

Goa University's CROWNING GLORY

Three years after the only varsity in the state started to function independently, football helped occupy a pride of place



ROY BARRETO
Shree Damodar College



JUDE FERNANDES
Bandeckar College



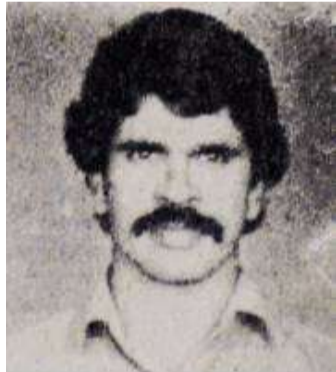
CUSTODIO RODRIGUES
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There was an undeniable power and more than a hint of swagger when Goa University took the field for the All India Inter-University Football Championship in 1988. At the Rajendra Prasad Stadium in Margao, the hosts personified both those characteristics in their opening game as Patna University were crushed 4-0 with star striker Roy Barreto in fine form.

If there were any doubts about their ability to go all the way, it was only in the West Zone Championship, a qualifier for the main event. Jabalpur University had proved to be a hard nut to crack in the opener as the teams shared the spoils in a 1-1 draw. Jiwaji University, too, were difficult opponents as Goa scraped through for a solitary goal win. But once the hosts got the better of Bombay University 2-0 and qualified, there was no looking back.

This was only the third time that Goa University had fielded an independent team. All along, Goan students had been part of the Bombay University, and even after being delinked in 1985, confidence seemed to be in short supply.

"We didn't do well previously, and I remember the previous year we failed to move past the west zone. There were doubts, honestly," said captain and goalkeeper

Oswald D'Costa. The 1988 edition was different though. Played in Goa for the first time, there was all-too-obvious pressure on the hosts to go all the way. The preparations, chalked out by coach MM Muttawali

Salgaocar Sports Club officials were knocking on their doors with professional contracts.

"This was not just about individual performances. We were a very strong unit and rarely looked troubled," said

excellent facilities," said the captain.

On the field, the competition remained fierce. After a comfortable opening day win over Patna (4-0), Guru Nanak University (1-0) and Mahatma Gandhi University (1-0) stretched Goa to the limit. The semifinal was another tough battle against Burdwan University. Goa eventually won 3-0 but had it not been for a Burdwan player who was sent off for a nasty foul - when the teams were tied - the match could have gone either way.

Goa were overwhelming favourites in the final, even though they were up against Punjab University, with Nigerian Bernard Operanozie in their ranks. Goa had a foreign player of their own - Belmiro Andre from Angola, a first-year student of Chowgule College in Margao - but it was captain Oswald who became the hero cynosure of all eyes after stopping two penalties in the tiebreaker. Custodio, Belmiro, Luis and Judas all converted their attempts in the tiebreaker after the teams were locked goalless in regulation time.

No sooner Oswald stopped Amolak Singh's penalty for a 4-2 triumph, the crowd ran on to the Bandodkar ground at Campal, celebrating the Goa University's first national triumph. Even 30 years later, the celebrations continue as the team gets together next week for a reunion. Surely, they'll make it memorable, just like their triumph in 1988.



WINNERS TAKE IT ALL: Goa University players cannot hide their joy as they receive the winners' trophy at the hands of the then chief minister, Pratapsingh Rane

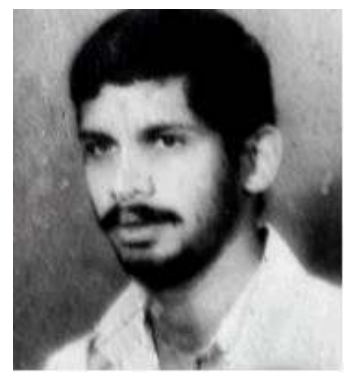
and manager Sudhakar Naik, were thorough, camping together for long spells at Sanguem and Cortalim.

"The days together made us stronger. We were like a family, and it helped that we had a squad teeming with quality players. Once we went through the (zonal) qualifiers, we never looked back," said Jude Fernandes.

Jude and Roy Barreto were the leading stars in the squad. Already donning colours for Vasco Sports Club, Jude gave a good account of himself all through, while Roy, then with Salcete FC, grabbed wide attention with his ability to pluck goals from nowhere. By the end of the tournament,

Lino Pereira, another player who shone through just like Custodio Rodrigues, Nazareth Coutinho, Judas Fernandes, Camilo Britto, Luis Gomes and Edwin Braganza, to name a few. Goalkeeper Oswald led by example, conceding just one goal in the entire tournament, which included three matches in the qualifiers. That momentary lapse in concentration haunts him even 30 years later.

"The support that we had was unbelievable. I remember Brahmanand Shankhwalkar prepping us all along. He was always there to boost us. Then, the sports director Susan de Sousa left nothing to chance and provided us with



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M M MUTTAWALI
Coach

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