



AFC Elite-Youth Bulletin 2024

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Content

Message from the AFC President

- 1. Key Notes by the AFC Technical Director
- 2. Big Interview with Mr Yoshiro Moriyama
- 3. AFC Elite Youth Scheme
- 4. AFC’s Activities in Elite Youth Football Development
 - AFC Elite Youth Online Session 2024
 - AFC Special Elite Youth Football Awards 2024
- 5. MA’s Good Practices in Elite Youth Football Development
 - Football Australia Academy: Shaping the Future of Australian Football
 - An approach to enhancing elite youth football in the vast and diverse nation of China PR

- The UAE Football Association’s Center of Excellence: Developing the Next Generation of Football Talent
- Elite Youth Football Development in Jordan: Empowering the Future of Asian Football

6. Youth Academies in Asia

- JFA Academy Fukushima Girl’s (Japan) – Elevating the Next Wave of Women’s Football in Japan
- Aspire Academy (Qatar): Nurturing Qatar’s Emerging Football Stars



MESSAGE FROM THE AFC PRESIDENT



Dear friends,

I am honoured and proud to present the Confederation’s latest technical resource – the AFC Elite Youth Bulletin 2024.

In the same way the AFC Grassroots Review, the AFC Coaches Circle as well as our competition-centric technical reports have enhanced our knowledge bank of best practices, I have no doubt that this bulletin will follow in the footsteps of the comprehensive collection of publications aimed at uplifting the technical capabilities and sensibilities of our Member Associations (MAs).

The AFC has made clear our ambitions to ensure the success of Asian teams and players on the world’s biggest stages and the recent achievements – most notably, DPR Korea’s successive triumphs in the FIFA women’s age-group competitions in 2024 are indeed a clear sign of our shared ambitions coming to life.

There remains, however, plenty of hard work for Asian teams, particularly as we strive to maintain our dominance in women’s football and close the gap in the men’s game and in no uncertain terms, that journey begins through the establishment of robust and vibrant elite youth pathways for our Asian stars of tomorrow to fulfil their full potential.

Over the years, we have been working in close partnership with our MAs by providing tailor-made support to empower them to create the optimum environment to identify, nurture, and develop future icons capable of competing at the highest levels.

In addition to organising world-class age-group competitions, the AFC Elite Youth Scheme has systematically raised our talent development standards and stimulated a culture of excellence amongst our MAs and their academies.

Whilst I am pleased to note the transformative and palpable impact of this breakthrough initiative, I urge all our MAs to embark on this rewarding journey, not only to seek endorsement under the AFC Elite Youth Scheme

but also upgrade your endorsement levels and reap all the benefits that come from adopting a unified approach to excellence.

The investment in our youth players today will lead to a brighter future for Asian football tomorrow and a long-term commitment to instituting sustainable player pathways, supported by sound strategic plans are just some of the key outcomes of the AFC Elite Youth Scheme. As we have witnessed, widespread across the Continent, it is a game-changing and evidence-informed blueprint designed to kick start your pathway towards greatness.

As you peruse the upcoming pages, I hope you will join me in drawing inspiration from the best practices put in place by our fellow MAs and beyond, and more importantly, chart the way forward in strengthening the foundations for Asian football to usher in greater success in the years to come.

A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink, likely belonging to Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent 'S' at the beginning.

Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President



KEY NOTES BY THE AFC TECHNICAL DIRECTOR



Elite Youth football is a transitional phase in the player development process between the grassroots and the professional game. The AFC’s guiding principle for this stage states that we want ‘the best, with the best, against the best, guided by the best.’ In a word, it is about talent: top players and specialist youth coaches. The importance of producing players for Asian teams is emphasised by the AFC President, Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa, when he states: ‘The foundation of any successful national team is built at the elite youth level. The AFC’s desire to develop our future generation - the stars of tomorrow - has never been stronger.’

In order to stimulate further investment and interest in elite youth football, the AFC has established its Elite Youth Scheme which provides specific criteria, guidelines and support to participating Member Associations (MAs) for their ongoing work in player development, both at national and club level. The focus on the establishment of elite academies is particularly significant in this context. With 26 MAs in membership of the scheme, steady progress is being made, although the creation of regular domestic youth competitions remains an issue in some MAs.

It is hoped that the new publication on elite youth football, which showcases a number of best practices, will trigger a response and result in new initiatives and greater efforts in the elite youth sector. Talented

young players are to be prized and nurturing them is a cause worthy of our full commitment. Remember: we don’t spend time and money on young players, we invest in them. Ange Postecoglou, who won the AFC Asian Cup™ with Australia and the J1 League as head coach of Yokohama F. Marinos, sounded a warning to anyone who has any doubts when he said: ‘If you don’t invest in grassroots and elite youth football, then it is inevitable that you will pay the price somewhere down the track.’

I wish you every success in your efforts to identify, manage, coach and lead your young talents - good results will surely follow!

Andy Roxburgh
AFC Technical Director



BIG INTERVIEW WITH MR YOSHIRO MORIYAMA



Meet the Architect of Success: The Legendary Youth Coach Embarking on a New Challenge

When you think of the coach who led Japan to back-to-back AFC U17 Asian Cup™ titles in 2018 and 2023, that alone speaks volumes. Yet, Yoshiro Moriyama’s story is far more layered and inspiring than a string of victories. There’s a legacy in the making – one that deserves to be told.

A gifted winger in high school, his talent was undeniable. However, it was his bold shift to full-back during his university days that marked the turning point of his career. This transformation not only set him on the path to success but also earned him a spot with Mazda SC, the club that would later become Sanfrecce Hiroshima, and ultimately a place in Japan’s national team. Moriyama’s playing career, spanning several top-tier clubs, was just the beginning.

After years of playing, he returned to his roots at Sanfrecce Hiroshima, but this time in a new capacity—coaching. Under his guidance, the youth academy, once a regional entity, blossomed into one of Japan’s most esteemed development programmes. His tireless work and innovative methods propelled the club to multiple championships, including back-to-back Japan Football Association (JFA) U18 Premier League titles, and birthed a generation of future national team stars.

In 2013, he began his coaching journey with the Japan U15 national team and by 2015, he had taken charge of the U17 squad. His vision was always global, aiming to develop players who could compete at the highest level. Under his leadership, Japan’s U17s secured three FIFA U-17 World Cup qualifications and clinched consecutive AFC U17 Asian Cup™ titles—a remarkable achievement that solidified his reputation as one of the premier youth development coaches in Asia.

One of the defining moments of his tenure came in the FIFA U-17 World Cup India 2017, where Japan faced England in a thrilling encounter that ended in a 0-0 draw and a penalty shootout. While England emerged victorious, their squad, brimming with future stars like Phil Foden and Marc Guéhi, could not overshadow Japan’s rising stature in world football. The performance was a testament to the power and potential of Asian youth football on the global stage.

After 13 years cultivating talent at Sanfrecce Hiroshima and 11 years shaping the future of Japanese football through the JFA, this master of youth development is now poised for his next challenge. In 2024, he took on the role of head coach at Vegalta Sendai in the J2 League—a position he has been courted for numerous times in the past.

In an exclusive interview, AFC Deputy Technical Director Takeshi Ono visited Vegalta Sendai’s training ground to sit down with the coach, offering insights into his philosophy and the future of Asian football development. For those familiar with Japanese football, Moriyama’s nickname “Gorisan” speaks volumes. It encapsulates his passion, his character, and the dedication he brings to shaping the next generation of football stars. For the rest of the football world, his name is synonymous with a relentless pursuit of excellence, both on and off the pitch.



BIG INTERVIEW WITH MR YOSHIRO MORIYAMA

Question 1
Having experienced three AFC U17 Asian Cup™ campaigns, including two back-to-back victories, you’ve seen the changes in Asian youth football. What developments have you observed over that time?

Looking back over the six years I’ve been involved in these tournaments, it’s clear that there have been significant changes in the level of play. One of the most notable developments is that many MAs are now focusing on building more sophisticated football, particularly in terms of individual technique. The access to global football knowledge has played a huge role in this—unlike decades ago, it’s now easier than ever to learn from top leagues and international best practices.

Another key factor is the increased involvement of foreign coaches with world-class experience. Many MAs have brought in coaches from abroad to help guide their youth national teams, bringing a fresh perspective and a higher level of expertise. This shift is helping Asian youth teams adopt a more modern approach, focusing on the tactical and technical demands necessary to succeed on the world stage.

From my perspective, it’s fascinating to see how some regions, like Southeast Asia, which weren’t traditionally known for producing top football talent, have become much more competitive. These countries are investing more in youth development and focusing on cultivating a footballing culture that matches global standards. This is having a real impact on the quality of the teams we see at tournaments like the AFC U17 Asian Cup™.

Overall, it’s clear that the next generation of coaches is now more attuned to the global trends in football. They are shaping players who are not only technically sound but also aware of the tactical nuances needed to compete internationally. This shift is reflected in the quality of training sessions and the progress we’ve witnessed at the national team level across Asia.

Question 2
Many players from that period have since joined the senior national team. How do you feel watching them thrive?

When I first took on the coaching role, one of the key discussions with the staff was how we should focus on nurturing players with great potential for the future, rather than only prioritising their current performance. It’s hard to believe now, but at that time, very few players made the jump directly from the U17 national team to the senior team. In fact, some of the most iconic players in Japanese football history—like Yuto Nagatomo, Keisuke Honda and Makoto Hasebe—didn’t even come through the youth national team ranks. They joined the J League straight from high school or university before eventually making their mark on the senior national team.

Seeing our current players thrive at the senior level is incredibly rewarding. While it’s fantastic to see them grow and succeed, I also believe there’s still room for improvement in how we develop players at the youth level. From the very beginning, we made it clear that our mission was to focus on sending these players to the next stage of their careers. It wasn’t just about achieving results in the U17 tournaments—it was about preparing them for the challenges of the senior national team. We wanted to provide them with the right stimuli, education, and experiences to help them grow as complete players.

Now, looking at how many of our former U17 players have gone on to play for the senior team, I can’t express how happy and proud I am. In a way, seeing them succeed at that level is even more fulfilling than winning back-to-back AFC U17 Asian Cup™ titles. It’s a testament to the long-term vision and work we put in, and it’s incredible to see the results of that effort.

Question 3
Additionally, what characteristics did these players have during their youth that led them to join the senior squad?

One of the key traits that these players had from a young age was their ability to develop and transform themselves. A national team environment can only offer so much stimulation over a short period, so what truly sets these players apart is their drive to address and improve on the weaknesses

they identified during each national team experience. They didn’t wait for the next camp or competition to evolve; instead, they actively worked on themselves in between those opportunities.

These players understood the importance of daily life — how every training session, every match, and every challenge was an opportunity to grow. They were incredibly hungry for personal development and had a strong will to shape their careers the way they envisioned. They possessed the courage to make changes, adapt and constantly push themselves beyond their comfort zones.

Another defining characteristic was their fierce competitiveness. Takefusa Kubo is a great example of this, but players like Yukinari Sugawara and Keito Nakamura exhibited the same mindset. They weren’t just focused on their own growth; they were also motivated by a healthy sense of rivalry. They recognised each other’s abilities but at the same time, they were always pushing to be the next player to succeed. I remember seeing them argue with each other at half-time — not out of conflict, but out of a shared desire to improve and compete at the highest level. They were genuinely happy for each other’s success but at the same time, they were constantly fueling one another’s ambitions with a strong desire to be the best.



BIG INTERVIEW WITH MR YOSHIRO MORIYAMA



Question 4
Before leading the U17 national team, you coached the Sanfrecce Hiroshima youth team, winning many titles and developing several senior national team players. What coaching principles did you prioritise during that time?

My coaching philosophy is quite straightforward: it revolves around enhancing the individual to the highest level, and then bringing those individuals together to form a strong team. Whether we're talking about technical skills, tactical awareness or the physical, mental and lifestyle aspects of the players, the goal is to make each player strong, well-rounded and resilient. Once you have 11 such players on the field, you're naturally going to have a strong team.

For example, when coaching defenders, I used to tell them to start with the simple goal of not being beaten by the player in front of them. From there, we would expand their thought process: What do you do with the player you're marking? How do you react to the player with the ball? And how do you adjust when an additional player joins the attack? This approach allows players to broaden their skills step by step—from focusing on a single task to understanding the bigger picture and becoming more adaptable.

The idea is to build individual strength and understanding in every aspect of the game. Once you get all these individuals working together with that mindset, they naturally form a cohesive and powerful collective. The foundation of any successful team lies in the development of each individual player—physically, mentally, and tactically. If you can achieve that, the team will take care of itself.



BIG INTERVIEW WITH MR YOSHIRO MORIYAMA

Question 5
At the time, even in the youth category, team tactics were a popular topic of interest for coaches. So why did you focus so much on individual development?

My focus on individual development was driven by a clear belief: to truly nurture players who could shine, both for their team and for themselves, regardless of the tactics or coaching style they would encounter. I wanted to prepare each player for success at the next level, and I firmly believe that the only way to achieve that is by developing well-rounded individuals—players who are adaptable, skilled and capable of thriving under any coach or system.

In my mind, the ideal player is someone who can excel in various styles of football, not just within a specific tactical framework. I didn’t want to create players who could only succeed in one particular system or under one style of play. My goal was always to build versatile, complete players who could adjust to different tactical approaches and continue to grow, no matter where they went after leaving the Sanfrecce Hiroshima youth team.

Question 6
Sanfrecce’s youth programme is synonymous with emphasising human development. What efforts or contributions did you undertake to balance human education with school education and football?

I believe that football, life off the pitch and school education form a vital triangle. If any of these elements are out of balance, it affects the whole. My approach has always been that players who grow up in a well-rounded environment will develop both as individuals and athletes. This balance was something I constantly communicated with the players.

The Sanfrecce Hiroshima youth team operated as a residential programme and we had a dormitory manager who was excellent at guiding the players in their day-to-day lives. I often stayed at the dormitory myself, sometimes for a week at a time, living alongside the players, seeing them off to school and being part of their daily routine. When the dormitory manager was strict with the players, I would take a slightly gentler approach and when the manager was more lenient, I’d be the one to remind the players of their responsibilities.

Building these bonds with the players was crucial. I always attended get-togethers with their parents, ensuring clear communication between everyone involved in their development. I also maintained close contact with the school teachers, and sometimes, would even sneak into their classes to observe. I’d notice how some players, who previously seemed distracted, would suddenly pay more attention and engage fully when they saw me in the room. It showed me that they understood the importance of their education and how much I valued it.

I’ve always believed that you cannot develop great footballers without first nurturing their personal growth. School education and life skills are just as important as football training. That’s why the club invested so much into fostering human development, ensuring that our players were well prepared not just as athletes, but as individuals ready to thrive in every aspect of life.”

Question 7
It is well-known that you received multiple offers from professional clubs while coaching elite youth, yet you chose to dedicate yourself to youth development. Where does this commitment come from?

It’s true that I received offers from professional clubs, but one of the main reasons I stayed was that I didn’t want to leave the players I was coaching, especially at such a pivotal stage in their development. This age group experiences rapid change, and I wanted to see them through it.

The real reason, however, is that I genuinely love coaching youth players. As a child, I dreamed of becoming a school teacher, combining teaching with coaching football. Being able to work in a school and community setting, where I could witness players’ progress firsthand, felt like a natural fit for me.

At this age, even the smallest improvements lead to remarkable growth, and it’s incredibly rewarding to be part of that journey. I realised that I couldn’t walk away from the joy of seeing young players grow, not just as footballers, but as individuals.

Question 8
You showed us a very close game against the dominant champions, England, in the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup, which went down to a penalty shoot-out. What would be the keys for Asian elite youth to take the next breakthrough step?

From a technical and tactical standpoint, there are plenty of reports available that can serve as valuable references. But if I had to distil it into a few words, it would be about handling high-intensity situations—making decisions quickly and executing your game plan under pressure. Asia is heading in the right direction in this regard.

However, the most critical factor comes down to the day-to-day development. When I first started coaching in Japan, we didn’t even have youth leagues. Over time, thanks to efforts by individuals like Takeshi Ono and Keiichiro Nuno, youth leagues were established to provide competitive opportunities, starting regionally and growing to a national level where teams could compete at similar standards.

The JFA has always stressed the importance of staying attuned to world football and increasing intensity on a daily basis. Over the course of 10 to 20 years, this patient, consistent effort has produced players who have gone on to play in Europe and become key members of major clubs. This steady, long-term commitment is paying off.

Currently, many Asian nations are striving to improve by bringing in coaches from Europe and other parts of the world. I believe that if domestic youth competitions become more competitive, with a focus on high-intensity football, the day-to-day development in Asia will change dramatically. That’s when we’ll see Asian nations truly start lifting major trophies.



BIG INTERVIEW WITH MR YOSHIRO MORIYAMA

Question 9
You currently thrive as the coach of Vegalta Sendai, leading professional players. How does your experience in elite youth development contribute to your current role?

At Vegalta Sendai, we analyse both ourselves and our opponents every week, developing strategies that we then put into practice on the pitch. It's a busy and intense process, but at the core, my approach hasn't changed much from my youth development days. Whether working with young players or professionals, the fundamental goal is the same: develop each individual to their fullest potential and then bring those individuals together as a cohesive team.

The difference in the outcome often comes down to the players themselves—how much they've developed individually and how well they can apply their strengths in match situations. Unlike the big clubs in major cities that can afford high-profile signings, Vegalta relies on young talent. One of the reasons I'm here is because we're winning by nurturing these young players and helping them grow.

I see myself not just as a coach, but as an educator and motivator. My role is to inspire the players, help them reach their full potential, and build a team that can challenge the top clubs. It's about creating an environment where players can thrive, grow and contribute to our success on the pitch.

Question 10
Finally, could you share your future aspirations with us?

I've been given the privilege of leading Vegalta Sendai and I believe this club is the perfect fit for me. I've spent 13 years with the Sanfrecce Hiroshima youth team and 11 years with the JFA's youth development programme, so I feel deeply connected to the process of nurturing young talent and building a team from the ground up. I want to continue working with this club to achieve our shared dreams and develop the players here.

My first goal is to get Vegalta promoted to J1, where I believe this club belongs. Once we reach that level, I aim to push us into the middle to upper ranks of the table, alongside all the people who support us.

If we achieve that, the AFC Champions League™ will be within our reach, and I'd love to get to the point where I can confidently say, 'When it comes

to Asia, leave it to us.' That's the vision I have for the future—a sustainable, long-term success that not only makes our fans proud but also establishes Vegalta Sendai as a strong presence in both domestic and Asian football.



AFC ELITE YOUTH SCHEME

The AFC Elite Youth Scheme is a cornerstone of the Confederation’s strategy to improve football across Asia. By focusing on high-quality player development, structured coaching and the establishment of elite academies, the Scheme provides the tools and frameworks necessary for nurturing the next generation of football stars. Its long-term impact will be felt across the region as Asia works to strengthen its football programmes, develop top-tier talent and enhance its presence on the international stage.

Objectives of the Scheme

The primary aims of the AFC Elite Youth Scheme are to:

- **Raise Standards:** Improve the quality of youth football programmes across Asia.
- **Support and Evaluate:** Help AFC MAs by assessing their player development programmes and recognising their efforts in nurturing elite talent.
- **Provide Guidelines:** Offer a structured framework for the identification, protection and education of talented young players.

The Concept

Central to the AFC’s Vision and Mission is the goal of improving football standards in Asia and increasing the region’s competitiveness at the top international levels. The development of young footballers is crucial to achieving these objectives. The AFC supports its MAs by helping them refine and advance their elite youth programmes, ensuring academies align with AFC standards.

By setting a benchmark for player development at training centres, the AFC and its MAs collaborate to nurture the next generation of professional footballers. The scheme specifically targets key elements of youth development, including talent identification, coaching quality and the strengthening of academy structures.



Scope and Philosophy

The AFC defines elite youth football as being played by exceptionally talented young players, either at the national team level or within professional club environments. The Scheme focuses on academies affiliated with top-division clubs or those designated as national training centres.

The evaluation of these academies follows a grading system based on the following three categories:

- **Three-Star:** Comprehensive programmes with significant range and measurable results.
- **Two-Star:** Increased criteria focusing on quality and quantity of players.
- **One-Star:** Meets sporting criteria and club licensing requirements, with strong participation and developmental plans.
- The core principles guiding the Scheme include:
 - **Player Welfare:** Ensuring the well-being of young players.
 - **Education Over Results:** Prioritising long-term development over short-term competitive outcomes.
 - **Quality Coaching:** Essential for fostering the growth of players.
 - **Holistic Development:** Focusing on technical skills, physical attributes, emotional stability and overall personal growth.
 - **Mutual Respect:** Encouraging positive relationships between players, staff and parents/guardians.



Progress in 2024

The AFC Elite Youth Scheme continues to expand its reach and strengthen its network of partners committed to youth football development. Notable developments in the past year include the following:

- Lion City Sailors Football Academy (Singapore) successfully advanced from 1-Star to 2-Star status, a transition officially endorsed in April 2024.
- PVF Academy (Vietnam) successfully renewed its 3-Star membership in May 2024, reaffirming its commitment to providing top-tier youth development.
- In October 2024, the UAE was granted 3-Star status, joining the ranks of top-tier academies in the region, while China PR and Oman were both endorsed to 2-Star level for their continued excellence in elite youth football development.
- In November 2024, Guam was endorsed to 1-Star level, while the Kyrgyz Republic, together with the Asylbek Momunov Football Academy, received a renewal of their 1-Star status.
- As of November 2024, the scheme has successfully engaged 26 MAs, all of whom are committed to the growth and development of youth football talent at the highest standards.



AFC ELITE YOUTH SCHEME

CATEGORIES
ENDORSED MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

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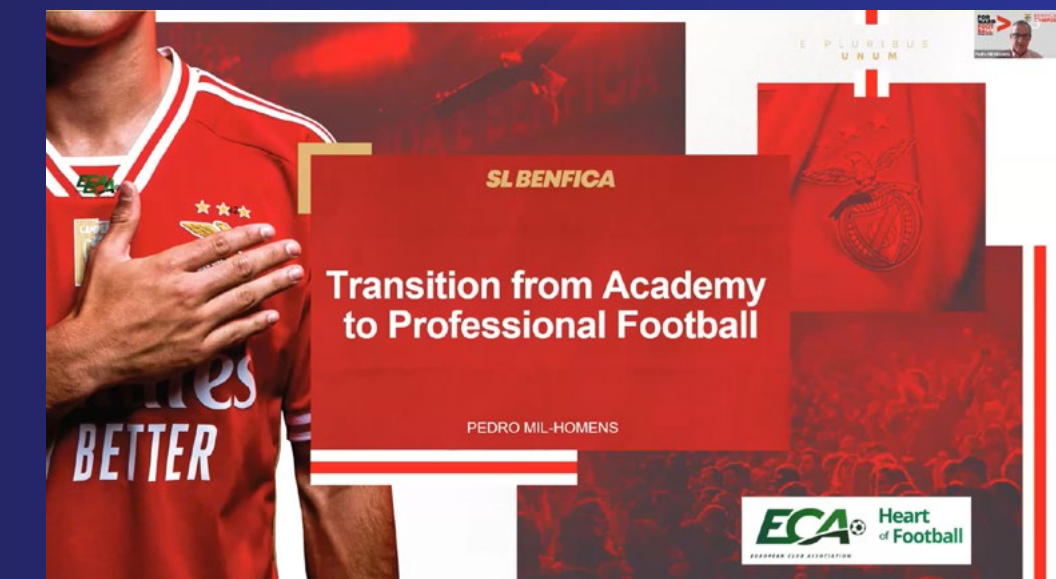


AFC’S ACTIVITIES IN ELITE YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

4.1 AFC Elite Youth Online Session 2024

Key Insights on Developing the Next Generation of Football Talent

The AFC Elite Youth Online Sessions 2024 provided valuable learning experiences for coaches and technical staff across Asia, with two sessions focused on enhancing youth development programmes and improving the transition from academy to professional football. Both sessions underscored the strategic importance of investing in youth football.



1st AFC Elite Youth Special Online Session 2024 – Excellence in Youth Football (June 25, 2024)

The AFC Elite Youth Special Online Session held on June 25, 2024, under the theme “Excellence in Youth Football”, gathered nearly 100 coaches and technical staff from across Asia. Chaired by AFC Technical Director Andy Roxburgh, the session provided an in-depth look into the successful structures and philosophies of two world-renowned football academies: Manchester City’s U18 Academy and Japan Football Association’s (JFA) Academy Fukushima.

Manchester City’s U18 Academy: The session featured Ben Wilkinson, Head Coach of Manchester City’s U18 team, who shared valuable insights into the academy’s approach to technical, tactical, and personal development. Wilkinson discussed how the academy fosters homegrown talent, highlighting the production of stars like Phil Foden and Cole Palmer. He stressed the importance of setting high targets, including national team call-ups and maintaining a focus on player well-being, mental health and off-field development.

JFA Academy Fukushima: The second half of the session featured Kageyama Masanaga, Technical Director of the JFA, who outlined the academy’s goal of raising standards in Japan’s U18 League. With a history of producing a high percentage of professional footballers, the JFA Academy’s commitment to developing top-tier talent was explored, providing valuable takeaways for other AFC MAs.

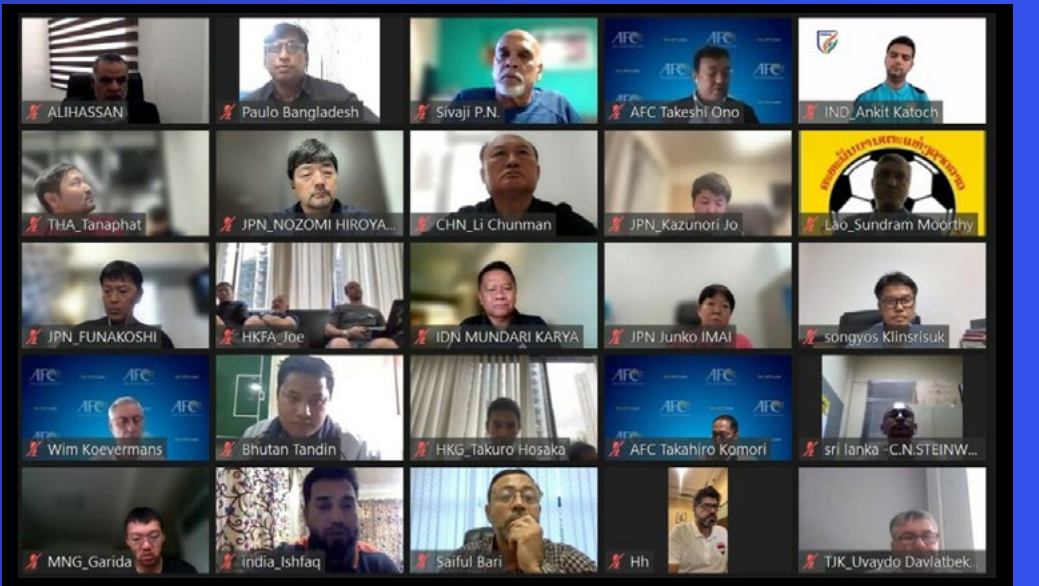
2nd AFC Elite Youth Special Online Session 2024 – Talent-to-Top Process (October 3, 2024)

The second session, held on October 3, 2024, focused on the transition of youth players from academy systems to professional football. Titled “Talent-to-Top Process”, this event brought together 100 participants from 41 AFC MAs and featured presentations from two prestigious European institutions: European Club Association (ECA) and SL Benfica Academy.

ECA’s Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) Strategy: Pouya Yaghoubinia, ECA Football Development Manager, and Diederik Dewaele, ECA Director of Football, presented the ECA’s LTPD strategy, which focuses on a sustainable model for developing players. The case studies of elite clubs such as AFC Ajax FC, RSC Anderlecht and Arsenal FC highlighted the importance of creating structured, long-term development pathways to cultivate top-tier talent.

SL Benfica Academy’s Methodologies: Pedro Mil Homens, Director of SL Benfica Academy, provided a deep dive into the club’s youth development philosophy. Benfica’s academy has produced some of Europe’s top talents, including Bernardo Silva, Ruben Dias and Joao Felix. The academy’s

emphasis on holistic player development—focusing not only on technical skills but also on character building, discipline, and psychological readiness—was explored.



AFC'S ACTIVITIES IN ELITE YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

4.2 AFC Special Elite Youth Football Awards 2024

The AFC Special Elite Youth Football Awards 2024 took place on November 12, honouring MAs' efforts in nurturing the talent of the future stars of Asian football.

Taking place on the sidelines of the 3rd AFC Women's Football Conference, the 2024 edition of the awards saw Japan's Nozomi Hiroyama and Miyo Okamoto recognised as the Youth Coach of the Year (Male) and (Female) respectively while the Prince Takamado U-15 Regional League won the Youth League of the Year title.

Vietnam's PVF Academy was bestowed with the accolade of Youth Academy of the Year (Boys) while China PR's Suzhou Football Center was awarded the Youth Academy of the Year (Girls).

Youth Coach of the Year (Male): Nozomi Hiroyama

Since hanging up his boots in 2012, Nozomi Hiroyama, who during his playing days enjoyed stints in both Europe and South America, has remained committed to the growth of youth football in Japan.

At the helm of the JFA Academy Fukushima from 2014 to 2018, the former midfielder played a pivotal role in solidifying the institution's reputation as a benchmark for youth development on the Continent.

In 2019, Hiroyama turned his focus toward nurturing talent across Japan's various age-group national teams. As assistant coach of the U17 national team, he guided the young Samurai to remarkable achievements, including successfully defending the AFC U17 Asian Cup™ title in 2023, a Round of 16 finish at the FIFA U-17 World Cup Indonesia 2023 and winning the International Dream Cup in 2024.



AFC'S ACTIVITIES IN ELITE YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT



Youth Coach of the Year (Female): Miyo Okamoto

A former midfielder, Miyo Okamoto served as an assistant coach across Japan's age-group women's national teams before being appointed head coach of Thailand's senior and U20 women's national teams where she guided the War Elephants to a silver medal finish at the Southeast Asian Games in 2021.

Known for her innovative tactics, Okamoto returned to Japan as the assistant coach of the U20 women's national team in 2023.

Under her guidance, the young Nadeshiko went on to finish as runners-up at the AFC U20 Women's Asian Cup™ Uzbekistan 2024 before also reaching the final of the FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup in Colombia a few months later.

Youth Academy of the Year (Boys): PVF Academy

The academy first received a three-star membership under the AFC Elite Youth Scheme in 2020 which was renewed earlier this year thanks to the institution's stellar efforts to provide talented youth footballers in the country with the best resources for them to hone their skills.

Boasting a wide array of facilities, including a mini stadium, multiple grass as well as artificial football pitches, a gymnasium, and medical and rehabilitation rooms, the PVF Academy puts a great deal of emphasis on creating an environment where youngsters remain on their educational journey and also participate in extra-curricular activities such as music and language lessons, ensuring their development as well-rounded individuals.

Currently housing 150 youth footballers, the academy has consistently supplied players for the Vietnamese national youth teams, with as many as six players participating in the AFC U17 Asian Cup™ Saudi Arabia 2025 Qualifiers.

Youth Academy of the Year (Girls): Suzhou Football Center

Since its formation in 2022, the Suzhou Football Center has quickly established itself as a premier institution for developing the talent of elite youth female footballers in China PR.

Co-founded by the Chinese Football Association (CFA) and the Suzhou Government, the academy functions as a national youth training hub and has organised training camps for almost 500 players in various age groups, while also hosting multiple workshops for regional coaches.

In line with the CFA's philosophy, the Suzhou Football Center collaborates with several local schools to ensure that the enrolled young girls not only receive the highest standards of football training but also adequate academic support.

Alongside dedicated coaching staff, the academy provides excellent facilities, ranging from fully-equipped gymnasiums and pitches exclusively reserved for elite youth teams to regular medical checkups and the presence of full-time doctors for each team. The academy has witnessed incredible growth with more than 100 elite female players scouted to provincial teams, professional clubs and national teams across age groups.

Youth League of the Year: Prince Takamado Trophy U-15 Regional League

Established by the JFA in 2008, the Prince Takamado Trophy U-15 Regional League has over 7000 registered teams in the U15 category, with 170 of them participating in regional leagues who have qualified through playoffs.

Taking place all year round, the league culminates in a national championship featuring the best 32 sides, ensuring a high level of competition.

Involving teams from junior high schools and youth clubs from across nine regions, the Prince Takamado Trophy U-15 Regional League works in close cooperation with local Football Associations of the JFA, facilitating operational stability and broad participation.



MA’S GOOD PRACTICES IN ELITE YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

AUSTRALIA

5.1 Football Australia Academy: Shaping the Future of Australian Football

In 2024, Football Australia introduced a groundbreaking initiative—the Football Australia Academy—designed to foster the development of Australia’s next generation of elite footballers and coaches. This new academy programme is aligned with Football Australia’s Player and Coach Development Pathways, ensuring that Australia’s football ecosystem not only produces world-class players but also equips coaches with the skills needed to guide them.

A New Vision for Football Development in Australia

The Football Australia Academy is an ambitious three-tier programme aimed at identifying and developing young players from Metropolitan, Regional and Rural areas across Australia. With a focus on enhancing technical skills, tactical understanding and high-performance behaviours, the academy strives to nurture a generation of players who embody Australia’s unique style and footballing philosophy.

The programme’s core objective is to create a football environment that supports the growth of both players and coaches, ensuring that Australia remains competitive on the global stage. By focusing on holistic development—on and off the pitch—the academy is designed to provide opportunities for young talent to excel in the sport.



MA'S GOOD PRACTICES IN ELITE YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

AUSTRALIA



Pilot Programme: Laying the Foundation

In its inaugural year, the Football Australia Academy will operate as a pilot programme, in collaboration with Football South Australia, Football Tasmania, Football Victoria, and Football West. This initial phase is critical for testing the programme’s effectiveness and refining the structure before a full national rollout.

The pilot will involve extensive planning and recruitment of both players and coaching staff, with preparations for the 2025 winter season now underway. A key focus of the programme is ensuring off-field development, which is equally as important as on-field performance. The aim is for the pilot to provide valuable insights into how to continuously improve the academy’s offerings.

Building on Existing Pathways

The academy forms part of Football Australia’s broader technical strategy to enhance the football landscape in Australia. By addressing key areas like technical skills, tactical awareness and high-performance behaviours, the academy aims to provide players with the necessary foundation to compete at the highest level. Moreover, ensuring access to qualified and experienced coaches is paramount throughout a player’s development journey.

The academy integrates seamlessly with other major components of Australia’s football development structure, including the FIFA Talent Development Scheme (TDS), the National Youth Championships (NYC), and the U17 Boys and Girls National Teams. These pathways ensure that talented players are identified and provided with opportunities to advance to the elite levels of the game.

A Flexible and Collaborative Approach

Given the diverse needs of Football Australia’s Member Federations, the academy is designed to be flexible and adaptable. With varying numbers of players and geographical challenges across the country, the academy is tailored to fit the unique circumstances of each region. By working closely with local federations, Football Australia aims to create the best possible environment for developing elite footballers at every level.

Importantly, this collaborative approach extends to coaching development. Aspiring coaches will receive ongoing mentorship and support throughout their career journey, ensuring that Australia’s footballing talent is nurtured by knowledgeable and skilled professionals.

Long-Term Strategy and Global Opportunities

The introduction of the Football Australia Academy represents a long-term vision to elevate the country’s football standing globally. As part of its commitment to technical excellence, the academy will play a vital role in ensuring that Australia produces players who can compete and succeed at the highest international levels.

With the FIFA Under-17 World Cups now set to be hosted annually for both boys and girls over the next five years, the academy offers young players a vital opportunity to showcase their talents on the global stage. The National Youth Championships also play a crucial role, providing a platform for emerging stars to be identified for selection into the Junior National Teams.

Creating a Sustainable Football Future

As part of its broader football development strategy, Football Australia is committed to laying the groundwork for a sustainable and competitive football future. The Football Australia Academy is a foundational step toward building a world-class environment for youth development, ensuring that the next generation of footballers has the opportunities and support to thrive both domestically and internationally.

Through this programme, Football Australia aims to create pathways that will not only produce world-class players but also contribute to the growth of the sport across the nation. Ultimately, the Football Australia Academy will be a cornerstone of the country’s ambitions to compete, win, and thrive on the global football stage.



MA'S GOOD PRACTICES IN ELITE YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

CHINA PR

5.2 An approach to enhancing elite youth football in the vast and diverse nation of China PR

The Current Landscape of Elite Youth Football Training in China PR: A Vision of Growth

Over the past few years, China PR's football scene has undergone a notable transformation, particularly in youth development. What once seemed like a distant dream is now rapidly becoming a reality as the country invests heavily in the future of the sport.

Government Commitment and Investment: The Chinese government has demonstrated a clear commitment to the growth of football, with strategic policies aimed at improving the infrastructure and resources available to young players. These initiatives are already setting the stage for a new era of football in China PR, with plans for continued investment in youth training programmes, grassroots development, and professional league reforms.

A Focus on Youth Development: In recent years, the emphasis on youth football has intensified, with efforts directed at building a solid foundation for the future. The development of grassroots coaching programmes, international partnerships, and increased opportunities for young players are just a few examples of how China PR is strengthening its youth football system.

Advancing Coaching Standards: The Chinese Football Association (CFA) has made significant strides in enhancing the quality of youth coaching. Through a variety of specialised courses, including the Elite Youth Coaches Training Course and Youth Technical Directors Course, the CFA is ensuring that coaches have the knowledge and skills required to nurture young talent to its fullest potential.

Creating Opportunities through Competition: One of the core components of youth development is competition. China PR has established a dynamic competition system that provides young players from schools, sports academies and amateur clubs with the opportunity to compete in structured environments. This system promotes not only the physical development of players but also their mental resilience.



The CFA's Strategy for Accelerating Elite Youth Football Development

The CFA is implementing a comprehensive strategy to accelerate the development of elite youth football in China PR. This vision is designed to position the country as a global contender in the footballing world by investing in young talent and creating a robust, sustainable framework.

A Comprehensive Talent Development System: At the heart of the CFA's strategy is the creation of a scientific and thorough talent development system. This system is designed to identify and cultivate top-tier talent from an early age, ensuring that young players have the necessary support and opportunities to develop their skills and reach their full potential.

Expanding Football in Schools: The CFA is working to integrate football into the national education system, making it a central part of physical education programmes across schools. This initiative aims to inspire the next generation of players and encourage more children to develop a passion for the game from an early age.

Leveraging Professional Resources in Schools: A significant component of this initiative is the introduction of professional football resources into schools. This approach will ensure that students have access to expert coaches, modern training facilities and high-quality education in the sport, creating a seamless pathway from school-based learning to elite development.

Strengthening Community Involvement: The CFA also recognises the importance of community involvement in football development. By encouraging local communities to invest in football programmes, the CFA is helping to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for young players to thrive.

Supporting Amateur Youth Clubs: In addition to professional academies, the CFA is fostering the growth of amateur youth clubs. This expansion is designed to provide additional opportunities for young players to gain experience and refine their skills, ensuring that every player has access to a variety of developmental pathways.

Enhancing the Competition Structure: A key part of the CFA's strategy is enhancing the youth competition system, providing more opportunities for players to challenge themselves in competitive environments. This approach is designed to push young players to reach new heights, improving their skills and enhancing their overall development.

Clear Pathways to Success: The CFA is working to create clear and accessible pathways for young players to progress in their football careers. With well-defined development programmes and support structures, talented players will have the opportunity to rise through the ranks and make a lasting impact in the sport.

Building a Strong Support System: Behind every successful player is a strong support team. The CFA is focused on strengthening the network of technical and support staff, ensuring that players receive the guidance they need to succeed at every stage of their development.



MA'S GOOD PRACTICES IN ELITE YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

CHINA PR



The Key Cities Project: A New Era for Elite Youth Football

The Key Cities Project is a bold and innovative initiative aimed at transforming selected cities into hubs of elite youth football development. These cities are set to become the cornerstones of China PR's footballing future, playing a pivotal role in shaping the next generation of football talent.

World-Class Infrastructure: At the core of the Key Cities Project is the development of world-class football facilities. These cities are being equipped with state-of-the-art training fields and football complexes, providing young players with the best possible environments to train and hone their skills.

Educating Tomorrow's Coaches: The Key Cities Project is also focused on developing a new generation of football coaches. Through specialised training programmes, these cities are nurturing coaches who bring both

international perspectives and advanced coaching techniques to their youth teams. These coaches will be instrumental in guiding young players to reach their full potential.

Innovative Scouting Systems: A more systematic and transparent scouting system is being introduced to identify and support emerging talent. This approach ensures that no promising player goes unnoticed and that they are provided with the appropriate resources for their growth and development.

International Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing: The Key Cities Project emphasises the importance of international collaboration, encouraging exchanges with footballing powerhouses around the world. By adopting the best practices from global leaders in football, these cities will be able to raise the standard of youth development in China PR.

Promoting School Football: In these key cities, football will be embedded into the fabric of the school system, helping to cultivate a broader football culture and encouraging more children to participate in the sport. This initiative will not only increase the talent pool but also build a deep-rooted passion for football across the country.

Building a Comprehensive Youth League System: To complement these efforts, the project is working on establishing a robust youth league system, providing young players with regular opportunities to compete and improve. This league system will allow them to gain valuable match experience and continue their development in a competitive setting.

Creating a Football Culture: The Key Cities Project is also focused on fostering a strong football culture, where the sport becomes an integral part of daily life. By creating an environment where football is celebrated and supported, these cities will become the epicentres of China PR's footballing future.

Holistic Development of Youth Players: The Key Cities Project understands that player development goes beyond football. These cities are committed to providing a well-rounded approach that balances athletic training with academic education and personal growth, ensuring that young players develop into well-rounded individuals.

Harnessing Technology for Player Development: The project will also embrace the use of technology, such as data analysis and sports science, to optimise training and competition. By using cutting-edge tools, the Key Cities Project will be able to track progress and enhance training efficiency, ensuring that every player reaches their full potential.

Sustaining Long-Term Growth: Sustained investment and strategic planning are essential for the long-term success of the Key Cities Project. With careful management and consistent support, the project will continue to drive the development of youth football in China PR for years to come.



MA'S GOOD PRACTICES IN ELITE YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

CHINA PR

Suzhou Youth Football Academy: Leading the Way in Women's Football Development

The Suzhou Youth Football Academy is making significant contributions to the growth of women's football in China PR, shaping the future of the sport for female players.

Building a Strong Foundation for Female Talent: Suzhou's commitment to developing female football talent has resulted in the establishment of a world-class training environment. With a dedicated technical and management team, the academy offers a comprehensive approach to developing young female footballers, providing them with the tools and resources they need to succeed.

Innovative Talent Identification: The academy has implemented a structured, multi-tiered talent identification system. Through scouting, training camps and ongoing development programmes, Suzhou ensures that the most promising young female players are identified early and given the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Long-Term Development Focus: The Suzhou Youth Football Academy places great emphasis on the long-term development of both players and coaches. This focus on sustainability ensures that the academy's influence on women's football in China PR will continue to grow, nurturing future generations of female football stars.

Overcoming Challenges and Ensuring Long-Term Success

As China PR embarks on this ambitious journey to develop elite youth football, there are important factors to consider for ensuring continued progress:

Aligning Vision and Strategy: Ensuring that all stakeholders share a unified vision for youth football development is essential for success. By aligning objectives and strategies, China PR is positioning itself to create a cohesive, powerful footballing system.

Building Balanced Football Environments: With continued investment in infrastructure and resources, China PR is working to create more balanced football environments across its vast regions, ensuring that talent can be developed at all levels.

Ensuring Sustainability: The long-term success of youth football development relies on consistent support, both financially and structurally.

Strategic planning and sustained investment are key to ensuring that the progress made is not only maintained but continuously enhanced.

Effective Policy Implementation: For the national vision to come to fruition, effective implementation of policies at every level is crucial. With a focus on clear execution, China PR is setting the stage for the sustained growth and success of youth football.



MA’S GOOD PRACTICES IN ELITE YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT



5.3 The UAE Football Association’s Center of Excellence: Developing the Next Generation of Football Talent

In recent years, the UAE Football Association (UAE FA) has made a significant investment in the future of football by establishing the State Centers of Excellence. These centres serve as a specialised platform for nurturing and developing the next generation of football stars, using world-class training methods designed by the national team staff. From early talent identification to elite player selection, the Centers are playing a key role in shaping the future of UAE football.

Focused Training with a National Team Edge

At the heart of the State Centers of Excellence is a training programme that’s both comprehensive and highly focused. Implemented by the national team coaching staff, this high-end programme aims to maximise the potential of young players by enhancing their footballing skills and knowledge. The training is not just about technical proficiency but also about understanding the playing philosophy and tactics of the national team, ensuring that the transition to higher levels of competition is smooth and seamless.

Starting Early: The Key to Success

The importance of early player development cannot be overstated, and the UAE FA recognises this by starting training programmes for players as young as eight. By investing in talent development from a young age, the UAE FA ensures that young players have a strong foundation in football. The programme provides these young athletes with the tools they need to succeed, both on and off the pitch, and sets them on the path to potentially representing their country at various age levels.

Nurturing Future Stars: Scouting and Selection

One of the standout features of the State Centers of Excellence is the emphasis on talent identification. The UAE FA’s scouting system works tirelessly to discover the best young footballing talent from across the country. Players between the ages of 10 and 16 are regularly invited to participate in competitive matches, where their skills and potential are

evaluated. Those who stand out are selected for the UAE FA’s Elite Selection Teams, where they can continue their development and potentially progress into the national team.

With five State Centers of Excellence strategically located in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Fujairah and Northern Emirates, the UAE FA ensures that no talented player is left undiscovered. Each centre has an average of 15 to 20 players per category, and the selection pool is continually updated based on ongoing scouting efforts. These players are not only trained but also given the opportunity to compete against other elite players, providing a competitive edge that is crucial for their development.

Building a Strong Network: Clubs and Coaches



The UAE FA understands that collaboration with local football clubs and coaches is essential for the success of its talent development programmes. By maintaining constant communication with clubs, the State Centers of Excellence ensure that players’ workloads, both in training and academic commitments, are carefully managed. This holistic approach makes sure

that young players receive the proper support they need to balance their athletic and academic pursuits, preparing them for a future in professional football.

A Step Towards Representation

The ultimate goal of the State Centers of Excellence is to produce players who can one day represent the UAE national teams. Through a structured pathway, the most talented young athletes have the chance to progress through the various levels of competition, ultimately reaching the national youth teams. The Elite Selection Teams, which have already produced national-level players, serve as a key stepping stone in this journey, and they are regularly updated to reflect the latest scouting findings.

A Glimpse into the Future

Looking ahead to the 2024/2025 season, the UAE FA is set to build upon its successes by expanding the State Centers of Excellence programme even further. New initiatives will focus on improving scouting, offering more competitive opportunities, and setting up new State Centers specifically for girls’ football. The aim is to continue fostering talent in a way that ensures the next generation of players is prepared to take UAE football to new heights.

Insights from Jan Van Winckel, UAE FA Technical Director: Managing Elite Youth Football Development in the UAE

Managing elite youth football development requires a unique approach tailored to the specific challenges and opportunities of each country. My work in the UAE differs from my previous experiences in Belgium and Saudi Arabia. Based on my experience, I focus on the following key points:

1. Leadership and Support

A technical department can only succeed with full backing from the highest levels of the organization. In the UAE, I have been fortunate to receive strong support from the General Secretary, the board, and the President which has been a key factor in implementing programmes and achieving success in elite youth development.



MA'S GOOD PRACTICES IN ELITE YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

UAE

2. Club-Centric Player Development

Player development should mainly happen at the club level, not within national teams. While national teams provide international experience, 90% of a player's growth happens in the clubs. The FA must create regulations that help and encourage clubs to focus on developing elite youth players.



Jan Van Winckel, UAE FA Technical Director, attending a coach's briefing session

3. The Role of a Technical Director

The role of a technical director is different from that of a coach. While a coach works with teams on a daily basis, a technical director focuses on the bigger picture. Key priorities include:

a. Grassroots Development

Building a large pool of players is essential. This involves creating new youth leagues and organising football festivals to encourage

early participation and interest in the sport.

b. Quality Training

Elite players need enough training time as well as high-quality coaching. The focus should be on increasing both the quantity and the quality of training. To compete with countries that have more football experience, players should have at least 10 months of club activities each year, including 10 hours of training and matches per week.

We've established centres of excellence, inviting players aged 10-15 to the FA thrice a month. Around 80 players per age group are selected who compete in regional matches, such as Dubai vs. Abu Dhabi. This allows us to identify top talent early and track their progress.

We also have the Young Whites programme, which focuses on the 25 best players between 14 and 18 years old and helps them prepare for the national team.

c. Youth League Structures

Youth leagues should be organised at different levels to give players the experience they need to grow. We've introduced regulations to encourage youth development, like removing classifications for players under 11 years old and promoting small-sided games that give players more chances to touch the ball and understand the game.

d. Coach Education

Improving coaching standards is crucial. We focus on better education programmes and aim to limit the number of underqualified foreign coaches. Retaining and developing local coaches is key to long-term football growth. I spend a lot of time working with local coaches because this is essential for sustainable football development.

4. Comprehensive Development Across All Age Groups

Development should focus on all age groups, not just those playing in international tournaments. The FIFA U-17 World Cup is a great example of how countries can develop players across multiple age brackets.

In the UAE, we've created national B teams for players who are still developing or may mature later. These "Future" teams regularly compete against our national teams or regional teams, providing more opportunities for players to gain experience.



MA'S GOOD PRACTICES IN ELITE YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

JORDAN

5.4 Elite Youth Football Development in Jordan: Empowering the Future of Asian Football

Jordan has been making significant strides in the world of football, not only through the remarkable performances of its senior team but also through its comprehensive youth development system. The country's investment in elite youth football is paying off, with the future of Asian football being shaped by the rising stars from Jordan's structured youth programmes.

Impact on AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023™ Performance

The tangible impact of Jordan's elite youth player development system was evident in the national team's exceptional run in the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023™, where they finished as runners-up. Key players such as Yazan Al Naimat and Mousa Al Tamari, products of Jordan's youth academies, were central to the team's success, highlighting the direct correlation between strong youth development and national team performance.

More than 60% of the senior squad at the AFC Asian Cup™ were graduates of the Jordan Football Association (JFA) youth programmes. This impressive statistic speaks volumes about the quality and consistency of the country's youth development pipeline. The rise of these young players is a testament to the JFA's commitment to fostering tactical acumen, physical resilience and mental toughness from a young age.

Strategies to Accelerate Youth Football Development

The JFA is focused on creating a sustainable ecosystem for football development through various strategic initiatives. These include:

- **Integrated Youth Schemes:** Aligning youth academies with the national football philosophy ensures a cohesive development pathway for players, bridging the gap between grassroots programmes and elite-level football.
- **Strategic Collaborations:** Partnerships with international football organizations provide opportunities to integrate global best practices into youth development programmes, enhancing their effectiveness and impact.
- **Leveraging Technology and Analytics:** The JFA uses video analysis and performance tracking systems to enhance training effectiveness and support evidence-based player development.
- **Coaching Education:** By modernising coaching curricula and offering specialised programmes, the JFA ensures that coaches are equipped to develop the next generation of football talent.
- **Elite Youth Leagues:** Increasing competitive opportunities through a robust league structure for U19, U17 and U15 age groups promotes skill development in a competitive environment.

Key Programmes and Initiatives

Jordan's approach to elite youth football development is multifaceted, focusing on playing philosophy, talent pathways and strategic collaborations.

- **Playing Philosophy:** The JFA has worked tirelessly to establish a unified football identity that emphasises teamwork, discipline and technical mastery, ensuring consistency across the development pathway.
- **Youth Academies Initiative:** Over a three-year period, the JFA has partnered with 12 youth academies, providing educational support and collaborating with high-level programmes to elevate standards and foster knowledge exchange.
- **High-Performance Training Camps:** Regular domestic and international training camps expose players to diverse playing styles, preparing them for competitive challenges at the highest levels.
- **Technology and Analytics:** Dedicated units for physical performance



MA'S GOOD PRACTICES IN ELITE YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

JORDAN



Statement by Mr. Alexander, Technical Director of the JFA:

The Jordan Football Association is unwavering in its commitment to advancing the development of elite youth football in Jordan. Over the years, we have diligently built a comprehensive framework to identify and nurture young talent, preparing them for the rigours of both regional and international competitions. The success we've seen, exemplified by the achievements of our youth graduates in the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023™, stands as a testament to the effectiveness of our strategies and programmes.

However, youth development is about more than just producing exceptional players. It is about shaping young individuals who embrace the values of teamwork, resilience and discipline, both on and off the pitch. Through strategic partnerships, innovative programmes and a relentless focus on our long-term vision, we are determined to elevate Jordan's stature in the global football community. Our goal is to inspire the next generation to pursue their dreams with passion, dedication and unwavering commitment.

We are honoured to contribute to the AFC Elite Youth Bulletin, which provides an invaluable platform for MAs to share knowledge and experiences, fostering collective growth and excellence across Asia. As we continue to push the boundaries of our efforts, we look forward to collaborating closely with the AFC and our fellow MAs to achieve our shared vision for the future of youth football.

and sports psychology provide holistic support for players, while technologies optimise match analysis and player tracking.

Managing Challenges and Ensuring Sustainability

Despite the challenges posed by Jordan's socio-economic and geopolitical context, the JFA has developed innovative solutions to continue the growth of its elite youth football programmes:

- **Maximising Resources:** Strategic partnerships and sponsorships help bridge funding gaps, allowing the JFA to invest in youth development.
- **Local Talent Utilisation:** By nurturing homegrown coaching talent, the JFA reduces its dependency on foreign expertise, further strengthening its local football infrastructure.
- **Community Engagement:** Grassroots initiatives promote football at the community level, ensuring a sustainable pipeline of young players.

Future Expectations and Goals

Looking ahead, the JFA has ambitious goals for the future of elite youth football in the country. These include:

- **Increased Representation in AFC Competitions:** Consistently producing players who excel at continental levels, ensuring Jordan's continued success in international competitions.
- **Global Recognition:** Earning accolades for its developmental programmes and contributing to the growth of Asian football.
- **Sustainability:** Ensuring the long-term success and sustainability of youth programmes through strategic investments and ongoing stakeholder engagement.



6.1 JFA Academy Fukushima Girl’s (Japan) –
Elevating the Next Wave of Women’s Football
in Japan

As the world of football continues to evolve, the JFA Academy Fukushima stands as a beacon of excellence in Japan’s efforts to cultivate elite talent. Founded by the Japan Football Association (JFA), this institution isn’t just about producing football stars – it’s about shaping well-rounded leaders who will excel on and off the pitch, both in football and in society.

The Motivation Behind the Academy

At its core, the JFA Academy Fukushima was established to tackle a critical issue in Japan’s society: the absence of strong leadership and decision-making skills. As Japan faces a shortage of leaders who can make bold, confident decisions, the academy aims to fill this gap by nurturing young athletes who not only possess the technical prowess required for elite football but also have the ability to lead with integrity, both on the field and in their communities.

“Our goal is to create individuals who can excel globally, make positive contributions, and act with unwavering confidence, whether they’re playing football in Japan or anywhere else in the world,” says a representative of the JFA Academy. By offering a comprehensive programme that integrates football training with human education, the academy aims to cultivate talent that will thrive in any environment, not just in the sport.

Developing Future Football Leaders

The academy’s philosophy is based on long-term development, focusing on both technical skills and the human aspect of education. This dual approach seeks to create athletes who are technically sound but also equipped with leadership qualities that will allow them to shine as global citizens.

“Our objective is to develop players who not only perform at the world’s level but also become future leaders in society, even beyond football,” explains the academy representative. This holistic approach ensures that players are prepared for life after football, empowering them to make lasting impacts in their communities and the wider world.



* Credit to (C)JFA on for the photos



Elevating Women’s Football in Japan

For women’s football, in particular, the academy’s role has become increasingly significant. While Japan has a rich history in women’s football, the infrastructure for elite youth development is still catching up in some areas. The JFA Academy Fukushima aims to change that by providing a nurturing environment where emerging female talent can flourish.

The academy serves as a critical platform for discovering and developing hidden talents who might otherwise go unnoticed. With a focus on creating high-quality training environments, the academy hopes to produce as many players for the Japanese women’s national team, Nadeshiko Japan, as possible. At the same time, it strives to become a model for the development of female football players in Japan, providing guidance and support to U15 and U18 teams across the country.

“Through the academy, we aim to nurture players who can excel not only on the field but also in the wider world of sports and society,” the representative adds. “The presence of the academy at J-Village, Japan’s national training centre, also strengthens our efforts to enhance the quality of coaching throughout the country.”

A Growing Legacy: From the Academy to Nadeshiko Japan

The academy’s impact on Japan’s women’s national teams is undeniable. Since its inception, the JFA Academy Fukushima has produced players who have gone on to represent Nadeshiko Japan, with 14 academy graduates making it to the senior national team. In addition, players from the academy have been consistently selected for Japan’s U16/17 and U19/20 teams, with a total of 25 players representing the U19/20 national teams and 44 in the U16/17 category.

The 2024 selection of two current academy players for Nadeshiko Japan marked another milestone in the academy’s ongoing success. With the steady flow of talent making its way into the national teams, the JFA Academy Fukushima has proven itself to be an indispensable part of Japan’s women’s football ecosystem.



* Credit to (C)JFA on for the photos

Looking Ahead: A Vision for the Future

As the academy enters its next phase, it continues to grow and evolve. With seven academy players representing Japan in this year’s Olympic Games, the spotlight on the JFA Academy Fukushima has never been brighter. The academy is now tasked with expanding its influence and improving its programme even further.

“In the next three years, we aim to continually refine our programme, keeping up with global trends, and ensuring we remain at the forefront of youth football development,” says the academy’s representative. “Our responsibility is to provide a strong foundation for the next generation of players, coaches, and leaders. By focusing on both the individual and team development, we are confident we will continue to produce world-class athletes.”

With its emphasis on nurturing talent, leadership, and global standards, the JFA Academy Fukushima is poised to play an even more pivotal role in shaping the future of women’s football in Japan and beyond. As more players emerge from the academy’s ranks and make their mark on the international stage, its legacy of excellence will only continue to grow, helping to elevate Japan’s position as a powerhouse in women’s football.

A New Era for Women’s Football in Japan

The JFA Academy Fukushima isn’t just a place for young players to hone their skills; it’s a springboard for future leaders. By blending top-tier football training with personal development, the academy is creating the next generation of athletes who will inspire and lead both on and off the field. As it continues to expand its reach and influence, the academy will remain a crucial pillar of Japan’s drive to enhance its women’s football programme and elevate the status of female athletes globally.



6.2 Aspire Academy (Qatar): Nurturing Qatar’s Emerging Football Stars

Nestled in the heart of Qatar’s Aspire Zone, the Aspire Academy stands as a beacon of excellence in sports development. Founded in 2004, this world-class institution has made it its mission to scout, nurture and develop Qatari talent, particularly in football, while offering secondary school education to its students.

A Philosophy Built for Success

At the core of the Aspire Academy’s football programme lies a distinctive philosophy that emphasises more than just technical skill. The academy’s vision goes beyond the basics, focusing on developing “game intelligence” — the ability to understand the game in all its nuances. The academy believes that a player’s success depends not only on their individual talents but also on their tactical awareness, physical readiness and mental fortitude.

Aspire’s coaching staff cultivates an environment where players are encouraged to think critically, adapt to changing game scenarios, and take responsibility for their roles within the team. From day one, students are trained to be proactive, aggressive and dominant on the pitch, ensuring that they’re always in control of the game.

A Structured Path to Excellence

The academy’s football programme is meticulously designed to cater to the evolving needs of young players. With age groups spanning from Under-13 to Under-18, the Aspire Academy takes a tailored approach to training, focusing on the individual’s biological rather than chronological age. The football programme is divided into two yearly training blocks, providing a clear and progressive pathway for players as they develop. The academy’s teams are structured into:

- Feeder Teams (U9-U12): Where the foundation of technical skills, tactical understanding, and physical development are laid.
- Aspire Academy Teams (U13-U18): These teams represent the next level, with players further refining their abilities and preparing for potential selection to national teams or professional clubs.

Shaping Qatar’s National Teams

The Aspire Academy’s role in shaping Qatar’s footballing future cannot be overstated. The academy collaborates closely with the Qatar Football Association (QFA) and the Qatar Stars League (QSL), playing a central role in the development of the country’s youth national teams. Today, nearly every player in Qatar’s U17 and U19/U20 national teams is either a current or former Aspire Academy student.

Aspire’s influence extends to the senior level as well. An impressive 18% of the players in Qatar’s 2014 FIFA World Cup qualification squad were Aspire graduates—an extraordinary achievement considering the academy had been in operation for less than a decade at that time. This remarkable success highlights the academy’s ability to consistently produce world-class talent capable of competing on the international stage.



The Future of Football in Qatar

Aspire Academy is more than just a training ground for footballers. It is a visionary institution that has set the standard for sports development in the region. By providing young athletes with world-class facilities, expert coaching and a holistic education, Aspire Academy is shaping the future of Qatari football. With the academy’s continued commitment to developing homegrown talent, it’s clear that the next generation of Qatari football stars is already on its way to greatness.



Remarks courtesy of Aspire Academy:

1. **What is the motivation behind the establishment of Aspire Academy?**

Rather than motivation, I would refer to it as a vision—one that encompasses the identification and development of talent, fostering individual profiles and personalities, and cultivating awareness of the demands of high-performance sports. These elements form the foundation of what the Aspire Academy aims to achieve. It’s not simply about desire; it’s about strategic preparation, questioning established norms and confronting the challenges posed by high-level competition. This approach shapes the essence of the Academy and drives its mission forward.

2. **What can be expected from the academy in the development of elite youth football?**

The Aspire Academy offers a comprehensive, results-driven programme focused on high-performance standards. We apply a dynamic, participatory and transparent methodology to identify and develop footballers who are capable of competing at the highest levels. This process ensures that the players selected will not only represent the Aspire Academy but also make meaningful contributions to Qatar’s national teams, continuing to build on our presence in both regional and international competitions.

3. **What is your plan to implement and improve the academy over the next three years?**

This is not a short-term plan, but rather a long-term project we have been carefully crafting for years. Our focus is on equipping the Qatar national teams with players who embody modern football profiles—well-rounded, technically sound and adaptable to the evolving demands of the game. We approach this with consistency, foresight and ongoing dedication. The results speak for themselves, as we’ve seen an increasing representation of Aspire Academy players in national team call-ups and club teams, both locally and internationally.

4. **How do you evaluate the impact of elite youth player development on the successful performance of the senior national team in international competitions?**

The development of youth players is central to our approach, with a focus on cultivating the right player profiles early on. The Academy’s early-stage programmes prepare players for their transition into elite-level football, ensuring they grow and mature both on and off the pitch. This focus has led to a noticeable increase in the number of Aspire Academy players making an impact at club level, as well as in European football projects. Most importantly, we see more of our graduates being called up to the national team, where they are contributing significantly to Qatar’s performance in international competitions.



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