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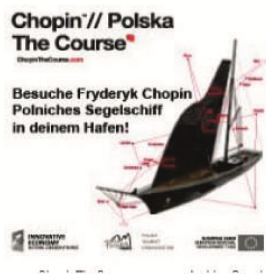
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These Mumbai girls will play in South Africa

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By Deepak Narayanan | Place: Mumbai | Agency: DNA



Mumbai: A few hundred yards off a shipping dock that's teeming with sewage, past a row of slums that dot the permanently potholed road outside Reay Road station, lies the Mumbai Port Trust (MbPT) sports ground. In the middle of this lush, green patch of grass, a group of girls is kicking a football around.

Less than a month from now, a few of them will be in far more glamorous settings. Sheetal Chetrampal, Savita Chawan, Gulafsha Ansari and Nagma

Sheikh are part of a team that will travel to South Africa for the 2010 FIFA World Cup — not a team of sponsors or a team of fans who have won a lucky draw, but a team that will play competitive football.

The final week of the World Cup will feature the 'Football for Hope Festival' in Alexandra, Johannesburg, where a team of poor children from India will take part in a five-a-side tournament, also involving 32 teams.

The girls, obviously, are excited. "Especially after watching the first two matches, I feel like going as soon as possible," says Sheetal, as Savita interrupts to provide evidence that they did, indeed, watch the games: "Both were draws."

The 32 participating teams, made up of boys and girls aged between 15 and 18, will represent non-profit organisations from across the world that use football for social change.

Nagma, Sheetal, Savita and Gulafsha are part of a team being picked by Mumbai-based NGO Magic Bus from their 'Sports for Development' programmes spread across slums in Dharavi, MbPT and Colaba.

For these kids, the significance of this journey to Johannesburg is far more than the 3,759 nautical miles that lie between the city and Mumbai.

"We never thought we'd travel so far," Nagma, who has been part of the Magic Bus programme in MbPT for the past seven years, says. "At the most, I thought our team will play in different parts of the country." The team is scheduled to depart on June 27.

All the organisations involved in the week-long conference-cum-tournament are part of the Football for Hope movement initiated by FIFA, football's world governing body, and Street Football World.

This year's festival — which will run from July 4 through 10 — builds on the success of the first Street Football World Championships that were held in Berlin during the 2006 World Cup.

In that event, which involved 24 teams, the Mathare Youth Sports Association side from Kenya were crowned champions.



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TEAM PROFILE

Greece
At USA 1994, the Greeks were eliminated in the first round, losing all three games, scoring no goals, and letting in 10.
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