

'4 foreigners ideal for Indian football'

India Captain Sunil Chhetri Is Hopeful That 20-Team Single League Will Be A Reality Soon

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Kolkata: India captain Sunil Chhetri is of the opinion that four-foreigner rule is ideal for Indian football and, eventually, all I-League or and Indian Super League teams should field four foreigners. While ISL is all set cut the number of on-field foreigners from six to five, some I-League clubs are in favour of increasing the number as the two leagues are likely to be played simultaneously.

"Eventually I want to see four foreigners, it does not matter which league you are talking about. This year it is going to be five foreigners in ISL. We gave our input, we wanted four. But, there is a way to bring it down. Next year it is going to be four, that is what we have been promised. The simple rule should be since the AFC says four foreigners, we should be follo-

wing that," said Chhetri on the sidelines of the investiture ceremony of The Newtown School where he was the chief guest on Saturday.

"We try to win the league or Federation Cup to play in AFC tournaments. So, it is best to play with their rules. That is my personal feeling."

With Bengaluru FC joining the ISL, Chhetri said he will miss playing against the likes of Mohun Bagan and East Bengal. "I loved our games against Mohun Bagan. Due respect to East Bengal, but over last three seasons the rivalry between Mohun Bagan and Bengaluru FC was quite intense. Even as a neutral, I would have loved to watch BFC playing against Bagan matches. I hope we meet again soon," he added.

Chhetri would prefer a 20-team single league but doesn't feel simultaneous operation of two leagues is blow



Sunil Chhetri with the students of The Newtown School on Saturday

to I-League.

"Everybody would prefer one league. The best thing is to have 20-team first division, second division and, if pos-

sible, third and fourth divisions. I know everyone wants to move towards that. The dynamics are something we can't comment upon," said

the 32-year old.

"But, I don't think this is blow to I-League. I hope both leagues work properly. Good part is with 20 teams playing at same time, there will be more opportunity for Indian players."

India's all-time top scorer said he chose to stay with Bengaluru FC for the emotional reasons.

"I had a great time with Mumbai City. But, I have been with Bengaluru FC from the beginning and have developed an emotional attachment. I am excited about the new season. Before the ISL, there is the AFC Cup and we are looking to do well in that tournament too."

Bengaluru FC play the first leg of AFC Cup inter-zone play-off semifinals against North Korean side 4.25 SC at home on August 23 before the away game on September 13.

Last two years have been excellent for national team and India are now No. 96 in FIFA rankings.

The team's priority is Asian Cup qualification. They have won first two matches against Myanmar and Kyrgyz Republic and have their next assignment against Macau on September 5.

"I don't take the rankings too seriously. If after three years, we are still within 100 that would be big achievement. For me, it is important that we win games and tournaments. We are now more in sync with what the coach (Stephen Constantine) wants and he knows the players better. Things are clicking slowly," he said, adding, "But, we have a long way to go. It is beginning of the toughest part. People are thinking that as we have beaten Kyrgyz Republic, Macau would be easy. It is never like that."

Pradip Datta