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Coach from India Participates in NCAA Women Coaches Academy

Anjana Turambekar grew up in a small village in India where few girls played soccer and her parents didn't want a daughter who did.

Getting from that environment to her current position of the All India Football Federation's grassroots manager for the entire country meant forfeiting her family's support and fighting through social taboos that few women in American sports today have ever encountered.

Her story and her ability to share it are why the Alliance of Women Coaches was so pleased that Anju, as she likes to be called, was invited by the U.S. State Department to participate in the NCAA Women Coaches Academy Dec. 7-10 in Denver. Meeting with so many American women at all levels of sports administration is why Anju was happy to be here.

"My biggest joy at the Academy is Anju's impact on American coaches," said Marlene Bjornsrud, the Alliance's executive director. "Her level of gratitude, her coming from nothing. It shows everyone here that the community of women coaches is really a global community."

"We all face common struggles," said Amy Wilson, the NCAA's director of inclusion, which focuses on international issues in a portfolio of concerns including women, LGBTQ, minorities and students with disabilities because foreign students are athletes at U.S. colleges and universities, which also hire foreign coaches.

"Women in coaching, internationally, face the same issues we do here," Wilson continued, giving the declining number of women in administrative and coaching positions as an example. "Bringing diversity to academia is important. We don't have the same kinds of boundaries we used to have. We're really in an era where we can work together."

As a player Anju participated in India's U-17, U-19 and Senior Women's national championships, played for Pune University in the All India Inter University Football Tournament and represented her home state of Maharashtra at the high school national championships.



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Kelli Davis, who manages the Sports Visitors Program through the State Department's Office of Sports United in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, picked Anju from the alumni of previous sports exchanges with whom she stays in contact.

"Her compassion and her love for inclusion in empowering young women and girls through sport is why Anju was invited," Davis said.

Since being named to her current position two years ago, the 28-year-old woman whose own family and village tried to discourage her love of sports and soccer has developed and implemented a grassroots development plan for 11 Indian states, organized 87 soccer festivals for more than 8,000 kids and conducted workshops to train more than 650 coaches.

"I feel proud to say that whatever I am today is because of sports," Anju said. "I came out of the house; I came out of the village because of sports. Sports empowered me to study life. Sports kept me going to achieve something in life. Once it was hard for me to speak to one or two people and now I am comfortable speaking to 50 or 100 people at a time all because of sports."

Soccer has taken her to Britain and Holland for advanced coaching training and to the United States on a previous visit, sponsored by the State Department, when she was a guest at the NCAA Women's College Cup in San Diego.

"There are no boundaries to the community of women coaches," Bjornsrud said. "We all, regardless where we are located, are stronger together than we are as individuals. Every woman has something to offer and every woman has something to receive."

Anju said the Academy was another chapter in a "wonderful, wonderful life."

"In the States you have great sporting culture that I enjoy," she said. "It's really good. In the States I think there are so many opportunities to grow. Going back to India, where they really lack in education and sports opportunities, I hope to show how one can grow in modern world. When you have that culture of opportunities, when have that confidence from sports, you get chances to learn and explore."

For more information on the Alliance of Women Coaches and the NCAA Women Coaches Academy, visit www.gocoaches.org.

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