



Inaugural KCFL sets new benchmark for Football in Kashmir

Draws unprecedented crowds, lays foundation for a new era in Valley football

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS
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The successful conclusion of the inaugural Kashmir Champions Football League (KCFL) 2026 has marked a historic milestone in the sporting landscape of Jammu & Kashmir, with the tournament emerging as one of the largest and most professionally organised football competitions ever held in the Kashmir Valley.

Organised by the Jammu & Kashmir Sports Council, the league brought together footballers representing districts from across Kashmir, providing a first-of-its-kind competitive platform where local talent from every corner of the Valley competed under a structured league and playoff format. The tournament showcased the immense footballing potential of the region while creating opportunities for emerging players to perform on a grand stage.

Over the course of the competition, the league witnessed exceptional football, fierce rivalries and remarkable sportsmanship, with teams displaying high standards of skill and determination. The floodlit matches added a new dimension to the tournament, giving players the opportunity to perform in a professional atmosphere while offering spectators an unforgettable



footballing experience.

The tournament drew impressive crowds throughout its run, the knockout stage, in particular, witnessed an extraordinary surge in attendance, with occasional prominent sports personalities making their presence, along with thousands of football lovers making their way to the TRC Synthetic Turf Football Ground every evening to cheer for their district teams and favourite local football stars under the floodlights.

The grand finale on Sunday stood as a fitting culmination to the tournament's success, with the TRC venue witnessing a jam-packed stadium as supporters from across the Kashmir Valley travelled to Srinagar to witness the historic title clash.

The Jammu & Kashmir Sports Council expresses

satisfaction over the successful conduct of the league, and that the tournament has established a strong foundation for the future of competitive football in the Union Territory. The KCFL has not only provided a platform for talented footballers to showcase their abilities but has also strengthened grassroots football by fostering healthy competition among players representing different districts.

The Council also acknowledges the collective efforts of players, coaches, match officials, organising committees, volunteers, security personnel, medical teams, media organisations and football fans whose contributions ensured the tournament's smooth and successful conduct.

The inaugural edition of

the Kashmir Champions Football League has demonstrated that football continues to enjoy immense popularity in Kashmir. The tournament has set a new benchmark for football competitions in the UT and reinforced the Jammu & Kashmir Sports Council's commitment to nurturing local talent, promoting grassroots development and creating more opportunities for young footballers to excel.

With the resounding success of its maiden edition, the Jammu & Kashmir Sports Council looks forward to making the Kashmir Champions Football League an annual sporting spectacle, further strengthening Jammu & Kashmir's reputation as one of India's strongest footballing regions.

J&K Sports Council clarifies Sports Quota Recruitment Rules

Refutes misleading claims made through various Media Platforms

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The Jammu and Kashmir Sports Council has taken serious note of certain reports, allegations and misleading narratives circulated through various media platforms and social media regarding the recruitment of Outstanding Sportspersons under the Sports Quota, particularly in relation to the implementation of S.O. 12 of 2022 and the recognition of Pencak Silat & Kyaking & Canoeing (Dragon Boat) as an eligible sports discipline.

Since these reports have created confusion among sportspersons and the general public, the Sports Council considered it necessary to place the correct factual and legal position on record in the interest of transparency and public awareness.

The Sports Council clarified that the appointment of Outstanding Sportspersons in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is governed entirely by statutory Rules and Government Orders framed from time to time by the Government after detailed examination, inter-departmental consultation, legal scrutiny and approval of the Competent Authority. The policy has evolved over the years through various statutory notifications beginning with SRO-349 of 1998, subsequently amended through SRO-376 of 2004, followed by S.O. 149 of 2021 and thereafter comprehensively revised and consolidated through S.O. 12 of 2022, which was further supplemented by S.O. 412 of 2023.

These Government Orders collectively provide a transparent legal framework governing the appointment of Outstanding Sportspersons in Government service. They prescribe the recognized sports disciplines, eligibility conditions, assessment criteria, evaluation of sports achievements and the institutional mechanism for selection. Every provision contained in these Rules has been notified by the Government after due administrative and legal process and is binding upon all authorities concerned.

It is therefore incorrect to suggest that appointments under the Sports Quota are made on the basis of individual discretion or by the Jammu and Kashmir Sports Council independently. The Sports Council functions strictly as an implementing agency of Government policy and is required to discharge its responsibilities strictly in accordance with the Rules notified by the Government.

The process of recruitment is institutional in nature and is carried out through a duly constituted High-Powered Selection Committee headed by the Chief Secretary, Jammu and Kashmir, with senior officers of various Government Departments Such as Administrative Home, Administrative Secretary, Law, as its members. Every application received under the Sports Quota is subjected to scrutiny of eligibil-

ity, verification of sports achievements and examination under the prescribed rules before being placed before the competent Selection Committee. Decisions are taken collectively in accordance with the statutory provisions, leaving no scope for arbitrary or individual decision-making.

The Sports Council also clarified the position regarding Pencak Silat, as certain misleading statements have been circulated questioning its recognition as a sports discipline.

These claims are factually incorrect and contrary to official Government records. The Government of India, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, vide Order No. F. No. 9-32/2015-SP-I dated 03 November 2017, granted recognition to the Indian Pencak Silat Federation following the inclusion of the discipline in the 18th Asian Games held at Jakarta, Indonesia. Since then, Pencak Silat continues to enjoy national and international recognition and is governed globally by PERSILAT, the International Federation for the sport. It is played competitively across numerous countries and forms part of prestigious international sporting events, including the Asian Games, Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games, Southeast Asian Games, Asian Youth Games, and World Championships, under the auspices of the Olympic Council of Asia, the continental Olympic body recognized by the International Olympic Committee. The sport is also featured in international university sporting competitions, including the ASEAN University Games.

At the national level, Pencak Silat is recognized by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, through the recognition granted to the Indian Pencak Silat Federation as the National Sports Federation. It is included in major sporting competitions such as the National Games, Khelo India competitions, and the All India Inter-University Championships, with athletes also benefiting from various Khelo India programmes in accordance with the applicable scheme guidelines. Pencak silat is also featured in All India Police Games. Furthermore, the Government of India has notified Pencak Silat as one of the sports disciplines eligible for recruitment of Meritorious Sportspersons in Central Government Ministries and Departments under the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) policy, thereby affirming its official recognition for public employment.

In the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, following the inclusion of the mentioned recognized sports disciplines in MYAS Central Govt DOPT, five new games which were already recognized by J&K Sports Council / Govt of India viz baseball, netball, pencak silat, triathlon and Ice hockey were incorporated in the Job SRO 349 of 1998 read with SRO 376 of 2004 for consideration of appointment of outstanding sports persons by virtue of SO-149 of 2021 which is

to be read with SRO-376 of 2004 and 3rd proviso of SRO 376 of 2004 states that achievements five year prior to advertisement shall be considered. Subsequently these games were also incorporated in the SO-12 of 2022 read with SO-412 of 2023 at serial no. 40,41,42,43,44 of ANNEXURE-I of SO-12. Further, Indian Pencak Silat Federation was recognized at Ministry of Youth Affairs and sports Govt of India in 2017 and stands registered in J&K Sports Council from 2018 onwards till date.

That rule 7(i) of SO-12 also states that achievements in five year consideration zone shall be calculated. Consequently, Pencak Silat and Netball enjoys the same legal status as every other recognized sports discipline under the applicable Rules.

With regard to the consideration of sports achievements in Pencak Silat, it is further clarified that the matter had already been examined by the competent authorities. The issue was referred by the Scrutiny Committee to the Department of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs for legal opinion. Based upon the legal advice received and the decision of the competent Selection Committee, the applicable position under the Rules was clarified, thereby ensuring uniformity and consistency in the consideration of eligible candidates. The matter, therefore, already stands settled through the prescribed legal and administrative mechanism established by the Government.

Pencak Silat is also included in Chief Commissioner of CGST, Central Excise & Customs advertisement for recruitment of sports persons 2025. Pencak silat is at s.no. 38.

Pencak Silat is also included in principal Chief Commissioner of Income Tax ODISA advertisement for recruitment of sports persons dated 05/06/2026. Pencak silat is at s.no. 38. Besides, it is also included in Assam Rifles Meritorious Sports persons Recruitment 2026. Advertisement dated 18/12/2025. Pencak silat Athletes are also recruited in Haryana Government services

With regard to Kyaking & Canoeing, it is submitted that several sports disciplines consist of multiple recognized events have been conducted at National and International levels. For instance, in Athletics, Gymnastics, Fencing, Shooting, Wushu, roller-skating and Kayaking & Canoeing etc, various events are organized under the respective National and International Federations duly recognized by the Indian Olympic Association, Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports (Government of India), International Olympic Committee, and Olympic Council of Asia. As per the communication from SAI vide letter dated 15th January 2019 and Communication from IOA Indian Olympic Association vide letter dated 31st march 2017, Govt of India communication dated 25th April 2012 & IKCA letter dated 20th march 2012. ICF letter dated 12 Septem-

ber 2023. These letters clarify that Dragon boat event is a part of Canoeing and in Kayaking & Canoeing recognized events include Canoe Water (Canoe Sprint, Canoe Polo, Dragon Boat, Marathon), White Water (Slalom, Wild Water, Freestyle), and Salt Water (Canoe Sailing, Ocean Racing/Surfing), conducted under the aegis of the Indian Kayaking & Canoeing Association and the International Canoe Federation.

Likewise, in Gymnastics, sub-disciplines such as Artistic, Rhythmic, Trampoline, Tumbling, DMT, Acrobatic, Aerobics, and Parkour are conducted under the Gymnastics Federation of India and the International Gymnastics Federation.

In Fencing events such as Foil, Sabre, and Epee (Individual and Team) are conducted under the Fencing Association of India and the International Fencing Federation.

The Sports Council is deeply concerned that selective interpretation of Government notifications and circulation of inaccurate information have the potential to mislead the public and create unnecessary doubts regarding a transparent recruitment process that is entirely governed by statutory provisions. Such misinformation not only undermines confidence in public institutions but also affects the morale of genuine sportspersons who have devoted years of hard work, discipline and dedication to excel in their respective sports.

The Jammu and Kashmir Sports Council reiterates that it remains fully committed to implementing Government policies in their true letter and spirit. Every decision taken by the Council is guided by the statutory Rules, Government Orders and the decisions of the competent authorities. The Council has consistently worked towards strengthening the sports ecosystem in the Union Territory by expanding sports infrastructure, encouraging grassroots participation, supporting athletes across all recognized disciplines and ensuring that opportunities are provided in a fair, transparent and merit-based manner.

The Sports Council appeals to all media organizations, stakeholders and members of the public to rely upon authentic Government notifications, official records and verified information while reporting or commenting on matters relating to sports administration.

Constructive public discussion based on facts contributes to transparency and strengthens democratic institutions, whereas misinformation and speculative narratives serve only to create unnecessary confusion and undermine the credibility of established institutional processes.

The Jammu and Kashmir Sports Council remains steadfast in its commitment to the promotion of sports, the welfare of athletes and the faithful implementation of the policies and decisions of the Government of Jammu and Kashmir in accordance with law.

FIFA World Cup 2026

Spain's Unai Simon's record clean-sheet run under spotlight ahead of Portugal clash

TEXAS [US], JULY 6: FIFA has spotlighted Spain goalkeeper Unai Simon's remarkable defensive record ahead of the country's blockbuster FIFA World Cup 2026 Round of 16 clash against Portugal.

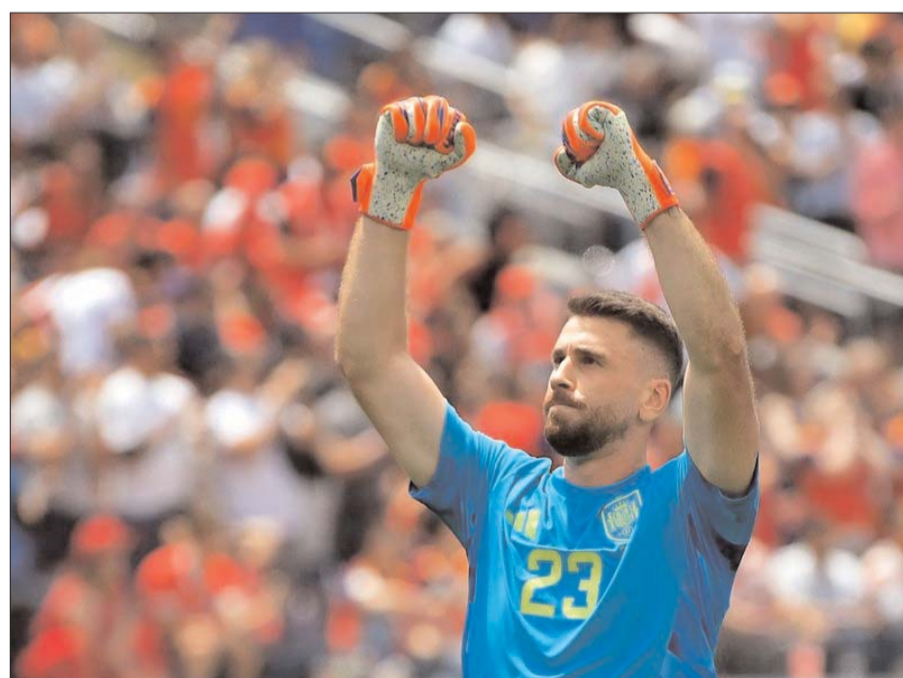
In a post on X ahead of the high-stakes knockout encounter, FIFA noted that Simon has set a new tournament record by going 519 consecutive minutes without conceding a goal.

"A tournament record for Unai Simon," FIFA World Cup posted on X, alongside a graphic showing the Spain goalkeeper's tally of 519 minutes played and zero goals conceded.

Simon has been one of Spain's standout performers during the ongoing tournament, anchoring a defence that has yet to be breached as the 2010 world champions advanced to the Round of 16.

Meanwhile, legendary footballer and Portugal skipper Cristiano Ronaldo has confirmed that the FIFA World Cup 2026 will be the final World Cup of his illustrious career, saying he wants to enjoy every moment of the tournament.

Addressing the media



ahead of Monday's knockout fixture, the 41-year-old ended speculation surrounding his World Cup future while expressing hope that Portugal's campaign would continue beyond the last 16. "I want to enjoy it as much as possible, because it will be my last World Cup, yes. But I hope that tomorrow won't be my last game in the World Cup," Ronaldo said, as per OneFootball.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner, who has started all

four of Portugal's matches at the tournament and scored three goals, also dismissed repeated questions about retirement, insisting his focus remains solely on helping the national team.

"I'm always committed, body and soul, to helping the National Team. Whether I'm playing or not, I'll always have an important role," he continued.

"I'll finish [retire] when I want to, not when you want me to. It's a waste of time to

keep asking that question. But I don't want to draw attention to that. The most important thing is tomorrow," he added.

The Iberian rivals last met at the World Cup in 2018, when Ronaldo scored a memorable hat-trick in a thrilling 3-3 draw. Portugal will now hope their captain can produce another decisive performance and extend his farewell World Cup journey by at least one more match.

India announce squad for T20I series against Zimbabwe; Samson out, Prabhsimran receives maiden call-up

MUMBAI, JULY 6: The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced the 15-member squad for the three-match T20I series against Zimbabwe, to be played from July 23. Ashok Sharma, Prabhsimran Singh and Yash Thakur have earned their maiden India call-ups, while Sanju Samson has been omitted from the squad.

India will play the 1st T20I on July 23, the 2nd on July 25, and the 3rd on

July 26, all scheduled to be played in Harare. While Iyer will captain the side, Sooryavanshi keeps his spot after playing his first game for India during the ongoing India vs England five-match T20I series. Tilak Varma, on the other hand, will be Iyer's deputy.

The squad also features the likes of Rinku Singh, Harsh Dubey, Shuvam Dube, and Mayank Yadav, among others. The three-match T20I series against

Zimbabwe will be preceded by a three-match ODI series against England, which will follow the ongoing five-match T20I series.

Shreyas Iyer (Captain), Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma (Vice-Captain), Ishan Kishan (WK), Shivam Dube, Suryansh Shedge, Rinku Singh, Harsh Dubey, Varun Chakaravathy, Prince Yadav, Yash Thakur, Ashok Sharma, Mayank Yadav, Prabhsimran Singh (WK).