



# COACHES CIRCLE

KEEPING COACHES IN ASIA UP TO DATE WITH TECHNICAL NEWS AND DEVELOPMENTS



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**THE BIG INTERVIEW WITH** ▶  
**GRAHAM ARNOLD**

## A GAME OF EMOTIONS

Andy Roxburgh, AFC Technical Director

During the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar, Saudi Arabia caused a sensation by beating Argentina 2-1 in the opening game in Group C. Speaking at a recent FIFA National Coaches Forum, Argentinian coach Lionel Scaloni reflected on the situation that his team faced. 'We had stressful days after the loss to Saudi, but we quickly turned the page and focused on our preparations for the next game, which was against Mexico. With emotions running high in the Saudi game, we were reminded that when a game becomes chaotic, you need to remain calm and keep your composure.'

The Argentinian team showed great resilience; recovered from their initial set back; and went on to win the World Cup in a tension-filled Final against France, where mental strength was a key component in a contest overflowing with drama.

In recent years, emotions in football have become a key subject for discussion and the AFC has taken the initiative by creating a working group with a remit to promote and develop the topic for inclusion into MA coach education programmes. AFC President, Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa, fully supports the Confederation's ambition. As he said at the outset of the project: "Football is an emotional game and the ability to control your emotions and to express yourself in a positive way is fundamental for the success of the individual and the team. It is our



duty to support Asian coaches and players in this vital aspect of their development.”

There are two target groups for the working group: Firstly, Pro-level student coaches because, to be successful, elite



coaches need to understand their own emotions and those of their players. Secondly, grassroots coaches who have the task of helping young people deal with their emotions and improve their ability to relate to others.

To aid our understanding of this key aspect of football, we have appointed two pilot MAs to help us with research and the initial implementation of practical work. The Japanese FA and the Qatar FA were happy to join us on this journey. The former has already introduced the topic into its various coaching courses, while the latter further develops its frontline youth coaches who are based at the renowned Aspire Academy. (The Coach Education Conference article which appears later in this publication provides more details about these developments).

An original member of the Emotions-In-Football Working Group was the late, great Gérard Houllier, the former manager of Liverpool FC, Olympique Lyonnais and France. Although we lost Gérard, he left a legacy of wise counsel, and some great quotes about the importance of emotions in the professional game. For example: “When a player behaves differently, you need to see behind the screen.” This highlights the need to watch and listen when you are responsible for the players under your guidance. Or: “A great player is one who masters, apart from the technical and tactical aspects, everything that’s at stake. A player who can understand and control what’s going on inside himself.” As a leader, the coach must be aware of his/her own emotions and skilful in handling the emotional scenarios of those in their care.

The role of emotions in the game is more in the public domain than ever before, with players and coaches openly declaring their views on the subject. Mikel Arteta, the head coach of Arsenal FC, emphasised the need



**Leadership is the transfer of emotions.**

**Gérard Houllier**



for his team to have their emotions under control when he said: “Arsenal players must learn to control their emotions. When we show frustration, we have to show it in the right way - emotionally, we have to control the situations better.”

Replicating Argentina's World Cup success will not be easy, but AFC's coaching family can learn from the exploits of the top technicians who recognise the value of resilience, of controlling emotions, of professionalism, of desire, of discipline and so on. As Sir Alex Ferguson said: 'It's a very emotional game and expectations are too high.'

Educating coaches and young players to understand their emotions and those of others around them is vital for both football success and for personal well-being. But the last word belongs to AFC General Secretary Datuk Seri Windsor John: “As a footballer or as a coach, technical know-how is not enough. You need to understand your emotions and to behave appropriately in the game. AFC's Emotions in Football project addresses the various aspects of emotional intelligence and offers practical advice for coaches (and their players) at all levels of the game.”

## BELIEF CAN CREATE MIRACLES AND HISTORY

Not many coaches have a street named after them – a merited recompense for a long road in playing and coaching. As a striker, he rattled in goals for home-town Sydney United before leaving for Europe, playing for Roda JC and NAC Breda with, sandwiched between the two Dutch clubs, spells with Belgium's FC Liège and Charleroi followed, in the early days of the J-League, by a season in Japan with Sanfrecce Hiroshima. In the meantime, he was accumulating 19 goals in 56 games for Australia and, not long after hanging up his boots, he was drafted back into the national team set-up as assistant coach and, as right-hand man to Guus Hiddink, heading for the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany where Australia made history by progressing beyond the Group Stage. Stepping up to head coach, he led the senior team through the AFC Asian Cup in 2007, took the U23 to the Olympic Games in 2008; and headed for the FIFA World Cup in 2010 as assistant to Pim Verbeek. His hankering for club coaching then took him to Central Coast Mariners for a successful period that included three seasons in the AFC Champions League. A spell in Japan was followed by three seasons at Sydney FC, where he became the first manager to lift the A-League title with different clubs. 2018 marked his return to the national team in time for the AFC Asian Cup a year later, followed by a bronze medal with the U23s in Thailand in 2020 that earned the Olyroos a berth at the delayed Olympic Games in Tokyo. He then took the senior team to the FIFA World Cup in 2022 via play-off victories over UAE and Peru. In Qatar, Australia progressed beyond the Group Stage for a second time during a campaign that ended with eventual world champions Argentina calling for time as the Socceroos pushed forward for an equaliser. He is the Australia national team manager...



GRAHAM ARNOLD

## LOOKING BACK, HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR PLAYING CAREER HAS INFLUENCED YOUR COACHING?

Passion for the game is important. But even when I was younger, I understood tactics. And I was a good chess player. I was a builder – so you had to plan – before I went into playing. I was very fortunate that I played under some very good coaches. I learned a lot off Eddie Thompson with Football Australia. He was great. Then I went to the Netherlands, and I had some good coaches over there, like Erik Gerets, who were open to discuss tactics with you and, when I look back, I think that some of the people I played with would say that I was ready to question tactics. I always wanted to understand the tactical side of it, but the playing side helped me understand the pressures attached to the game and to coaching. The pressure doesn't bother me at all – in fact I enjoy it. You get asked questions about what you preferred. Being a player or a coach. Playing is pretty much about doing it yourself. But coaching, well, I prefer it to playing because it's about helping people. When you coach teams and see players progress and play in the English Premier League you feel that you've helped some people with their lives. It's very rewarding. I really enjoy the planning – and then seeing it come off. You know, designing the training sessions over weeks and months and then the game plans. There's nothing more satisfying than seeing a game plan work, whereas on the playing side you just focus on your own job even though, as a player, I always wanted the team to win and, as a striker, I never had an issue with chasing back, making tackles near our own box and, you know, doing the dirty work for someone else. I was a hard worker and I never thought of myself as being particularly skilful.



## YOU COME ACROSS AS A VERY OPTIMISTIC PERSON. SOMEONE WHO CAN INFLUENCE OTHERS IN A POSITIVE WAY. IF YOU AGREE WITH THAT ASSESSMENT, HOW DID IT INFLUENCE YOUR MANAGEMENT STYLE?

I remember when I went to the Netherlands and walked into the dressing-room during the first or second week and they were talking about the yearly plan and about getting into the top half. I couldn't agree with that and thought we should always be aiming for the top. It was the same when I went to Japan. The players were very modest in their mindsets as if they were scared to do things. I've always believed in positive values. I've always believed in achieving. You want success but I always think you must be prepared to take risks. I'd rather change things and lose than not change anything and carry on with something that's not working. I think that to get the best out of people your message has to be very positive.

People have said that I don't play with fear. But fear is a word I would never say. I'd never let it into the mindset of the players because it can only be negative. I just set out to be positive about the way we do things, creating a positive mindset and never forgetting to have fun. If we can't enjoy what we're doing when we're playing professional football, then you're not enjoying life. I think the important thing today is to have a mindset that gives you energy – among the players and the staff. Especially the backroom staff. That's where it starts. It starts with the kit man who greets the players with a positive attitude when they go in to get their kit.

## SIR ALEX FERGUSON USED TO TALK ABOUT ABILITY AND NOT ONLY COPING WITH THE ENVIRONMENT BUT ACTUALLY LIKING IT...

You learn from people and I remember one time I was at Manchester United when Sir Alex Ferguson was there. Eddie Thompson got me the chance to go there when I was a young coach and one thing that has stuck with me forever was when he said you could tell the character of a person by the way he plays. You can tell if he's into hard work; you can tell if he's got energy. You don't have to talk to him, just watch how he plays. And Guus Hiddink was another one like that. If he sat in a room, he said he could pick a team based on people's behaviour. That's something I learned from him. He said the louder they are, the more character they have, the more personality they have, the greater the chance you're going to get a performance from them on the pitch. You can see the ones who are solid and the ones who are scared, the ones who can't handle the pressure of big games. The ones with character, he said, are the ones you can bank on – the ones who'll perform every time.

## HOW HAS YOUR APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT EVOLVED SINCE YOUR EXPERIENCES AS A CLUB COACH?

I did my career back-to-front. When I retired, a year or two later I was assistant coach to the national team. Then I went club coaching with the Mariners when I was already 47. In club coaching it was great because I had the knowledge I'd gathered internationally. If I'd done it the other way, maybe things would have been different. But when you're a club coach you become a bit more of a control freak. You have control over the four main issues: technical, tactical, physical, mental. At a club you can work on the players technically, physically you can make them better; tactically you can improve them with your game plans; and mentally you can work on mindsets. In a way, you have to go into reverse because, at the club, mentality might come fourth but, in the national team, the mental part becomes Number One. You can't really work on them technically. They've just got to have it. Physically, they've also got to have it – otherwise you've picked the wrong players! And tactically, you sit every week and watch the players performing at their clubs and then I try to simplify their roles. Instead of having them play my way, I try to get the boys together as a team and encourage them to play their way. I see what they do at weekends and then it's three simple questions, three messages: with and without the ball; what you do with the ball at your club; and what's your precise role. I've got to understand what their existing strengths are, whereas at a club you can work on them yourself. In the national team you don't get the time to coach – you get the time to manage. And then it's about getting the best staff to help with the planning that has to be done to make sure they hit the hotel and the ground running



with everything smooth and ready. I think choosing the right backroom staff is critical. And then you've got to delegate. And trust them like you'd trust your brother. Then you've got their backing and they've got yours to get things done together.

## WHAT TYPE OF PLAYERS DID YOU LOOK FOR WHEN YOU WERE MANAGING THE AGE-LIMIT TEAMS?

Firstly, mentality and work rate. These days, especially, it's essential to work hard because mentalities are changing. Technical quality is important, of course. But

I don't worry too much about the tactical side because they can learn that and, even though people might sometimes regard them as uneducated in that aspect, they're not. So the emphasis is on the technical and physical sides because, these days, the amount of football they have to play is incredible. When I took the boys to the Olympics in Tokyo and we beat Argentina 2-0 in the first game. The second was against Spain and we lost 1-0 in the 82nd minute. The boys had done really well. The third game against Egypt was a no-show. They weren't used to doing it, not just in the physical aspect but when you put the kids – Australian kids especially – on a big stage it's strangely stressful. I think they might feel that they don't belong. Because they're used to watching players from other teams on TV; they know that they're at big clubs. And it's when they're on that stage alongside them that they get their belief that they belong and that they can play against them. It's good. Because once they start believing, the physical side, the technical side...it all comes together.

## TALKING ABOUT THE BIG COMPETITIONS, WHAT WERE YOUR REFLECTIONS AFTER THE WORLD CUP IN QATAR?

First of all, it was a fantastic event. The way the stadiums were set up, the people in the stadiums...everything was incredible. The players were left alone to get on with things. And, for myself, I was incredibly proud of the boys. We were written off at home with people saying we were going to be the first team to be knocked and things like that. But it's all about focusing on why you are doing things and getting the maximum out of your players. The best thing that happened to us was losing 4-1 in our opening game against France. We came into

it with no preparation to speak of and I said afterwards that it was the best friendly match we could have had! We learned that if you make a small mistake against a team like France you pay for it. We had to tidy things up. We got back to the hotel and had a meeting straight away. I was able to go back to the boys and say, 'this is where we're at' and ask if there was anyone in the room who thought we were a better team than France. No one raised a hand to say we were better players. So, we knew we had to use our strong points like fighting spirit and a winning mentality. And we knew that if we used them against Tunisia and beat them, we were still in the competition. So, the important thing is to put the France game in the past, sleep well and recover well. You could see from their faces that they were encouraged. I could have gone in there and told them they were an embarrassment, a disgrace to the nation and so on. But I didn't. And then I focused on picking the staff up. I wanted the players to hear us laughing. I told the staff that if we were down, the team would be down. We picked ourselves up and when we finally went home, we had earned a lot of positive feeling and we'd had a fantastic time. But I don't really like to keep looking back to it. I've torn that page out of my diary! If you keep looking back and saying how great things were, you don't go anywhere.

## BY THE WAY, WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO STAY AT THE ASPIRE ACADEMY WHILE YOU WERE IN QATAR?

Well, it's simply a fantastic facility. Also, we knew that if we stayed in a normal hotel we might be pestered by fans and the players could be distracted by them or by family or by friends. And there were small benefits like not needing to get on a bus to go training. Also we had



I don't think we're far off.

Graham Arnold



all the recovery resources; we set up social areas where the players could have a game of pool, sit together to watch games and so on. And we set up a cafeteria with our own barista to serve proper coffees. It was all so simple to set up. When I heard about how other teams were having to cope with fans and other elements that can be distractions can sap your energy.

## HOW DID YOU DEAL PERSONALLY WITH THE PRESSURES AND EMOTIONS OF BEING THE NATIONAL TEAM COACH AT A WORLD CUP? FOR EXAMPLE, WHAT WERE YOUR FEELINGS AFTER THAT DEFEAT BY FRANCE?

No problem. To be honest, for me the most important thing was the Peru game – the play-off that qualified us. I spoke to Australia's national team coaches of cricket, rugby league, rugby union and they all said that coaching the national team is the most difficult job because of the pressure you're carrying on your shoulders. Guus Hiddink used to tell me it was the same with the Netherlands. When we did our coaching review of the World Cup, I spoke to Gareth Southgate, and he said the same. You've

got the pressure on your shoulders and the passion in your heart, and you just don't want to let the nation down. After that Peru game, it was an amazing feeling to have qualified and, after that, it was about positive thinking and a positive approach to a tournament where nobody expected us to do anything. I regarded it as an opportunity to shock the world. So, I wanted to get that mindset across to the players. It was a belief in what we could do and then getting them on board to do it. We had a short time for preparation, so the important thing was to give them that mindset. As for the personal pressure, I think my playing career and the big games I took part in helped to set me up for this. I sleep well on the night before games; sleep in the afternoon of the game...even



my wife is surprised by how much I sleep! But I think that I wouldn't be able to sleep if I hadn't got the feeling that I'd given it everything I've got. If I'd cut corners or hadn't done the right thing. If things don't work out, OK. But the key is to have no regrets.

## HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE TYPE OF FOOTBALL THAT YOU WANT AUSTRALIA TO PLAY?

Always looking forward, playing forward. The goal is up that end for a reason. And we've got to defend the goal at the other end. But if we can, play forward, run forward, be positive. I like to work on first-touch forward passing, the timing of forward runs in behind and so on. But, from Day One my driving desire was to become the best Soccerroo team in history. That was the reason for the posters on the walls about belief creating miracles or creating history. And it worked. So, it was important that the messaging was right – among the whole staff. What you don't want is for your assistant coach to say something different, then your fitness coach to say something different and so on. That creates confusion. And once you get confusion, you're likely to get frustration and then poor performance.

## THE DRAW HAS BEEN MADE FOR THE AFC ASIAN CUP, WHICH IS THE NEXT OBJECTIVE. WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

The expectation is to win it. Otherwise we don't turn up! At the World Cup we celebrated reaching the last 16. And part of that displeased me. But it made positive waves and if it helps us to find and develop another Harry Kewell



or a Tim Cahill that's fine. I think that if we make the last four we have a right to celebrate. But in the run-up to the AFC Asian Cup, my messaging is that we're going back to Qatar to win it. If your standards or expectations are low, that's what you're going to get. For me, the standards have to be high – in training sessions and in everything we do. If we do that, we have greater chances of getting to the Semi-finals and being successful.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK ASIAN TEAMS NEED TO DO TO BECOME CONTENDERS FOR THE TITLE AT A WORLD CUP?

I don't think we're far off. If you look at the amount of time the leagues in England or Scotland have been played, Asia, by comparison, is still new. When I went to Japan in 1997, the J-League was only two years old. And I remember reading a quote from the JFA at the time saying that by 2050 Japan could win the World Cup. So, I think we're on target. And you see how countries like Qatar and Saudi Arabia are investing in the game and developing kids and you see what other nations are doing in Asia. OK, you've got to get your pathways right to be successful. We can also see that the top leagues in Europe are now investing in Asian players. I would like Asia to be, maybe, a bit different from the rest of the world. I'd like to see age-limit tournaments being played on an annual basis because when you have gaps of two years or more that's when development programmes can fall apart. I'd like to see Asian Cups every year in the 17 to 21 age-bracket because I think that's the crucial development stage for a player. Especially in national teams. Club competitions are becoming more and more commercial so international football can give you the best scenario to develop young players.

## FIFA WORLD CUP REFLECTIONS

### GROUNDS FOR OPTIMISM

Where do we stand on the world stage? That was one of the FAQs at the AFC Coach Education Conference in Kuala Lumpur and the online session for national team coaches. Looking in the rear-view mirror at the FIFA World Cup, there are certainly grounds for optimism. AFC teams posted victories over Germany, Spain, Denmark, Tunisia, Wales, Portugal and the eventual world champions Argentina who, in their opening game, were defeated 2-1 by Hervé Renard's Saudi Arabia, who deserve congratulations for an outstanding performance – and mental resilience in bouncing back in the second half after falling behind to a Leo Messi penalty. Japan were unfortunate to lose a penalty shoot-out against bronze-medallists Croatia. Australia made Argentina fans engage in some serious nail-biting as they fought strongly for an equaliser in the final 20 minutes... Congratulations are due to the three coaches who led their teams out of the Group Stage into the Knockout rounds: Korea Republic's Paulo Bento, Japan's Hajime Moriyasu and Australia's Graham Arnold. The World Cup left a legacy of positive memories – not least Qatar's ability to organise one of the best final tournaments in the history of the competition.



One of the talking points is the value of continuity, bearing in mind that Moriyasu and Arnold are the only names among the AFC's six qualifiers to remain on the same team sheets with Renard, Paulo Bento, Carlos Queiroz (Islamic Republic of Iran) and Félix Sánchez (Qatar) moving to pastures new in the wake of the final tournament.

Among the positives for the AFC teams was their emotional resilience. Arnold and Queiroz had to lift their teams after heavy defeats in their opening fixtures – as the Australia boss mentions in the interview elsewhere in this publication. Rebound mentalities came to the fore in individual matches. Japan came from a goal behind to

beat Spain and Germany 2-1. Korea Republic did likewise against Portugal and then clawed their back from a 2-0 deficit against Ghana, only to concede a third goal shortly after levelling at 2-2. As mentioned earlier, Saudi Arabia came from behind to defeat Argentina.

The champions inevitably have to be regarded as the benchmark for AFC contenders. Lionel Scaloni evidently had top players and a strong all-round squad with high levels of skill under pressure. Of course, he also had Leo Messi. He also managed to create a chameleonic team with enough tactical flexibility to change shape from match to match and within the game, giving them a degree



Every player's dream is to play in the Champions League and the World Cup.

Son Heung-min





of unpredictability. They also hunted as a pack, with and without the ball. They exerted aggressive pressure on the ball and, after regains, countered in numbers and at sprint speed – typified by the magnificent second goal in the Final. They had mental resilience, as demonstrated when, in a Final they had thus far dominated, France wiped out their two-goal advantage in a couple of minutes. They also excelled in game management skills and competitive know-how. And, as Vicente Del Bosque's Spain had done a dozen years earlier, they bounced back to take the title after losing their opening game.

During a 'Talking Football' session at the recent AFC Coach Education Conference, technical director Andy Roxburgh pointed to some of the trends noted in Qatar. Among them was a greater emphasis on building from the back. Post-tournament statistics based on the percentages of games spent by teams in build-up play revealed that the AFC representatives were generally on the ball for less

time than their European counterparts, averaging 23% compared with the UEFA teams' 37%. Averages, of course, can be misleading – especially when there is such diversity of footballing cultures among AFC countries. IR Iran spent only 18% of their game in build-up mode, whereas Europe's average was inflated by Spain's 50% and England's 43%. None of the AFC teams topped 30%.

The more frequent use of switches of play to stretch compact defensive emerged as one of the other tendencies noted in Qatar. In this department, the AFC representatives posted the top average although, in this department, the mean figure was even more misleading. Korea Republic's average of 12.8 was the highest of the tournament ahead of Denmark (12.2), Qatar (11.6), Croatia and Portugal (both 10.1). But Japan's 2.5 was the lowest, with Australia's 4.5 also in the lower reaches. This meant that IR Iran and Saudi Arabia were the only teams to hover around the AFC average of 7.4.

Overloads in wide areas were a major weapon in attacking play with positional variations and, above all, greater diversity in the delivery of crosses – many of which were driven low into the box, aiming to exploit the area between defenders and goalkeeper. But AFC teams scored only three goals (Australia two; Japan one) from crosses whereas four European teams (England, France, Netherlands and Portugal) jointly totalled 18.

Aggressive pressure on the ball was a common denominator in Qatar, though the objective was often to oblige the opponent to play long rather than to earn high regains. A ranking based on average ball recovery time, was topped by Spain with a figure of 12.8 seconds. Among the AFC representatives, Saudi Arabia fared best in this particular department with a mean figure of 18.2 seconds but six European teams regained possession more quickly than Hervé Renard's side. Silver medallists France, incidentally, were not among the half-dozen, often preferring to drop into a mid-block and give themselves space to exploit their counterattacking potential. Still with statistical rankings, AFC teams competed comfortably in terms of distance covered, with Australia's average of 108km per match only surpassed by USA's 110km.

Interestingly, observers in Qatar also highlighted the impact of substitutions and greater goalscoring efficiency – two topics which also emerged as talking points at the recent AFC U20 Asian Cup™, as mentioned later in this issue.

Results in Qatar confirmed the status of AFC teams as challengers to the world elite. And, as Graham Arnold said in his interview when asked what Asian teams need to do to become title contenders, "I don't think we're far off".

## AFC COACH EDUCATION CONFERENCE

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“The beautiful game never sleeps and is constantly evolving. So, four years in football can seem like a lifetime. It is therefore imperative that we can come together to share the trends.” The words by AFC General Secretary Datuk Seri Windsor John as he welcomed participants to the 4th AFC Coach Education Conference were the prelude to a three-day event in Kuala Lumpur permeated by enthusiasm and camaraderie as more than a hundred coach educators and technical directors were able to shake hands for the first time in four years.

Under the banner of Educating Tomorrow's Coaches, the intensive programme set out to send people home knowing more about the coach education process, the AFC Coaching Convention, how to run a Pro Diploma course, AFC's Emotions in Football Project, the skills of listening and observing, the development implications from the FIFA World Cup, the new initiatives being taken by the AFC and, on the last day, FIFA's programme for Coach Educators. With all due modesty, objectives were achieved.

#### GOOD EARS AND EYES?

Setting the ball in motion with what he described as a 'warm-up session', AFC Technical Director Andy Roxburgh recalled some words by his former team-mate, Sir Alex Ferguson. "Most people don't use their eyes and ears effectively," he said. "They aren't very observant and they fail to listen intently." This provided a cue for Mark Milton, a member of the AFC Emotions in Football working group, to step on stage, split the audience into pairs and challenge them to listen intently to their colleague, without interrupting or offering opinions, for three minutes. After this had set the room buzzing, Roxburgh screened a replay of Argentina's gem of a



Education is about everybody inspiring and helping each other.

Andy Roxburgh



counterattack that put them 2-0 up against France in the FIFA World Cup Final, inviting the audience to describe exactly what they had seen: for example, the number of touches, the players involved, the unchallenged run by scorer Angel Di María.... “For coaches,” he explained, “the curse is the superficial. The vital skill is to be able to see the small details as well as the big picture.” Listening and observation skills were to provide a core thread throughout the Conference.

### WHY CHOOSE COACHING?

One of the topics to emerge during a review of the coach education process was the need, during courses, to deal with groups that often feature great diversity in terms of backgrounds and ambitions. While former players constitute a high percentage, most readers will be able to think of names who came into coaching as, for example, analysts, interpreters, teachers or even supporters. For the coach educator, the challenge is to connect with each member of the group. “If we want to educate,” Mark Milton had remarked, “the first item is connection.”

### READY TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY?

Connection problems provided AFC’s Head of Coach Education Wim Koevermans with a cue to restart the game on the second morning. “A lot of our coach education work had to be done on screen during the pandemic,” he reflected, “including assessments, as the members of the AFC Coach Education Panel were unable to travel. But it helped to underline that MAs now take much greater responsibility for coach education than they did in the past when courses were run by AFC tutors who flew in and flew out. It means that the MA now has to know how to organise courses efficiently. By the way,” he added, “bringing in tutors from other countries is perfectly all right. But you need to make sure they leave a legacy in terms of preparing your own tutors to take on the role – which is important because, within the guidelines of the Coaching Convention, identity and individuality are key words.”

He also reviewed the benefits of the modular system which spreads courses over an entire season instead of generating an avalanche of information in a period of three to four weeks. In addition, he suggested putting the primordial topic of match analysis at the head of each course, and underlined Andy Roxburgh’s message about shunning the superficial and delving into detail. “It’s easy to give a module a title like ‘Pressing’,” he said. “But the important thing is to go into the details of when, where and how.” Finally, he clarified the concept of reality-based learning (“creating situations in your course programme as close as possible to the reality of the coach’s daily work”) and emphasised the value of what he called ‘self-scanning’ “as part of the individual learning process where the students can discover their strengths and weaknesses and, ideally, find out how others see you.”



### READY FOR GOALKEEPER AND ELITE YOUTH COURSES?

The second day also threw light on to the AFC’s initiative of grafting four branches on to the central trunk of the coach education tree; two for technicians wishing to specialise in elite youth development; and the other two for goalkeeper coaches. The AFC Elite Youth B diploma is primarily aimed at coaches working with talented young players and guiding them through the transition from grassroots or amateur levels up to the elite rungs of ladder, while A diploma is aimed at coaches specialised in shepherding players from the elite youth levels into the professional game.

Former goalkeeper Jose Carpio, now Head of Football Development in the AFC’s Technical Division,

metaphorically put on his gloves to present the AFC Goalkeeping B and A diplomas which, like the Elite Youth counterparts, are based on courses of 60 and 120 hours respectively. He explained that the guidelines for both goalkeeping courses are based on a two-thirds quota of practical work on the pitch or in a club environment. The same philosophy underpins the Elite Youth courses where, as Wim Koevermans had stressed, reality-based learning is the prime objective.

### CAN YOU MASTER YOUR EMOTIONS?

The relevance of emotional well-being and emotional intelligence is being regularly endorsed by quotes from front-line performers. “A lot of players have the ability to perform at the top level,” says Manchester United attacker Marcus Rashford, for example, “but what sets them apart is their mentality.” Or Roberto Martínez, stepping away from the Belgium national team after the World Cup, admits “I just couldn’t control all the emotions any more.” And, at the Conference, Takeshi Ono told the audience “sometimes emotions surpass technical and tactical matters and determine the game.” Japan’s Deputy Technical Director stepped on stage to report on his MA’s experience while conducting a pilot project in the AFC initiative. Setting up a task force was the first step towards a 90-minute module, supported by Andy Roxburgh and Mark Milton, at an ‘A – Pro licence course in 2021, preceded on JFA’s media by promotional features aimed at raising awareness among coaches. The task force generated video material to illustrate the impact of emotions – and translated Mark Milton’s book on self-awareness and mastery of emotions. Or rather, they did more than translate it. An advisory group, including the men’s and women’s national team coaches, was set up to adapt the publication, customising it to Japanese football and culture. The following move was to organise

a specific course for the A-diploma tutors in the JFA’s nine regions prior to the injection of Emotions in Football modules into ‘A’ and ‘Pro’ courses during the current year.

Fahad Al Zarraa reported on the other pilot scheme run by the Qatar FA in conjunction with the Aspire Academy, where neurophysiologist María Ruíz de Ona, as she explained on stage, works on a daily basis with players, coaches and staff to create a dynamic working environment, develop learning processes and respond to psychological needs, focusing on the person behind the profession. “A leader who has passion transmits passion,” she said, “a leader who has love transmits love. A frustrated leader transmits frustration” – a view which corroborates the treasured declaration by Gérard Houllier, one of the founder members of the Emotions in Football Working Group, that “leadership is the transfer of emotions”.

In the meantime, more than 40 MAs had responded to a questionnaire on the Emotions in Football Project, a few of them commenting that, in their footballing culture,



Sometimes emotions surpass technical and tactical matters and determine the game.

Takeshi Ono



‘emotion’ was sometimes identifiable with ‘weakness’. When the subject was broached at the Conference, the general feeling was that this is basically a linguistic issue, bearing in mind that emotional responses can very often be related to attitudes, mindsets, winning mentalities or, simply, professional behaviour. As Andy Roxburgh remarked “at grassroots level, the aim is to help young people to deal with their emotions and to improve their ability to relate to others. And, at the top of the game, coaches need to understand their own emotions and those of their players.”

This baton was picked up later in the day via role play involving participants in a series of scenarios with the coach required to deal with a tense post-match interview; conduct a one-to-one conversation with a player who has been out of sorts; consult with senior players in a bid to discover underlying reasons for a series of under-performances; or deal with a player who has been seriously out of order on social media. All in a day’s work...

## FIFA PATHWAYS

FIFA's Head of Coaching Development, Branko Ujević gave the participants a detailed insight into the thinking, the planning and the months of hard work invested in the construction of a FIFA Coach Education Programme that is globally valid yet, within the framework, caters for diversities between and within planet football's confederations. The result, he showed the audience, is a blend, available in a myriad of languages, of e-learning, online and on-site modules that lay a pathway for the development of coach educators. A 40-hour e-learning programme, based on video material, questionnaires and self-reflection, is followed by a three-day online course based on eight modules. A further 24 are featured in the five-day on-site course, with individual mentoring by FIFA or MA experts completing the pathway.

When asked if he had any advice to pass on to the coach educators in the conference room, Ujević commented "I would simply say that I would like to be in the position that you find yourselves in. You have a Coaching Convention in place; you have support and assistance from the AFC and its specialised panels. And FIFA is willing and ready



to help you. So, my advice is to fully embrace and use all the resources that are available to you with the objective of making your coach education even better."

## SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE

In the conference room, participants were arranged in tables of eight. And, when the audience was invited to split into pairs to discuss key issues in the final session, it spoke volumes for the camaraderie that had built up when there was a clear preference for bringing the whole table into play. The topics on the debating table included the selection and development of coach educators; structures for the further education of qualified coaches when, every three years, their licence needs to be renewed; the impact and benefits

of digital technology in coach education programmes; and priorities for the next phases of development in coach education. The responses provided fascinating listening – and a demonstration that face-to-face get-togethers are vital in terms of interchanging ideas and experience. As Andy Roxburgh remarked in closing the session, "education is about everybody inspiring and helping each other".

The final words, however, belong to Nair Sivaji of Singapore when he was challenged to describe the role of the coach educator. "He has to set an example in all facets," he said. "And, as a person, he must be approachable, knowledgeable and able to transfer that knowledge to students."



Some things can't be taught – they must be experienced.

Roy T. Bennett



## PROJECT UPDATES

### RUNNING TARGETS



Good vision helps when it comes to hitting targets. And it could be argued that good vision is required when setting them up, counter-balancing the desire to be ambitious with the pragmatic view that targets are irrelevant if there is no chance of hitting them. The pandemic evidently applied the brakes to forward movement on the AFC's three core projects. Yet momentum was by no means halted and, with travel restrictions easing sufficiently for AFC Panel members to resume on-site assessments, the Coach Education targets set for December 2023 are beginning to look hittable.

To go into detail, the objectives were to expand membership of the AFC Coaching Convention to 43 MAs; to increase the number of MAs qualified to conduct Pro Licence courses to 16; to deliver C-Licence courses in 25 MAs; and to establish the AFC Elite Youth Diploma.

Since our last issue, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kuwait and Malaysia have been ratified as Pro-level members of the AFC Coaching Convention, moving up from the A level. At first glance, the total is still short of the target for 2023. But five MAs are currently bidding to follow the same pathway, namely IR Iran, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam, all of whom have assessment visits in the pipeline with a view to attaining Pro status.

In the meantime, Palestine, Turkmenistan, Iraq, Macau, and Syria have been endorsed as A level members, raising the total to 16 while Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Chinese Taipei, Laos, Lebanon, Mongolia and Nepal are currently waiting in the wings until evaluation procedures are completed, while the Northern Mariana Islands are seeking membership at B Level. It means that membership currently stands at a total of 42.

There has been similar momentum in the AFC Elite Youth Scheme where, since our last issue, the number of 3-Star members has risen from four to six. Thailand has jumped up from 1-Star level with the FC Chonburi Academy (given a 2-Star rating) endorsed in March of this year. Uzbekistan's status has been upgraded from 2-Star to 3-Star with five more youth development facilities (bringing the total to eight) now enjoying the AFC's endorsement, namely the Metallurg, Namangan, Tashkent, Khorazm and Pakhtakor academies – the first three with a 2-Star rating and the

other two at the 1-Star level. Meanwhile, Hong Kong, China's Kitchee Academy has been upgraded to 2-Star level and Australia's application for membership at 3-Star level is also being evaluated. It means that 21MAs are already on board.

The severe disruption to grassroots football during the pandemic has been reflected by the AFC Grassroots Charter, where the status quo reported in the last issue has not registered any substantial variations. The number of endorsed MAs now stands at 40. But there is palpable

evidence that wind is filling sails again, with Hong Kong, China being upgraded from Silver level to Gold, China PR, Jordan, and Uzbekistan currently going through assessment processes for upgrading to the Gold Status. At the same time, UAE have applied to jump on board at the Silver level with Palestine also bidding to upgrade. In June, Oman was ratified at the Bronze level, with IR Iran going through the evaluation process for membership at the same level. If all applications are successful, membership could increase to a very healthy total of 42.

AFC PROJECTS



## AFC COACHING CONVENTION CATEGORIES

### PRO - Level



FOOTBALL AUSTRALIA



BANGLADESH FOOTBALL FEDERATION



CHINESE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF INDONESIA



ALL INDIA FOOTBALL FEDERATION



JAPAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



JORDAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



KFA KOREA FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



KUWAIT FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIA



QATAR FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE



UZBEKISTAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

### A - Level



BAHRAIN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



BHUTAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF HONG KONG, CHINA LIMITED



IRAQI FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL FEDERATION ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN



THE KYRGYZ FOOTBALL UNION



MACAU FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



PALESTINE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



PHILIPPINE FOOTBALL FEDERATION



SAUDI ARABIAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



SYRIAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



TAJIKISTAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF THAILAND



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL FEDERATION OF TURKMENISTAN



VIETNAM FOOTBALL FEDERATION

### B - Level



AFGHANISTAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF BRUNEI DARUSSALAM



FOOTBALL FEDERATION OF CAMBODIA



CHINESE TAIPEI FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



DPR KOREA FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



LAO FOOTBALL FEDERATION



LEBANESE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF MALDIVES



MONGOLIAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



MYANMAR FOOTBALL FEDERATION



ALL NEPAL FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



OMAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FEDERAÇÃO FUTEBOL DE TIMOR-LESTE

## AFC ELITE YOUTH SCHEME CATEGORIES

### ENDORSED MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

#### 3 - STAR



JAPAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



KOREA FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



QATAR FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF THAILAND



UZBEKISTAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



VIETNAM FOOTBALL FEDERATION

#### 2 - STAR



ALL INDIA FOOTBALL FEDERATION



JORDAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIA



SAUDI ARABIAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



TAJIKISTAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION

#### 1 - STAR



BAHRAIN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



BANGLADESH FOOTBALL FEDERATION



BHUTAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF HONG KONG, CHINA LIMITED



THE KYRGYZ FOOTBALL UNION



LEBANESE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF MALDIVES



MYANMAR FOOTBALL FEDERATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE

#### PROVISIONAL



MONGOLIAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION

## AFC GRASSROOTS CHARTER CATEGORIES



### GOLD



FOOTBALL AUSTRALIA



THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF HONG KONG, CHINA LIMITED



JAPAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



KFA  
KOREA FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE



QATAR FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

### SILVER



BHUTAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



CHINESE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



GUAM FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



JORDAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIA



PHILIPPINE FOOTBALL FEDERATION



TAJIKISTAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



FA THAILAND  
THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF THAILAND



UZBEKISTAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

### BRONZE



AFGHANISTAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



BAHRAIN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



BANGLADESH FOOTBALL FEDERATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF BRUNEI DARUSSALAM



CHINESE TAIPEI FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



ALL INDIA FOOTBALL FEDERATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF INDONESIA



IRAQI FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



KUWAIT FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



THE KYRGYZ FOOTBALL UNION



LAO FOOTBALL FEDERATION



LEBANESE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



MACAU FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF MALDIVES



MONGOLIAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



MYANMAR FOOTBALL FEDERATION



ALL NEPAL FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



OMAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



PALESTINE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL FEDERATION OF SRI LANKA



SYRIAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FEDERAÇÃO FUTEBOL DE TIMOR-LESTE



FOOTBALL FEDERATION OF TURKMENISTAN



VIETNAM FOOTBALL FEDERATION

## KEY DATES

	Jul 20-Aug 20				
<b>Jul 2023</b>	FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023				
<b>Aug 2023</b>	Aug 8 ACL2023/24 Preliminary Stage 1	Aug 8-9 ACC2023/24 Preliminary Stage 1	Aug 15 ACL2023/24 Preliminary Stage 2	Aug 15-16 ACC2023/24 Preliminary Stage 2	Aug 22 ACL2023/24 Playoff Stage
	Aug 22-23 ACC2023/24 Playoff Stage				
<b>Sep 2023</b>	Sep 4-12 AFC U23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024 Qualifiers	Sep 6 8th AFC Elite Club Coaches Forum	Sep 12 4th AFC Coach Education Panel Meeting	Sep 14 AFC Fitness Tutors Online Session	Sep 16-24 AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup Indonesia 2024 Qualifiers Round 2
	Sep 18-20 ACL2023/24 Group Stage Match Day 1	Sep 18-21 ACC2023/24 Group Stage Match Day 1	Sep 19 AFC Technical Committee Meeting		
<b>Oct 2023</b>	Oct 2-4 ACL2023/24 Group Stage Match Day 2	Oct 2-5 ACC2023/24 Group Stage Match Day 2	Oct 3 AFC - FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 Online Session	Oct 5 AFC Coach Education Online Session	Oct 12 FWC26 & AC27 Preliminary Joint Qualification Round 1 Match Day 1
	Oct 17 FWC26 & AC27 Preliminary Joint Qualification Round 1 Match Day 2	Oct 23-25 ACL2023/24 Group Stage Match Day 3	Oct 23-26 ACC2023/24 Group Stage Match Day 3	Oct 26-Nov 1 Women's Olympic Football Tournament Paris 2024 Asian Qualifiers Round 2	Oct 31 AFC Annual Awards 2023
<b>Nov 2023</b>	Nov 6-8 ACL2023/24 Group Stage Match Day 4	Nov 6-9 ACC2023/24 Group Stage Match Day 4	Nov 10-Dec 2 FIFA U-17 World Cup 2023	Nov 14 4th AFC Youth Panel Meeting	Nov 14-16 4th AFC Youth Conference
	Nov 16 FWC26 & AC27 Preliminary Joint Qualification Round 2 Match Day 1	Nov 21 FWC26 & AC27 Preliminary Joint Qualification Round 2 Match Day 2	Nov 21 4th AFC Grassroots Panel Meeting	Nov 21-23 3rd AFC Grassroots Conference	Nov 27-29 ACL2023/24 Group Stage Match Day 5
<b>Dec 2023</b>	Nov 27-30 ACC2023/24 Group Stage Match Day 5	Nov 27 - Dec 1 AFC Coach Education Tutors' Course (Women)			
	Dec 4-6 ACL2023/24 Group Stage Match Day 6	Dec 4-8 AFC Coach Education Tutors' Course (Men)	Dec 11-14 ACC2023/24 Group Stage Match Day 6	Dec 12-13 ACL2023/24 Group Stage Match Day 6	Dec 12-22 FIFA Club World Cup Saudi Arabia 2023

## AFC ASIAN CUP QATAR 2023™ FINAL DRAW

The 24 teams competing in the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023™ discovered their respective opponents in the Group Stage when the six groups were finalised at the official draw ceremony held on May 11, 2023 at the Katara Opera House in Doha, Qatar.

Scheduled for January 12 to February 10, 2024, the 18<sup>th</sup> edition of the continental showdown will see seven former winners competing for the coveted AFC Asian Cup™ trophy.

Host and defending champions Qatar are in Group A, 2015 champions Australia in Group B, three-time winners Islamic Republic of Iran in Group C, four-time winners Japan and 2007 champions Iraq in Group D, two-time champions Korea Republic in Group E and three-time winners Saudi Arabia in Group F.



The top two teams from each group and the four best third-placed teams will advance to the Round of 16 at Qatar 2023.

Following the conclusion of the Final Draw, the AFC and the Local Organising Committee (LOC) have also announced

the official match schedule for the upcoming edition of Asia's crown jewel, which can be accessed [here](#).

### DRAW RESULT

Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E	Group F
Qatar	Australia	IR Iran	Japan	Korea Republic	Saudi Arabia
China PR	Uzbekistan	United Arab Emirates	Indonesia	Malaysia	Thailand
Tajikistan	Syria	Hong Kong, China	Iraq	Jordan	Kyrgyz Republic
Lebanon	India	Palestine	Vietnam	Bahrain	Oman

## AFC U20 ASIAN CUP™ UZBEKISTAN 2023 REVIEW

### U20s END A FIVE-YEAR WAIT

The recent AFC U20 Asian Cup™ put an end to a five-year gap since the previous edition which was played as a U19 event in Indonesia in 2018. One of the question-marks is whether such a long pause will have long-term repercussions in terms of player development within a crucial age-bracket. So the 2023 final tournament in Uzbekistan represented a welcome return to a degree of normality, with the host nation defeating Iraq 1-0 in the Final in Tashkent with Semi-finalists Japan and Korea Republic joining the top two in earning trips to the FIFA U20 World Cup in Argentina.



One of the striking features of the tournament in Uzbekistan was that the goal tally, despite Australia's crushing 9-1 victory over Qatar, dropped from 117 in 2018 to 69 – a 41% downturn. The champions, in their six matches – two of which were decided by penalty shoot-outs – scored five goals, three of which were from dead-ball situations. In 600 minutes of football, Ravshan Khaydarov's team conceded one goal. Inevitably, the scarcity of goals hinted strongly at defence-minded attitudes. AFC's technical observers, however, reported that there was no shortage of incisive attacking play or clear goalscoring opportunities. The development issue was, in their opinion, the lack of goalscoring efficiency – a viewpoint endorsed by Khaydarov. "At times it seemed that we were only scoring goals from penalties," the champion coach admitted, "so our mission in the future is to score more goals". He regarded this as a priority during preparations for the FIFA U20 World Cup.

Even though statistics were distorted by Australia converting nine of their 20 goal attempts against Qatar, the overall average for the tournament was one goal per 11.22 attempts. Uzbekistan required 21.6 opportunities to score a goal while Saudi Arabia, the champions in 2018, were eliminated in the Group Stage after converting two of their 52 attempts. The inevitable questions were whether sufficient training-ground time is being dedicated to the art of finishing and whether goalscorers in this age



group are enjoying enough playing time with their clubs to hone their skills.

#### VERY CLEAN SHEETS

To what extent was the low conversion rate influenced by the standard of goalkeeping? The technical observers were quick to praise the general quality of shot-stopping with Korea Republic's Kim Joon-hong and Iraq's Hussain Hassan earning special mentions, while Uzbekistan's Otabek Boymurodov lifted the Best Goalkeeper award with that remarkable record of conceding one goal in 600 minutes. During the tournament, goalkeepers headed back to the dressing-room with the satisfaction of having kept a clean sheet on 24 occasions, compared with 11 at the previous tournament in 2018. Another eyebrow-

raising statistic was that goalkeepers were beaten by only two of 330 attempts from long range.

The technical observers noted a significant change in comparison with 2018 when, they felt, the ‘sweeper keeper’ had been conspicuous by his absence. In Uzbekistan, they said, the top teams’ goalkeepers were ready and willing to receive the ball, even when under pressure by opponents. At the same time, levels of game-participation and cooperation with defenders showed significant improvement. When defensive lines were high, keepers were generally prepared to operate as the sweeper covering a vast area. And they were pro-active in building from the back and changing the tempo of the game. It added up to endorsement of the work done by goalkeeping coaches during the five-year interlude.

### TEAM-BUILDING AND BENCH-BUILDING

One of the other questions raised by the technical observers in Uzbekistan was whether the five-substitution rule enhances the relevance of strength on the bench. The top teams, they commented, were able to re-energise play without any apparent loss of quality and, as an example of the value of having ‘impact players’ on the bench, they cited Japan’s match against China PR. Trailing 1-0 thanks to an own goal, Koichi Togashi reacted by sending on Naoki Kumata in the 56th minute. The sub promptly scored both goals in the 2-1 win and, although he started only two of his team’s five matches, Kumata went home as the tournament’s top scorer with five goals. Another telling statistic is that substitutes accounted for 12 goals – almost a quarter of the open-play total in the tournament.

### SUPPLY FROM THE WINGS

The tournament in Uzbekistan demonstrated, once again, the value of deliveries from the wide areas. Crosses, cut-



backs and diagonal passes into the box accounted for 41% of open-play goals. However, the nature of deliveries showed greater diversity with the observers noting an increase in the use of early crosses behind high back lines and a clear trend towards inswinging deliveries – not only from dead-ball situations but also in open play. One of the technical observers, Takeshi Ono, commented “statistics showed that the cross is back in the spotlight as an essential attacking tool, as had been the case at the FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Nowadays, defence against crosses has become more sophisticated. So, to score goals, there is a need for variations such as early crosses or, in particular, inswinging crosses delivered from areas much closer to the box. This was a prominent feature of the tournament.”

His opinion was fully endorsed by Japan who averaged 22 crosses per game and, during their 2-2 Semi-final draw

with Iraq, the equaliser which took the tie to a penalty shoot-out was created by a short left-footed cross from the right-hand corner of the penalty area for Kumata to head home. Japan’s first equaliser in that game was also a left-footed delivery from the right by Takatora Einaga. Earlier in the tournament, a chipped short cross and a header had similarly earned an equaliser against China PR, while a right-footed cross from the left generated their winner. It was a similar script in success stories about set plays. The four goals derived from free-kicks were all change-footed deliveries while the majority of the corners which provided 50% of set-play successes were also change-footed inswingers which posed serious questions to defenders and goalkeepers.

These details – and many more – can be found in the digital technical report on the AFC U20 Asian Cup™ published on [the-AFC.com](https://the-AFC.com) website.



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