



COVID-19 Pandemic: Indian football behind closed door

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to analyze the match outcome of Indian professional football clubs before and during the COVID-19 pandemic with and without spectators. Professional football clubs of India were selected as the subjects for the purpose of the study. The year-wise performance analysis was taken into consideration seasons 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 & 2021-22. To analyze the performance aspects in matches played at home and away, the given variables were selected; the number of matches won, number of matches lost, number of points won, number of goals scored, number of goals conceded, number of matches played draw, and average ball possession. Data was collected through various available online repositories such as the official website of the Indian Super League, I-League, All India Football Federation, websites of various professional football clubs of India, Print media, online media, newspapers, and Video recordings. Results indicated that when the matches were played behind the closed door by teams during the COVID-19 pandemic their performance declined compared to the seasons when the matches were played in front of the fans of the clubs.

Keywords: Covid-19, Indian super league, I-league, all India football federation

Introduction

Football also referred to as association football is a team sport that consists of 11 players from two teams playing against each other. It involves 10 outfield players using their body parts except for their arms to pass, kick and shoot a spherical ball into their opponent's goal. The goalkeeper can use any body part to stop the ball from getting into the goal inside his own penalty area. Handling the ball with his hand outside his own penalty area will result in a foul being committed. The field of play is actually rectangular in shape with two goal post facing each other on both sides of the goal line ^[1, 2]. In the mid-nineteenth century, British soldiers introduced football in India. In 1888, Mortimer Durand, India's Foreign Secretary founded the Durand Cup, the third-oldest football competition in the world ^[3]. The golden era in Indian football from 1951 to 1962 saw India as the best team in Asia under the tutelage of Syed Abdul Rahim ^[4].

Covid-19 has affected football across the world and in India, all the matches in the Indian Super League were played behind closed doors ^[5]. It also affected European football and the remaining matches of the UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League and their respective domestic leagues were postponed and continued later behind closed doors ^[6, 7, 8, 9].

Statement of the problem

The purpose of the study was to analyze the match outcome of Indian professional football clubs before and during the COVID-19 pandemic with and without spectators.

Methodology

Professional football clubs of India were selected as the subjects for the purpose of the study. The year-wise performance analysis was taken into consideration seasons 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 & 2021-22. In the seasons of 2018 and 2019, crowds were present at the stadiums, while in the 2020 and 2021 seasons, no crowds were allowed in the stadiums, due to the sanitary restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. To analyze the performance aspects in matches played at home and away, the given variables were selected:

1. Number of matches won
2. Number of matches lost
3. Number of points won
4. Number of goals scored
5. Number of goals conceded
6. Number of matches played draw
7. Average ball possession

Data was collected through various available online repositories such as the official website of the Indian Super League, I-League, All India Football Federation, websites of various professional football clubs of India, Print media, online media, newspapers, and Video recordings.

Results

Table 1: Match performance variables of different ISL Football Clubs at Home Ground in season 2018-19

Name of the club	No of the Matches played	Win	Draw	Loss	Average Ball possession (%)	Goal Scored	Goal Conceded	Points
Bengaluru FC	9	6	3	0	52	15	7	21
FC Goa	9	7	1	1	56	25	7	22

Mumbai City FC	9	5	1	3	47	13	7	16
Northeast United FC	9	2	6	1	54	9	8	12
Jamshedpur FC	9	5	3	1	55	19	11	18
ATK	9	4	1	4	43	9	11	13
FC Pune City	9	3	2	4	45	12	17	11
Delhi Dynamos FC	9	2	4	3	51	11	13	10
Kerala Blasters FC	9	1	5	3	50	9	10	8
Chennaiyin FC	9	1	2	6	49	10	17	5

Table 4.1 shows the performance variables of different clubs in ISL season 2018-19. Every team played 9 home matches and FC Goa have the most home wins (7 out of 9 matches) and won 22 points. They have an average ball possession of 56 percent, scored 25 goals, and conceded 7 goals from their

home matches. While Chennaiyin FC was able to get only 5 points and was only able to win 1 match out of their 9 home games. They have an average ball possession of 49 percent, scored 10 goals, and conceded 17 goals from their home matches.

Table 2: Match performance variables of different ISL Football Clubs at Home Ground in season 2019-20

Name of the club	No of the Matches played	Win	Draw	Loss	Average Ball possession (%)	Goal Scored	Goal Conceded	Points
Bengaluru FC	9	6	2	1	49	16	6	20
FC Goa	9	7	1	1	55	23	8	22
Mumbai City FC	9	4	1	4	49	12	14	13
Northeast United FC	9	1	5	3	48	12	20	8
Jamshedpur FC	9	3	3	3	51	11	16	12
ATK	9	6	1	2	47	18	8	19
Hyderabad FC	9	1	4	4	48	9	13	7
Odisha FC	9	5	2	2	51	17	13	17
Kerala Blasters FC	9	3	4	2	55	17	15	13
Chennaiyin FC	9	4	3	2	48	16	10	15

Table 2 shows the performance variables of ISL clubs in the season 2019-20. All the games were played in home and away format in which each team played 9 home matches. From the above table, we can see that FC Goa has won 7 out of 9 home games and they draw and lost 1 game. They had an average ball possession of 55 percent, scored 23 goals, and conceded 8 goals from their home matches. They were

the club with a maximum of 22 points when they played in front of their fans. Hyderabad FC was only able to win 1 match in front of their supporters and draw 4 and lost 4 matches. They had an average ball possession of 48 percent, scored 9 goals, and conceded 13 goals from their 9 home games.

Table 3: Match performance variables of different ISL Football Clubs at Home Ground in season 2020-21

Name of the club	No of the Matches played	Win	Draw	Loss	Average Ball possession (%)	Goal Scored	Goal Conceded	Points
Bengaluru FC	10	1	4	5	51	9	14	7
FC Goa	10	3	5	2	57	15	10	14
Mumbai City FC	10	5	3	2	57	18	11	18
Northeast United FC	10	5	3	2	44	15	10	18
Jamshedpur FC	10	3	2	5	45	15	16	11
ATK Mohun Bagan	10	8	1	1	48	14	5	25
Hyderabad FC	10	3	5	2	51	16	12	14
Odisha FC	10	1	2	7	44	14	26	5
Kerala Blasters FC	10	2	5	3	51	12	13	11
Chennaiyin FC	10	0	7	3	49	7	12	7
SC East Bengal	10	1	5	4	51	9	13	8

Table 3 shows the match performance variables of season 2020-21 of ISL. In this edition of ISL, the games were played behind closed doors because of the restrictions imposed by the government due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country. No spectators were allowed to enter the stadium. ATK Mohun Bagan a newly formed team by merging ATK and Mohun Bagan has won 8 matches and draw 1 and lost 1 match from their 10 home games. They had an average of 48 percent ball possession, scored 14

goals, conceded only 5 goals from 10 home games, and were able to secure 25 points from their home matches. Odisha FC. From their 10 home games, they could only win 1 game and draw 2 matches and lost 7 matches. They only had 44 percent of average ball possession, scored 14 goals, and conceded 26 goals from 10 games making them the worst defensive record in the 2020-21 ISL with only 5 points from their home matches.

Table 4: Match performance variables of different ISL Football Clubs at Home Ground in season 2021-22

Name of the club	No of the Matches played	Win	Draw	Loss	Average Ball possession (%)	Goal Scored	Goal Conceded	Points
Bengaluru FC	10	4	4	2	54	20	15	16
FC Goa	10	2	4	4	61	12	17	10
Mumbai City FC	10	5	2	3	54	16	14	17
Northeast United FC	10	3	2	5	48	14	20	11
Jamshedpur FC	10	7	2	1	47	19	8	23
ATK Mohun Bagan	10	5	3	2	52	18	14	18
Hyderabad FC	10	6	1	3	51	21	13	19
Odisha FC	10	4	3	3	47	20	20	15
Kerala Blasters FC	10	6	3	1	49	17	9	21
Chennaiyin FC	10	2	2	6	49	8	21	8
SC East Bengal	10	0	5	5	45	9	19	5

Table 4 shows the match performance variables of season 2021-22 of ISL. All the matches were played behind closed doors due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Jamshedpur FC have got the highest points from their home games. They won 7 matches and lost only 1 match and draw 2 matches. They kept an average ball possession of 47 percent and scored 19 goals and conceded 8 goals from 10 games and score a total

of 23 points. SC East Bengal a historical club in Indian football was at the bottom of the home game table scoring 5 points. They couldn't win a single home match, lost 5, and draw 5 matches. They only had 45 percent of average ball possession, scored a total of 9 goals, and conceded 19 goals from their home games.

Table 5: Match performance variables of different I League Football Clubs at Home Ground in season 2018-19

Name of the club	No of the Matches played	Win	Draw	Loss	Average Ball possession (%)	Goal Scored	Goal Conceded	Points
Aizawl FC	10	4	2	4	50	15	13	14
Chennai City FC	10	8	1	1	53	29	14	25
Churchil Brothers FC	10	7	2	1	54	23	12	23
East Bengal FC	10	5	3	2	55	18	10	18
Gokulam Kerala FC	10	3	4	3	52	14	14	13
Indian Arrows	10	3	2	5	45	9	13	11
Minerva Punjab FC	10	2	3	5	52	3	6	9
Mohun Bagan AC	10	3	3	4	57	12	15	12
Neroca FC	10	4	4	2	51	16	13	16
Real Kashmir FC	9	5	1	3	50	12	6	16
Shillong Lajong FC	10	2	2	6	48	14	22	8

Table 5 shows the performance variables of different clubs in the I-League season 2018-19. Chennai City FC has more home wins (8 out of 10 matches) and won 25 points. They had an average ball possession of 53 percent, scored 29 goals, and conceded 14 goals in their home matches.

Shillong Lajong FC were able to get 8 points with 2 wins, 2 draws, and 6 losses from their 10 home games. They managed to keep an average ball possession of 48 percent, scored 14 goals, and conceded 22 goals in their home matches.

Table 6: Match performance variables of different I League Football Clubs at Home Ground in season 2019-20

Name of the club	No of the Matches played	Win	Draw	Loss	Average Ball possession (%)	Goal Scored	Goal Conceded	Points
Aizawl FC	6	1	4	1	51	8	8	7
Chennai City FC	7	2	2	3	56	7	9	8
Churchil Brothers FC	10	5	0	5	48	16	14	15
East Bengal FC	7	1	3	3	53	6	9	6
Gokulam Kerala FC	8	2	4	2	55	9	9	10
Indian Arrows	8	0	2	6	49	4	14	2
Minerva Punjab FC	7	5	2	0	55	13	6	17
Mohun Bagan AC	9	7	1	1	56	20	9	22
Neroca FC	9	5	2	2	48	17	14	17
Real Kashmir FC	7	3	2	2	45	7	7	11
TRAU FC	9	4	3	2	49	11	11	15

Table 6 shows the performance variables of I-League clubs in the season 2019-20. All the games were played in home and away format in which some teams couldn't complete their home matches because of the suspension of the league due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Mohun Bagan AC has won 7 out of 9, drawn 1, and lost 1 home match. They had an average ball possession of 56 percent, 20 goals, and

conceded 9 goals from their home matches. They were the club with a maximum of 22 points when they played in front of their fans. Indian Arrows couldn't win a single match in front of their supporters. They draw 2 matches and lost 6 matches in their home, had an average ball possession of 49 percent, scored 4 goals, and conceded 14 goals from their 8 home matches.

Table 7: Match performance variables of different I League Football Clubs at Home Ground in season 2020-21

Name of the club	No of the Matches played	Win	Draw	Loss	Average Ball possession (%)	Goal Scored	Goal Conceded	Points
Aizawl FC	7	3	2	2	54	11	8	11
Chennai City FC	7	1	0	6	49	4	16	3
Churchill Brothers FC	8	3	3	2	53	8	10	12
Gokulam Kerala FC	7	3	2	2	51	16	10	11
Indian Arrows	7	2	0	5	46	8	21	6
Mohammedan SC	7	3	2	2	53	7	8	11
Neroa FC	7	0	1	6	48	5	13	1
Real Kashmir FC	8	3	3	2	47	17	12	12
Round Glass Punjab FC	8	3	3	2	51	7	5	12
Sudeva Delhi FC	7	3	0	4	51	7	7	9
TRAU FC	7	3	2	2	52	7	8	11

Table 7 shows the match performance variables of season 2020-21 of the I-League. In this edition of I-League, the games were played behind closed doors because of the restrictions imposed by the government due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country. There were two phases in the competition; Phase I and Phase II. Three clubs Churchill Brothers FC, Real Kashmir FC, and Round Glass Punjab FC have equally got 12 points from 8 home matches, won 3 matches, drew 3 matches, and lost 2 matches respectively. Churchill Brothers FC had an average of 53 percent ball possession, scored 8 goals, and conceded 10 goals from 8

home matches. Real Kashmir FC had an average of 47 percent ball possession, scored 17 goals, and conceded 12 goals from 8 home matches. Round Glass Punjab FC had an average of 51 percentage ball possession, scored 7 goals, and conceded 5 goals only in 8 home matches. Neroa FC. couldn't win a single home match, draw 1 match, and lose 6 matches. They only had 48 percent of average ball possession, score 5 goals, and conceded 13 goals from 7 games. They only got 1 point from their home matches.

Table 8: Match performance variables of different I League Football Clubs at Home Ground in season 2021-22

Name of the club	No of the Matches played	Win	Draw	Loss	Average Ball possession (%)	Goal Scored	Goal Conceded	Points
Aizawl FC	8	3	0	5	51	9	12	9
Churchil Brothers FC	6	3	1	2	50	7	6	10
Gokulam Kerala FC	9	7	1	1	56	27	8	22
Indian Arrows	6	2	0	4	48	5	8	6
Mohammedan SC	11	7	2	2	53	21	11	23
Mumbai Kenkre FC	4	1	1	2	47	2	6	4
Neroa FC	10	3	3	4	50	11	16	12
Rajasthan United FC	9	2	4	3	50	5	7	10
Real Kashmir FC	12	1	7	4	48	16	20	10
Round Glass Punjab FC	12	5	3	4	48	21	22	18
Sreenidi Deccan FC	8	2	4	2	50	10	9	10
Sudeva Delhi FC	8	1	2	5	45	3	12	5

Table 8 shows the match performance variables of season 2021-22 of the I-League. All the matches were played behind closed doors due to the COVID-19 outbreak. This season there was no proper format of home and away games some clubs played 12 home matches and some played 6 home matches. Mohammedan SC has got the highest points and won 7 matches, lost 2 matches, and draw 2 matches out of 11 home matches. They kept an average ball possession

of 53 percent, scored 21 goals, and conceded 11 goals. They got 23 points making them table-toppers for home matches. Mumbai Kenkre FC was at the bottom of the home matches table scoring 4 points. The reason could be due to the least number of home matches played (4 home matches). They won 1 match, lost 2, and draw 1 home match. They only had 47 percent of average ball possession, scored 2 goals, and conceded 6 goals from their home matches.

Table 9: Season-wise performance analysis of all ISL clubs

Name of the club	Before COVID-19 Pandemic		During COVID-19 Pandemic	
	Points 2018-19	Points 2019-20	Points 2020-21	Points 2021-22
Bengaluru FC	21	20	7	16
FC Goa	22	22	14	10
Mumbai City FC	16	13	18	17
Northeast United FC	12	8	18	11
Jamshedpur FC	18	12	11	23
ATK	13	19	-	-
FC Pune City	11	-	-	-
Delhi Dynamos FC	10	-	-	-
Hyderabad FC	-	7	14	19
Odisha FC	-	17	5	15

Kerala Blasters FC	8	13	11	21
Chennaiyin FC	5	15	7	8
ATK Mohun Bagan	-	-	25	18
SC East Bengal	-	-	8	5

Table 9 shows evidence that the performance of the ISL clubs was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic during the restriction period while matches were played closed door due to the outbreak of coronavirus. In seasons 2018-19 and 2019-20 the matches were played in the home and away format and it was before the COVID-19 outbreak. During season 2018-19, FC Goa gained maximum points from their home matches while Chennaiyin FC were only able to score 5 points from their home matches. The following season 2019-20, FC Goa dominated the home matches by scoring 22 points from 9 games while Hyderabad FC scored only 7 points from their 9 home matches. 2020-21 and 2021-22

seasons matches in ISL were in closed-door at a neutral venue. Yet teams were given matches on the basis of home and away format. ATK Mohun Bagan scored 25 points from 10 home matches in the season 2020-21 while the least points of 5 was scored by Odisha FC from 10 home games. In the 2021-22 season, there were no changes in the league format, the matches took place at Goa behind closed doors as a neutral venue for all teams. Jamshedpur FC scored 23 points from 10 home games and led the home games table. While SC East Bengal was only able to score 5 points from their 10 home matches.

Table 10: Season-wise performance analysis of all I-League clubs

Name of the club	Before COVID-19 Pandemic		During COVID-19 Pandemic	
	Points 2018-19	Points 2019-20	Points 2020-21	Points 2021-22
Aizawl FC	14	7	11	9
Chennai City FC	25	8	3	-
Churchill Brothers FC	23	15	12	10
East Bengal FC	18	6	-	-
Gokulam Kerala FC	13	10	11	22
Indian Arrows	11	2	6	6
Minerva Punjab FC	9	17	-	-
Mohun Bagan AC	12	22	-	-
Neroca FC	16	17	1	12
Real Kashmir FC	16	11	12	10
Shillong Lajong FC	8	-	-	-
TRAU FC	-	15	11	12
Mohammedan SC	-	-	11	23
Round Glass Punjab FC	-	-	12	18
Sudeva Delhi FC	-	-	9	5
Mumbai Kenkre FC	-	-	-	4
Rajasthan United FC	-	-	-	10
Sreenidi Deccan FC	-	-	-	10

Table 10 clearly shows that the impact of COVID-19 has affected the performance of clubs from the I-League. The 2018-19 and 2019-20 editions of I-League were conducted in regular format by teams playing home and away matches. Due to the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 in India, AIFF has to cancel the last few matches of the 2019-20 I-league season. Because of that some teams were not able to play their last few home matches. In the season 2018-19, Chennai City FC secured the highest points in their home matches while Shillong Lajong FC secured the least points. In the season 2019-20, Mohun Bagan AC led the home match table point with 22 points from 9 home matches, and Indian Arrows managed to get only 2 points from their 8 home games. After the outbreak of coronavirus in the country I-League Season 2020-21 was played behind closed doors. In the first-ever season behind the closed-door; Churchill Brothers FC, Real Kashmir FC, and Round Glass Punjab FC obtained a total of 12 points from their 8 home matches. While Neroca FC obtained 1 point from their 7 home games. In the season 2021-22, Mohammedans SC got 23 points and was at the top of the point table from 11 home games. While Mumbai Kenkre FC was at the bottom with only 4 points from 4 home matches.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were formed based on the findings and within the limits and delimitations of the current study. It is evident that when the matches were played behind the closed door by teams during the COVID-19 pandemic their performance declined compared to the seasons when the matches were played in front of the fans of the clubs. Due to the sudden changes in the format of the league, some teams were performing badly at their home ground which may be because of the unavailability of crowd support for their players.

Compared to ISL clubs, the I-League club's performance during the pandemic declined. That can be due to some reasons like mental toughness when the league was controlled under a bio-secure bubble, the local players lacking confidence because of the absence of supporters at their home ground, etc. In some exceptional cases where few teams have not performed well in season 2020-21, but improved their performance in the next season 2021-22. That can be due to the adjustment of players and coaches to the new format of the league due to the COVID-19 pandemic or could be because of the arrival of better local and foreign players compared to the previous seasons.

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