

A blistering run from Rooney sees him unmarked, as he streaks past a sliding Gerrard and unleashes a powerful shot only to be smartly punched out by a diving Cech.

Before you think of an English Premier League derby, this was the scene at the Bangalore Football Stadium on Sunday where hundreds of Rooneys, Terrys and Gerrards ran, dribbled, slid, kicked and tackled as best as they could, hoping to live their dream of playing for their country at Arsenal.

Into its second edition, *Tata Tea Jaago Re Soccer Stars* is searching for two best school football teams, which will then compete in the national finals with 18 other finalists from other parts of the country. Apart from this, 30 kids will be selected for a special one-month training camp under Arsenal coaches in Kolkata.

From this lot, the best 16 will be chosen and taken to United Kingdom to represent India at the Arsenal International Soccer Festival. An intermittent drizzle did not deter the morale of the avid youngsters as about 60 schools sent their best football talent for the event.

In one corner, an anxious coach could be seen giving a pep talk to his team while in another, a huddle of boisterous kids were working out, concentration evident on their scrunched faces.

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"We've been training hard for the last one month. A chance to play for India in London really means a lot for us," said captain Shiv as teammates Dave, Manfred, Paomin and Rahil egged him on confidently.

The central part of the ground was split into two miniature football-like courts where teams of seven players each battled for top honours for 15 minutes.

"We begin with the league format and the winners will play in the knock-out round the next day," said Ranveer Singh, the event organiser. Last year's event had three Bengaluru kids — Kiran Kumar, R. Deepak from Angels High School and Avijit Dey from A.S.C. High School — in the final 16, with Kiran leading the team to England.

It was the first time that an Indian team was taking part and the young lads made it historical too. They battled their way past many footballing nations such as USA, Greece,

South Africa and England to win the prestigious Plate Cup. With a larger turnout this year, Iranian football coach Jamshed Nassiri is busy scouting for the hidden, untapped talent in the country.

"Bengaluru has shown a better quality of football talent and last year we got three impressive players from here. We have selected three from Calicut and this year too, there have been some credible players here that may make it through for the camp," he said.

Nassiri explained that last time several kids were overlooked by the Arsenal coaches due to their lack of height and physique. "Keeping that in mind, talented footballers with a good build and physique have the advantage," he said.

Further, having attributes such as game mentality, sense of positioning, technique and communication will also be considered, Nassiri added. With a better turnout of fresh talent this year, the Bengaluru boys can hopefully carry on the tradition of striking it big for the nation.