league between Darvazeh-qaar and Farahzad teams, Alireza Faqani, the Iranian International referee, blew the whistle.
This match was ended up 3-2 with Darvazehqaar’s winning and this team became the champignon of this tournament. By the end of this game, Championship cup was given to Darvazehqaar team and Javad Ahangar from Darvazehqaar Persian team was selected as the best goal scorer with 6 goals.
The Closing Ceremony

The closing ceremony of Persian football league was held on Sep 25, 2015 by the attendance of all participated teams and their coaches.

In this ceremony, the medals and gifts for the teams from first to third places of kids and young adults tournaments was given. Additionally, the other seven teams in kids’ range and five teams from young adult range were awarded.

The best goal scorer was awarded as well and the teams from Amol, Saari and Malekabad gained the awards and behaviour cup.
The support of football players

The Media Coverage

The news about Persian football league was not only published in Sharq, Etemad and Shaparak newspaper, but also released in different websites and news agencies such as Sports 3. The website of 90 TV program, ISNA, Mehr, Online news, the photography agency of Hamshahri newspaper, Aka Iran, Aftab, Qatreh and etc.