Coca-Cola’s Under-16 football talent, Uttam Rai, selected to train at prestigious Colorado Rush Football Academy in USA

Uttam Rai, one of India’s promising young football talents, has been selected for training with the prestigious United States Soccer Development Academy, Colorado Rush. Uttam’s talent was first spotted while he played for Delhi in the Coca-Cola Mir Iqbal Hussain Trophy. He later went on to represent the Indian Under-14 national team. Coca-Cola India is now facilitating his training stint at the Academy, collaborating with Libero Sports. This placement will offer him an opportunity to train with some of the top youth players and coaches in the country and compete in the United States premier youth development league.

Coca-Cola India celebrated Uttam’s selection to the Academy by organizing a sendoff for the footballer at its headquarters in Gurgaon. Present at the sendoff event were **Mr. Atul Singh, President & CEO, Coca-Cola India and South West Asia, Mr. Tim Schulz, CEO, Rush Soccer and Mr. Sukhvinder Singh, Managing Director, Libero Sports.**

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Speaking at the event **Mr. Atul Singh** said, “At Coca-Cola India, it has been our endeavor to promote grassroots level sports by associating with tournaments at the school level. It is a proud moment for us that our very own talent from the Coca-Cola Mir Iqbal Hussain Under-16 tournament - Uttam Rai –will now be training at the Colorado Rush Soccer Development Academy. This recognition for talent at the grassroots level is very encouraging as India prepares to take the leap to the next level with the sport. We hope that there will be more recognition and many more opportunities from international clubs and associations for the talent in this country. We are certain that with his immense talent and potential and passion for the game, Uttam will earn recognition on the international stage.”

Hailed as the next Baichung Bhutia of Indian football, 16-year old Uttam Rai has a list of accomplishments to his name. Uttam was first spotted as a young 13 year-old at the Coca-Cola sponsored 32nd Mir Iqbal Hussain Trophy (MIHT) in the year2009 which was a significant stepping stone in his career. CC MIHT enabled Uttam to cement his position in the U-14 national team. Arguably the best youth prospect of India, he has set a dazzling record with his prodigious footballing skills and has been as regular with the national squad ever since he was selected for the India U-14 team in 2010.

Mr. Tim Schulz, President &CEO, Rush Soccer, said, "We are looking forward to Uttam Rai's visit to the United States. India is an emerging country in the world of football and we are honored to be a part of her growth. The partnership with Libero Sports and Rush has been in place for some time but to hear that Coca-Cola will be involved is huge. Coca-Cola is a big player and they can get things done."

While Uttam's stint at the Academy lasting 6 months would be extremely technical in nature, a broad overview of his trip would include:

- Integration of Uttam in the Rush Academy set-up and acclimatization
- Familiarize him with the culture and customs at the Academy, its players and technical staff

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- Expose him to professional scouts with the possibility of playing professional football

According to **Sukhvinder Singh, Managing Director, Libero Sports**, “It is heartening to see Coca-Cola India continuing its support to young footballers from across the country. We are also pleased for Uttam who will now be able to train with international coaches and many other talented footballers at the Academy. This is a great example of the results that could be achieved by sustained and synchronized efforts of key stakeholders working towards a common objective.”

The Coca-Cola Mir Iqbal Hussain Trophy has acted as a robust platform for young football talent of the country to come forth and showcase their best. With participation from over 2500 schools, across 75 cities in 27 states, the tournament has proved to be a raging success with youngsters across the country.

About Coca-Cola India

Coca-Cola in India refreshes millions of consumers throughout the country with an exciting range of beverages including Coca-Cola, Diet Coke, Thums Up, Fanta, Limca, Sprite, Maaza, Maaza Milky Delite, Minute Maid Pulpy Orange, Minute Maid Nimbu Fresh, Minute Maid Mixed Fruit, Minute Maid 100 % juice (Minute Maid Apple, Minute Maid Orange, Minute Maid Grape), Georgia, Georgia Gold, Kinley, Kinley Club Soda, Burn and Nestea through a network of more than one and a half million outlets. The Coca-Cola India system has invested more than US$ 2 billion in its Indian operations and provides direct employment to more than 25,000 people. For more information and details on the company's Indian operations please visit: www.coca-colaindia.com.

About Libero Sports

Libero Sports is a Chicago based full service professional athlete representation and corporate consulting company operating with offices in multiple regions throughout the world. By working with athletes and football clubs to place professional footballers “on the field,” and also working with businesses looking to launch marketing campaigns or other initiatives in the football industry “off the field,” Libero provides a unique view point to all its clients.

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Libero Sports India (LSI) is a subsidiary of Libero Sports Asia and is based out of Gurgaon. LSI provides an in country base for Libero operations in the country and manages projects around sponsorship packaging, consulting and player representation for footballers in India. LSI is unique in that it is the first and only strategic football consultancy in the country.

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