AFC U17 ASIAN CUP™

AFC U20 ASIAN CUP™

TECHNICAL REPORT



CONTENTS

03 INTRODUCTION

04 MESSAGE FROM THE AFC PRESIDENT

06 INTRODUCTION OF U20 ASIAN CUP 2025

07 STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

22 THE WINNING COACH

25 TECHNICAL TOPICS

31 GOALSCORING ANALYSIS

35 TALKING POINTS

38 TEAM PROFILES

44 TOURNAMENT RESULTS

52 REFEREES

57 BEST PLAYERS/ BEST GOALS/ AWARDS

64 SOCIAL MEDIA

67 INTRODUCTION OF U17 ASIAN CUP 2025

68 STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

83 THE WINNING COACH

86 TECHNICAL TOPICS

92 GOALSCORING ANALYSIS

96 TALKING POINTS

99 TEAM PROFILES

108 TOURNAMENT RESULTS

116 REFEREES

122 BEST PLAYERS/ BEST GOALS/ AWARDS

129 SOCIAL MEDIA

131 COMMITTEES

134 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



INTRODUCTION

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) is pleased to share that this edition's Technical Reports for the AFC U20 Asian Cup™ China 2025 and AFC U17 Asian Cup™ Saudi Arabia 2025 have adopted a joint format. This new format aims to make it easier for technical observers to reference information, especially since these two competitions took place within successive months.

Taking inspiration from the women's youth competitions, future editions of the Technical Reports of the AFC's age-group competitions will assume a similar approach to ensure a concise joint report without compromising our usual quality standards.

Technical observers and other interested parties will also find this report valuable as it is being released in advance of the upcoming FIFA tournaments. These include the FIFA U-20 World Cup Chile 2025 (September 27 to October 19) and the newly expanded FIFA U-17 World Cup to be held in Qatar 2025 (November 3 to 27), where Asia's representatives will strive to make the Continent proud.





MESSAGE FROM THE
AFC PRESIDENT

Dear friends and colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that I present the combined Technical Report for both the AFC U20 Asian Cup™ China 2025 and the AFC U17 Asian Cup™ Saudi Arabia 2025.

Australia's first-ever triumph in the AFC U20 Asian Cup™ China 2025 deserves special praise and we must also congratulate Uzbekistan on securing their second AFC U17 Asian Cup™ title, marking a significant achievement 13 years after their first in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

We must also acknowledge the outstanding finalists in both competitions, Saudi Arabia, whose continuous dedication to strengthening football at all levels serves as an inspiration to all our Member Associations (MAs) in their pursuit of excellence.

Across the 31 matches played in both tournaments, a total of 93 goals were scored in China PR with another 101 in Saudi Arabia – both increases from the previous editions – exemplifying once again the undeniable talent emerging from Asia.

The expanded FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2025 will see a historic eight AFC MAs compete with the world's elite alongside hosts Qatar and we wish all nine teams, along with our four qualified teams from the AFC U20 Asian Cup™ China 2025, the very best of success in the global showpieces later this year.

Our youth embody our hopes for the future of Asian football, and I want to assure you of the AFC's unwavering commitment to working closely with our technical community and MAs to realise our Vision of ensuring our Asian teams continue to excel on the world's biggest stages.

This commitment is evident in the invaluable work of our Technical Study Groups, who have diligently produced this combined report, dedicating countless hours to watching and tactically analysing both tournaments. Their meticulous work aims to provide an overview of the key trends in our youth football competitions, not just for the benefit of our participating teams, but all our MAs, so that we can raise our competitive standards collectively.

I am confident that the insights within these pages will serve as a valuable resource for coaches, players, and Technical Directors as they develop robust systems for the ongoing progress of youth football.

On this note, I would like to extend our deepest appreciation to our hosts, the Chinese Football Association and the Saudi Arabian Football Federation, as well as their respective Local Organising Committees, for strengthening the foundations for our youth footballers to realise their true potential.

Finally, I extend my sincere thanks to all the relevant AFC Standing Committees for their expert guidance as well as the Technical Study Groups, and our relevant stakeholders for their invaluable contributions. Together, I am confident that we will continue to provide more competitive opportunities for our emerging stars to carry on Asia's proud legacy in the years to come.

Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President

AFC U20 ASIAN CUP™

AFC U20 ASIAN CUP CHINA 2025

TECHNICAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The 42nd edition of the tournament was the second to carry the AFC U20 Asian Cup™ label following the rebranding of the development competition formerly known as the AFC U-19 Championship. It was also the second to be staged in China PR, 15 years after DPR Korea had beaten Australia 3-2 in the 2010 Final. Curiously, Australia had not reappeared in a final until Trevor Morgan's team took the field against Saudi Arabia on March 1, 2025, at the 40,000-capacity Baoan Sports Centre Stadium in Shenzhen, the city which staged the final tournament at four stadiums within 45 minutes' travel time from team hotels. The Cultural & Sports Centre in the district of Longhua and two venues at the Shenzhen Football Training Base, with capacities between 1,164 and 10,000, provided the other three scenarios while 10 training grounds were available for match preparation. A temperature range between 12°C and 23°C supplied an ideal platform for performance levels during a rain-free 31-game final tournament involving 16 of the 45 teams who had competed in an 80-match qualifying phase.

At a local level, the event was a cue for football festivals and cultural promotions aimed at inspiring the young generation and encouraging player development. At international level, the major incentive for participants was provided by places for the four Semi-finalists at the FIFA U-20 World Cup to be played in Chile just over six months later. This honour was bestowed on Australia, Japan, Korea Republic and Saudi Arabia. There were so-near-yet-so-far scenarios for IR Iran and defending champions Uzbekistan who missed out in penalty shoot-outs in their Quarter-finals while China PR, the host nation, was defeated by a Saudi Arabian goal timed at 90+5.

Among the 16 head coaches at the tournament, six were non-native: two from Brazil and one apiece from the Netherlands, Serbia, Spain and Ukraine. Six of the eight Quarter-finalists were led by technicians coaching their native countries and three were on the benches of the four Semi-finalists who claimed FIFA World Cup places. In terms of squad rotation and player development, the coaches used 279 of the 318 substitutions available to them.

The AFC Technical Team at the final tournament comprised Li Chunman (China PR), Nihad Souqar (Jordan), Naranayan Sivaji (Singapore) and, wearing the captain's armband, AFC Deputy Technical Director Takeshi Ono.





STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

OVERVIEW

The AFC U20 Asian Cup™ China 2025 was held on February 12 to March 1, 2025.

Australia emerged champions for the first time after defeating Saudi Arabia in the Final at the Baoan Sports Centre Stadium. Three other venues across Shenzhen were also utilised during the tournament.

Losing semi-finalists Japan and Korea Republic joined Australia and Saudi Arabia in qualifying for the FIFA U-20 World Cup Chile 2025.



GROUP STAGE

GROUP A





Australia topped Group A with a perfect record of three wins, defeating Kyrgyz Republic 5-1, Qatar 3-1 and China PR 2-1.

China PR advanced to the Quarter-finals as the runners-up following victories over Qatar (2-1) and Kyrgyz Republic 5-2.

Qatar finished third in the group with a 4-0 win against Kyrgyz Republic in their concluding tie.

STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

GROUP B



Saudi Arabia and Iraq advanced to the knockout stage but only after a thrilling battle in Group B.

Saudi Arabia, who eventually topped the group, opened their campaign with a 1-0 win over Jordan but suffered a reverse - with the same score line - against Iraq in their second match.

The three-time champions, however, rediscovered their winning touch to edge DPR Korea 2-1 on Matchday Three.

Iraq, having drawn 1-1 with DPR Korea in their opening match, went into their final tie against Jordan as the leaders but a goalless draw meant finishing second in the group behind Saudi Arabia.

Jordan concluded their campaign with four points with DPR Korea on one point.



STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

GROUP C



Islamic Republic of Iran took a firm grip on Group C with the four-time champions kicking off their campaign with a 3-0 defeat of Indonesia.

That was followed by a 6-0 triumph against Yemen with IR Iran completing their Group Stage campaign with a perfect record after defeating defending champions Uzbekistan 2-1.

Uzbekistan also advanced, courtesy of victories against Yemen (1-0) and Indonesia (3-1).

Indonesia and Yemen finished on one point each, with the Southeast Asian third on goal difference.



STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

GROUP D





Korea Republic and Japan comfortably advanced from Group D.

Korea Republic - seeking a record-extending 13th title - defeated a plucky Syria side 2-1 in their opening match and confirmed their knockout stage spot with a 4-1 win against Thailand on Matchday Two.

Japan had to work a little harder after their opening 3-0 win against Thailand was followed by a 2-2 draw with Syria.

Japan had to avoid defeat against Korea Republic in their final group tie, which ended 0-0, as they finished second on five points.

Syria, who played to a 2-2 draw with Thailand in their final match, concluded their campaign with two points, one ahead of the Southeast Asian side.

QUARTER-FINALS

SAUDI ARABIA 1-0 CHINA PR

Amar Al Yuhaybi struck deep into time added on as Saudi Arabia defeated China PR 1-0 in their Quarter-final at the Shenzhen Youth Football Training Base Centre Stadium.

China PR dominated the tie and had more attempts on goal but their inability to finish their chances cost them dearly in the fifth minute of time added on at the end of the second half.

With play edging towards an additional 30 minutes, Saudi Arabia had the China PR fans holding their heads in dismay when Yuhaybi volleyed the ball into the back of the net over the outstretched arms of keeper Liu Qiwei for a sensational finish to a thrilling contest.





STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

AUSTRALIA 3-2 IRAQ

Australia came from behind twice to defeat Iraq 3-2 in their Quarter-final at the Baoan Sports Centre Stadium.

Amoori Faisal opened the scoring in the 15th minute with Luka Jovanovic's dipping free-kick in the 22nd minute drawing Australia level.

Mustafa Qabeel restored Iraq's lead in the 26th minute but Australia fought back with Panagiotis Kikianis drawing them level with a curling right-footed finish.

Victory was sealed thanks to a sensational Alexander Badolato shot from just outside the box in the 74th minute.





STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

IR IRAN 1-1 JAPAN
(AET, JAPAN WON 4-3 ON PENALTIES)

Rion Ichihara struck the winning spot-kick in the penalty shootout as Japan defeated Islamic Republic of Iran in their Quarter-final.

Reza Ghandipour gave IR Iran a fifth minute lead, with Kose Ogura's equaliser in the 30th minute forcing the match into extra-time and then penalties.

Goalkeeper Arsha Shakouri - whose saves had kept IR Iran in the game - scored in the shootout and also stopped Japan's third but Erfan Darvish Aali and Pourya Shahrabadi missed the opening two efforts with Ichihara netting the winning spot-kick as Japan advanced to the Semi-finals.





STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

KOREA REPUBLIC 3-3 UZBEKISTAN
(AET, KOREA REPUBLIC WON 3-1 ON PENALTIES)

Goalkeeper Hong Seong-min saved twice in the shootout as Korea Republic defeated defending champions Uzbekistan 3-1 on penalties in their Quarter-final, with the match having ended 3-3 at the end of 120 minutes.

In a thrilling encounter, skipper Muhammadali Urinboev missed from the penalty spot in the second minute but Uzbekistan did go on to take the lead through Asilbek Jumaev in the 18th minute.

Korea Republic roared back and looked to have booked their Semi-final spot through goals from Shin Min-ha (24th, 56th) and skipper Kim Tae-won (61st).

Uzbekistan, however, refused to concede defeat with strikes from Urinboev (90th) and Abdugafur Haydarov (90+4) forcing the game to an additional 30 minutes and penalties, with Hong denying Ollabergan Karimov and Murodjon Komilov to take Korea Republic through.





SEMI-FINALS



STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

SAUDI ARABIA 0-0 KOREA REPUBLIC
(AET, SAUDI ARABIA WON 3-2 ON PENALTIES)

Saudi Arabia defeated Korea Republic 3-2 on penalties after their last four tie ended in a goalless draw after 120 minutes.

Goalkeeper Hamed Yousef starred for Saudi Arabia in the shootout, saving twice to take his team through despite having been dominated by Korea Republic.

In a match which saw Korea Republic outshooting Saudi Arabia 13 to 5, the East Asian side's inability to finish cost them dearly in the penalty shootout.

Yousef saved Kim Tae-won's opening effort while Lee Chang-woo hit the post as Saudi Arabia led 2-0.

Missed penalties from Saleh Barnawi and Saud Al Tumbkti, however, saw Korea Republic pull themselves back into the tie but the momentum swung in Saudi Arabia's favour again when Yousef saved Kim Gyeol's attempt with Ali Al Mahdawi netting the decisive spot-kick to take Saudi Arabia into the Final.





STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

AUSTRALIA 2-0 JAPAN

Australia produced a dominant second half display to defeat Japan 2-0 in their Semi-final.

Goals from Musa Toure and Jaylan Pearman took Australia within one match of lifting the trophy for the first time.

Japan, however, started the tie on the front foot and outshot Australia with 12 shots to six through the course of the match but were unable to find a breakthrough.

Crucially for Australia, both their shots on target ended in the back of the net with Toure opening the scoring in the 49th minute.

Even better was to come for Australia when substitute Pearman, who had been on the pitch for just four minutes, netted their second in the 67th minute to confirm their ticket to the Final.





STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

THE FINAL



AUSTRALIA 1-1 SAUDI ARABIA
(AET, AUSTRALIA WON 5-4 ON PENALTIES)

Goalkeeper Steven Hall was the star as Australia defeated Saudi Arabia 5-4 on penalties.

With the Final ending 1-1 after 120 minutes, Hall saved Bassam Hazazi's spot-kick as Australia won their first title.

Saudi Arabia - seeking to emerge champions for a fourth time - almost got off to a dream start when Hussain Al Raqwani's instinctive intervention in the third minute sent Talal Haji clear on goal but Hall parried the shot before it was cleared to safety.

Australia had their first opening six minutes later when Alex Badolato executed a neat lob to Louis Agosti inside a packed box, but Saleh Barnawi's timely tackle nullified the threat.

Haji then wasted a golden opportunity to give Saudi Arabia the lead in the 13th minute when Amar Al Yuhaybi laid the ball for the unmarked forward, who sent his effort over the bar while at the other end, Musa Toure saw his attempt from just above the box blocked.

Australia gradually got a firmer grip on the proceedings and took the lead in the 24th minute when Badolato's cross into the box was deflected onto the path of Agosti, whose shot from just outside the box sailed past despairing Saudi Arabia keeper Hamed Yousef and into the bottom left corner.

Buoyed by the goal, Australia pushed forward in numbers, but Saudi Arabia remained resolute in defence, with Farhah Al Shamrani making a crucial goal line clearance to deny Paul Okon's effort from a corner.

With the first half in time added on, Saudi Arabia drew level in dramatic fashion with Haji making amends for his earlier miss.

The forward perfectly timed his jump to meet Nawaf Al Ghulaimish's cross and nodded home, with Hall seemingly having made the save. The assistant referee, however, flagged for the goal which was confirmed after a VAR review.



STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

Australia rang in the changes at the start of the second half with Fabian Talladira, Jayllan Pearman and Jonny Yull going on but it was Saudi Arabia who had an opening as Shamrani made a decisive interception in the 67th minute and sent a delightful ball through for Haqawi who, however, struck his close-range effort straight into the arms of Hall.

Haji then sent his headed attempt wide in the 78th minute while Luka Jovanovic missed his header in the 90th minute as the match went into extra-time.

Both sides were limited to half chances in the additional 30 minutes and the penalty shootout went according to script until Hall got his hand to Hazazi's effort to seal the title for Australia.

Australian midfielder Badolato was named the Most Valuable Player while Saudi Arabia's Hamed Yousef was picked as the Best Goalkeeper. Uzbekistan's Mukhammadali Urinboev won the Top Scorer Award.







THE WINNING COACH

THE WINNING COACH

MORGAN'S TEAM FINDS WAYS TO WIN

"It was a big ride to the end, and it tested us mentally," said Trevor Morgan after his team had displayed poise and confidence during the penalty shoot-out win that secured Australia's first AFC trophy since the senior side's AFC Asian Cup™ victory in 2015. "Being able to win was a great reward for the players and the effort they put in throughout the tournament. The team grew, showed character, great courage and belief in themselves. My joy is in coaching players and teams to achieve at the highest level," he told the AFC Technical Team in Shenzhen.

The trophy also represented a reward for a man who could claim role-model status in the field of player development. Grassroots coaching provided the substructure for a stockpile of expertise that includes a trip to the FIFA U-20 World Cup as a video analyst, coaching at youth academies and big-tournament experience with Australia's age-limit teams – a portfolio of skills which, since August 2022, is being exploited in a role combining coaching work with the U20 and U23 teams with the identification and development of emerging talents—not to mention the role of Technical Observer at the last senior AFC Asian Cup™.

"I am pleased," he said on accepting the new challenge at Football Australia, "that in my new scope of work I will not only be able to dedicate myself to the Young Socceroos and the Olyroos, but also be empowered to think holistically and strategically about how we identify and develop top Australian talent and to help the organisation improve the pipeline of elite footballers available to our national teams, particularly in the crucial U17 to U23 age bracket."

In Shenzhen, when asked by the AFC Technical Team to outline the reasons for success, he responded: "They worked well together both from a football point of view and socially, creating a strong bond within the team. They have been together since June 2023; they have played high-level opponents posing different challenges in different environments; and they have learned many lessons along the way. Above all, the team's focus has always been on the positive."

For Morgan, the 'positive' is "a team that really believes in itself, plays its football on the front foot and is tactically equipped to beat anybody. One of our goals in friendly matches and in qualifying is to play in a way



THE WINNING COACH

where there's a structure that gives the group a collective idea, a collective goal and a way of playing, but also gives people freedom to express themselves."

Asked about Australia's ability to perform despite squad rotation and absences due to injury or to player-release issues, he said: "We trust our squad of players. We tried to ensure that each member was ready to contribute to the success of the team and was raring to go. We also wanted our players to be as fresh as possible for each match, taking into consideration that we were playing matches every third day."

The run to the title obliged Morgan's team to negotiate a variety of scenarios, starting with the suppression of euphoria after an opening 5-1 win against the Kyrgyz Republic, followed by tests of mental resilience during comeback victories over Qatar and, especially, Iraq in a Quarter-final when they twice fell behind. Plus, of course, the demands of the Final against a defensively solid Saudi Arabia team that equalised on the stroke of half-time, prompting Morgan to make two substitutions and tactical adjustments. "Our decisions at half-time," he said, "were about changing the way we attacked. They were decisions of conviction, knowing that the squad had different qualities, and that we might need a few different plays. In the end, there were some very good moments in the second half where, even though we didn't score, we played football in a way that looked more like ourselves."





Tactical versatility is one of Morgan's key concepts – exemplified by the fact that, despite the desire to play on the front foot, Australia emerged as the tournament's most effective counterattacking team. "We scored from set pieces, counterattacks, build-ups, crosses and we scored individual goals," he commented. "That's what we want to look like. Because, if you're analysing us, you have some problems to deal with. You can't say we're a set-piece team or a counterattacking team. That's the way we want to tell the story. That if you play against us, no matter how you set up, we're going to find a way."

After another display of mental strength during the shoot-out that secured the title, he said: "Players and coaches work hard. For me personally, helping the players do what they did throughout the tournament was an honour. I'm very happy with how it turned out, and I'm proud. I know I put in a lot of effort, but in the end, it's the players who have to perform. To help guide these young players is a special honour. Asia is such a diverse and large confederation with so much talent and love for football, that to finally win something like this is huge."

Asked by the AFC Technical Team to share his aspirations for the players' future, he replied: "That they go on to successful careers in professional football and in the national team; that they will be excellent role models and stay hungry for success."



TECHNICAL TOPICS

TECHNICAL TOPICS

"Compared to previous tournaments, we can see progress in terms of both individual and collective qualities. So, one of the outstanding features was that, generally, there were no longer major differences between the teams. This is probably a sign that awareness of the importance of youth development is increasing throughout the Member Associations". This was the viewpoint expressed by Nihad Souqar, a vastly experienced member of the AFC Technical Team, who highlighted technical and tactical improvements allied with impressive levels of intensity. Their comparisons with previous tournaments were not only based on the U20 event in 2023 but also the senior AFC Asian Cup™ in Qatar where, as the Technical Report had commented, "the general trend was towards spontaneous pressure on the ball – more individual than collective and more frenetic than intense. In-possession play was often similarly marked by a frenzied pace which tested the limits of technical abilities". At the final tournament in Shenzhen, the observers detected a more structured and composed brand of high-intensity play.



INTENSELY IMPRESSIVE

The Technical Team agreed that "the common denominator among the teams who advanced to the Knockout Stage was their ability to play high-intensity matches", although their methods were varied. The high press was a valuable weapon in armouries, even those of teams who missed out on World Cup places, in particular Uzbekistan, IR Iran and China PR, who exploited ball-winning derived from high pressing to carve out scoring chances. The hosts immediately presented a prime example in the 17th minute of their opening game against Qatar, when a high regain set them on the road to a 2-1 win.

The top four - Australia, Saudi Arabia, Japan and Korea Republic - were adept at mixing compact midfield blocks with energetic high pressing. The latter were especially effective in springing out from a well-structured midfield unit to trigger an aggressive high press, while the champions excelled at forcing opponents into wide areas and then pressing forcefully. The observers mentioned that while their challenges were muscular and effective, Australia not only won the title but also picked up the Fair Play Award – emphasising the importance, when pressing, of not allowing the opponent an easy way out via a free kick.

The top teams – notably Japan – were also adept at the art of counter-pressing; in other words, winning the ball back within seconds of losing it and, at the same time, pre-empting counterattacks by the opponent. "The tournament," commented the observers, "confirmed that awareness of the value of counter-pressing in attack-to-defence transition play has become quite widespread in Asian football."

PRESS US IF YOU CAN

"The successful teams always had one or more solutions against intensive pressing," said Takeshi Ono. "When the opponent triggers the press, the question is whether



the players feel afraid of it or whether they see it as an opportunity to exploit spaces that the opponent is leaving open." The tournament showcased various methods of beating the press. Teams such as China PR, IR Iran, Japan, Korea Republic, Saudi Arabia or even Thailand relied on clever technique to play out of tight situations. IR Iran, Australia and Japan were good at bringing the goalkeeper into play when subjected to intense pressure. The last two, along with China PR and Korea Republic often found an outlet via their holding midfielders' ability to find space and make themselves available as passing options. If opponents pushed up to press, Uzbekistan, Australia and IR Iran were quick to respond with forward runs to stretch the opposition's structure. And, in some cases, high-speed running with the ball was an effective antidote to pressing. Both Australian full-backs, for example, were good at driving out from the back, as was the Korea Republic left-back Kim Seo-jin who was also adept at breaking forward into midfield before the opposition could engage its counter-pressing mechanisms. Saudi Arabia and China PR excelled at using long diagonal switches of play to bypass the high press, notably the latter's holding midfielder Yimulan Maimaiti.

TECHNICAL TOPICS

TRANSITIONAL PHASES

"If we draw parallels with car equipment", Nair Sivaji remarked, "Quick Transition was once an optional extra for high-end models. But it is now standard equipment - in other words, indispensable." The tournament underlined that quickness of transition play has now become an essential ingredient in the recipe for success. The observers cited the group game between Uzbekistan and IR Iran as a prime example. Even though both teams had already qualified for the Quarter-finals, the tussle for top spot led to a high-intensity game with very quick transitions between attack and defence. Uzbekistan displayed very fast transition play throughout the tournament, the observers commented, and the defending champions performed well in both directions, creating scoring chances and thwarting their opponents' counterattacking options.

The ability to make fast transitions from defence to attack was one of the trademarks of the top teams – notably the two finalists. Counterattacking provided 14 goals – almost one-fifth of the open-play total. Breaking them down into categories, five were classic counters from deep positions; five were rapid-response attacks from advanced areas; and the other four were collective counters following regains in midfield. Australia's head coach Trevor Morgan made no secret of his preference for an assertive attitude, encouraging his team to play on the front foot. But, by the same token, training-ground work on fast breaks from deep positions paid handsome dividends. The champions led the field with five counterattacking goals among their total of 16. Their credo was that when there was space available up front, it was there to be exploited.

THE FINISHING TOUCH

As it had done at the previous final tournament in Uzbekistan, efficiency in front of goal emerged as one of the major debating points. Overall statistics indicate that one in three of 844 goal attempts was on target – and one-third of the accurate finishes ended up in the net. The tournament yielded one goal per 9.07 attempts. Discussion focused on whether these figures are acceptable or indicate room for coaching work.

The figures were an improvement on the 2023 tournament where it had required 11.2 attempts to score a goal. However, as Li Chunman said, "often it was not about the sheer number of chances created but more about the efficiency of finishing". As an example, he cited the Quarter-final where China PR had enjoyed 59% of possession, had created four clear scoring opportunities (even a penalty) yet, after failing to capitalise, had been defeated by a Saudi Arabia goal in stoppage-time.

It could be argued that Australia's success in Shenzhen represented a reward for the finishing ability and goalscoring efficiency that had impressed the Technical Team. A total of 32 on-target finishes yielded 16 goals. By contrast, Saudi Arabia, let down by indifferent finishing in the previous tournament where 52 attempts had produced two goals, ended the 2025 event with a balance of five goals from 65. Japan, who ticked so many boxes with the quality of their approach play and neat combinations around the penalty area, bowed out after a Semi-final in which they totalled two shots on target from a dozen attempts, leaving them with an overall tournament tally of seven goals from 79 finishes. This



TECHNICAL TOPICS

prompted the observers to recall comments by Ravshan Khaydarov after he had led Uzbekistan to the title in 2023, wondering whether there was an over-emphasis in training-ground work on box-to-box play and whether more attention should be paid to the art of finishing. Is his question still valid?



PASSING COMMENTS

The interlocking issue of the quality of passing in the final third also gave food for thought. Coaches are generally ready to accept that creative passing in the attacking zone entails a higher exposure to losses of possession. In Shenzhen, whereas pass completion rates in the teams' own half of the pitch ranged from 81.8% to 92.8%, the figures dropped significantly at the sharp end of attacking play. Unsurprisingly given their traditions in combination play, Japan and Korea Republic led the field with averages of 163 and 149 passes respectively per match in the final third with completion rates of 71.3% and 73.2%. Numerically, Uzbekistan were close behind with 147 passes but a lower success ratio of 64.2%. An average of 117 passes hinted at Australia's slightly more direct approach with 64.3% of their passing reaching a team-mate, while Saudi Arabia, their opponents in the Final, posted a pass completion rate of 53.9% - the lowest percentage among the 16 participants. From a coaching perspective, how important is it to reconcile creativity with accuracy in the attacking third. And how do you achieve it?

HANDLE WITH CARE

Discussions also focused on the other end of the pitch. "The tournament indicated a significant improvement in the quality of goalkeepers, as we could see in the Final. Their ability to deal with high balls and their contribution to build-up play are probably due to the player-development efforts by Member Associations," said Nair Sivaji, whose opinion was endorsed by the rest of the Technical Team, who also noted better technique with the feet when goalkeepers were challenged in possession and subjected to vigorous pressing. "The goalkeepers of teams that advanced further in the tournament," they added, "such as Australia, Japan, Korea Republic or Uzbekistan were key factors in build-up play." AFC's Best Goalkeeper Award was handed to Saudi Arabia's Hamed Yousef who the observers described as "the leading force in the team's progress to the Final, saving the day in numerous dangerous situations with his exceptional reaction speed and composed play". Even though he was often shielded by Saudi Arabia's well-organised defence, he was required to make 16 saves and was beaten only three times in his side's six matches. His save percentage of 83.3% was bettered only by the 89.5% registered by IR Iran goalkeeper Arsha Shakouri who, at 1.91m, was the tallest of the 17 who actually took the field in Shenzhen (Korea Republic being the only team to use two goalkeepers). Nine goalkeepers had shot-stopping percentages of 70% or over and only three posted figures below 50%.

In the debit column, the observers also witnessed a number of errors that were not unexpected among a group of young goalkeepers negotiating learning curves that, in many cases, had been distorted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, tournament statistics attributed five goals directly to goalkeeping errors – some of them determining the outcome of a game.



TECHNICAL TOPICS

The issues to address, they felt, started with basic shot-stopping errors with hands or feet and misjudgements when it came to covering the space behind the back-line (high-speed, high-risk sprints outside the penalty area). Footwork was sometimes suspect; shot-stopping often kept the attack alive and created high-risk situations when the ball was kept in play by parries or punches rather than turned around or over the woodwork; and, irrespective of their shot-stopping abilities, some of the young goalkeepers were not proficient in commanding the penalty area.

APPLAUSE FOR THE SOLOIST

In the eyes of the observers, the tournament demonstrated a clear improvement in technical and tactical levels. But, they added, it also revealed that this was sometimes not enough to win big games. This prompted the analysts to discuss the importance of the soloist on the international stage. As Takeshi Ono said: "The more sophisticated teams become in terms of technique and tactics, the more often it is the exceptional individual who decides the result."

The codicil was that the issue is not confined to the individual skills or creative vision of the outstanding soloist but is also about the way the individual can activate and energise the whole team – the capacity to make team-mates better. This was the case with Alex Badolato, the player they named as AFC's Player of the Tournament on the basis of his ability to "create numerous opportunities with his superb technique and insight and who could also score decisive goals that led his team to success". The Australia No. 10 weighed in with two goals (one of them the outstanding first touch and volley that earned the 3-2 comeback win in the Quarter-final against Iraq) and three assists. The left-side attacking midfielder also created 15 scoring chances with a pass-completion percentage of 78% in the opponent's half. The observers were also impressed by the inspirational qualities of his team-mate Paul Okon, a commanding central midfielder whose influence



can be gauged by 151 passes in opposition territory – a total surpassed only by Japan's Rion Ichihara (in a ranking where Japan, incidentally, had four players in the top six). The observers also turned the spotlight on to Uzbekistan's Muhammadali Orinboev and the Saudi Arabia pair Mohammed Barnawi and Amar Al Yuhaybi as gifted soloists whose contributions inspired their teams' collective efforts.

WINGS AND FLIGHT PLANS

Deliveries from wide areas accounted for 40% of the tournament's open-play goals (compared with 35% in 2023) to underline the relevance of wing play, especially against compact defensive blocks prioritising the protection of central areas. In Shenzhen, the focus on wing play was illustrated by statistical evidence. The 31 fixtures were punctuated by 1,007 crosses at an average of 32.5 per game with a success rate of around one goal per 50 deliveries. The tournament did, nevertheless, produce impressive examples, such as the overlap on the right, the low cross, and the one-touch finish by Musa Toure that put Australia 1-0 ahead in the Semi-final against Japan. Or the second goal by IR Iran against Indonesia where a throw-in on the right was played back to the taker and his first-time cross was scissor-kicked into the net by Esmaeil Gholizadeh.

TECHNICAL TOPICS

However, the ongoing preference for wing play in the top-level game has encouraged coaches to focus on defensive mechanisms aimed at dealing with crosses – thereby introducing a predictability factor into the equation. The tournament illustrated that variety in deliveries from wide areas is now essential in order to maintain a surprise element. The Technical Team mused that "decades ago, wingers would often cross the ball while kicking up chalk from the touchline, and the big target striker would head the ball in. But things have changed now. And, following a global trend, one of the commonly seen features of this tournament was the use of inswinging crosses delivered with the 'wrong' foot – in open play as well as at set pieces".

The Technical Team calculated that 30% of the goals from crosses were inswingers – usually delivered by wide attackers or inverted full-backs (Korea Republic and Australia were prime exponents) who preferred to check back with a view to delivering with their better foot – for example, Korea Republic's second and third goals against Thailand or the left-footed cross from the right which gave Saudi Arabia their winning goal in the Quarter-final against the hosts thanks to a volley by a player left unmarked beyond the back post because defenders had been drawn towards the ball-carrier. The trend towards inverted wingers and full-backs also signified that crosses tended to be delivered from areas closer to the penalty area than to the touchline. The same applied to cut-backs from zones closer to the bye-line when, as Li Chunman pointed out, "the key to success was for attackers to push back the opposing defensive line with sharp forward movements in order to open spaces in the central area of the penalty box".

The tournament also displayed significant differences in use of the wide areas with Korea Republic averaging 25 crosses per game and Japan 18.5. When the two teams met, the emphasis was so strongly on wing play that the groundsmen had little repair work to perform on the central channel of the pitch. Barely 17% of Japan's attacking was through the middle; it was 14% for the Korea Republic. The stark contrast was provided by Saudi Arabia who, despite playing two periods of extra-time, averaged just over 11 crosses per game – yet scored their only two goals of the Knockout Rounds from crosses. Marcos Soares' side provided an exception to the general rule by sharing their attacks fairly evenly among the wide and central channels – as they did in the Final against Australia with 32% on the left flank; 31% on the right; and 37% through the middle. And it said a great deal about the compactness of Saudi Arabia's defending that DPR Korea, Iraq and Korea Republic were able to develop 16%, 18% and 19% respectively of their attacking play through the central channel. The champions, as Trevor Morgan commented, found ways to overcome the tactically varied opposition visible during a high-quality final tournament.





GOALSCORING ANALYSIS

A ROAD TO RECOVERY

A tally of 93 goals at three per game signified a reassuring return to health after the startling 41% decline in goalscoring during the previous final tournament in 2023. In Shenzhen, only three of the 31 fixtures were goal-less (Iraq v Jordan, Indonesia v Yemen and the Semi-final between Saudi Arabia and Korea Republic). And whereas, in the previous tournament, both teams had scored in only 11 games, this figure shot up to 19 in 2025. Although there was a sprinkling of heavier scorelines (IR Iran 6-0 Yemen was the extreme example), margins were generally slim. Australia's 2-0 Semi-final victory over Japan was the widest in the seven knockout fixtures, four of which were drawn and needed to be settled by penalty shoot-outs. This was one of the few goalscoring patterns that mirrored the 2023 edition in Uzbekistan, where three of the four matches that went to extra time were decided by shoot-outs – a common denominator which provides food for thought among coaches about the relevance of mental and physical preparation for high-pressure penalty-taking after two hours of football.

The champions, Australia, were the top scorers with 16 during a run to the title which offered spectators 22 goals – almost a quarter of the tournament's total. Trevor Morgan's team also led the field in terms of goals from counterattacks (five), long-range shots (four) and cut-backs (three). By contrast, the six matches involving silver-medallists Saudi Arabia yielded eight goals – five scored and three conceded. In all six games, incidentally, the Saudi Arabian net remained unruffled after half-time. In general, though, goalscoring was evenly spread: 47 in the first half; 46 after the break. The most prolific periods were the middle sections of each half: 26 between the 16th and 30th minutes; 18 in the 61st-75th-minute segment.



Set plays

Dead-ball situations accounted for 23% of the tournament's goals, compared with 29% at the previous edition in Uzbekistan and 31% at the senior AFC Asian Cup™ (where the tally had been inflated by 20 penalty kicks). Although the percentage in Shenzhen was relatively modest, the importance of set-play successes was often great, such as the direct free kick by Amoori Faisal which allowed Iraq to become the only team to defeat Saudi Arabia. Or the two free kicks that originated Australia's crucial equalisers when trailing Iraq 0-1 and 1-2 in their Quarter-final – the first a superb strike from 35m by Luca Jovanovic and the second a low cross and finish after a free kick had been played short. The champions' goal in the Final came after a free kick had been driven in right-footed from the left and the partial clearance to the edge of the box set up a long-range success.



GOALSCORING ANALYSIS

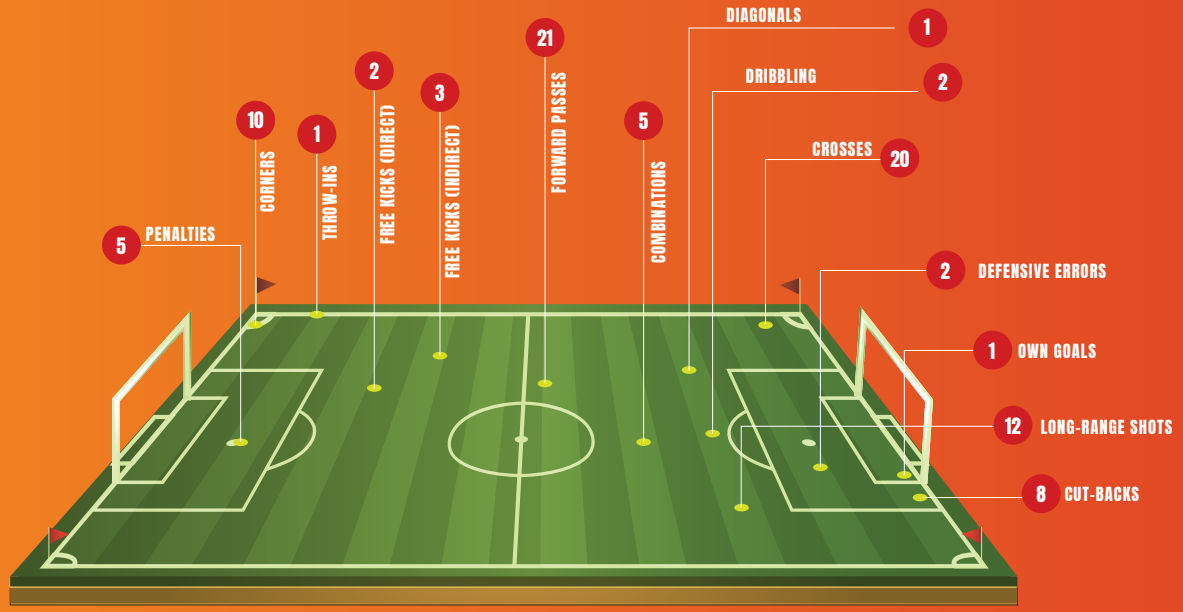
GOALSCORING ANALYSIS

Korea Republic capitalised on dead-ball situations to score half of their 10 goals – three from corners; one from an indirect free kick; and one following a long throw-in on the right in the group game against Syria. All three of their goals in the Quarter-final against Uzbekistan were from set plays.

As they had done in 2023, corners accounted for almost half of the set-play goals, with inswinging deliveries (left-footed from the right or vice versa) leading to seven. Short corners were a comparative rarity, with Japan's opening goal against Thailand providing a rare success. Calculators are not required to convert 10 goals from 274 corners into a respectable success ratio of 1:27.4. The figure is, in fact, much more respectable than the ratio posted at the senior AFC Asian Cup™ – a startling 1:61 – but much more in line with the 1:31 registered at the club level in the AFC Champions League Elite™.

The long throw, after its re-emergence as an attacking weapon at the senior event in 2024, was also visible in the repertoire of some teams in Shenzhen – notably Saudi Arabia and Korea Republic.





GOALS FROM SET PLAY

ACTION	GUIDELINES	GOALS
Corners	Directly / Indirectly from a corner	10
Free kicks (direct)	Direct from a free kick	2
Free kicks (indirect)	Indirectly from a free kick	3
Penalties	Spot kick including rebounds	5
Throw-ins	Following a throw-in	1

TOTAL GOALS SCORED : 93

GOALS FROM OPEN PLAY

ACTION	GUIDELINES	GOALS
Combinations	Combination moves involving 2/3/4 players	5
Crosses	Crosses from the wing	20
Cut-backs	Backward passes from the goal-line	8
Diagonals	Diagonal passes into the penalty box	1
Dribbling	Dribbling and finishing or providing an assist	2
Long-range shooting	Shots from outside the penalty box including rebounds	12
Forward passes	Penetrating or aerial passes	21
Defensive errors	Exploiting mistakes by goalkeeper or defenders	2
Own goals	Players scoring against their own team	1

GOALSCORING ANALYSIS GOALSCORING ANALYSIS

Open play

A tally of 72 goals in open play at an average of 2.3 per game signified a recovery from the total of 49 at the 2023 tournament. The significant trends, however, lurk below the surface of the overall figures.

Successes derived from the forward pass, for instance. In Uzbekistan, it had delivered one solitary goal and, at the senior event in 2024, only 12% of open-play goals. In China PR, 21 goals represented just under 30% of the open-play total. The technical report on the U20 event in 2023 had commented "the tournament underlined the difficulty of finding passing pathways through mid or low defensive blocks." The much richer harvest in 2025 supplied fuel for coffee-table discussion on a number of topics.

Firstly, the attackers' readiness to make high-speed runs between the centre-backs or into the channels between the central defenders and full-backs. Secondly, the ability – especially by defenders and midfielders in central positions – to spot the off-ball runs and deliver the through ball. Thirdly, it hints that teams in Shenzhen were willing to accept the risk element in holding higher defensive lines. And, fourthly, it raises questions about goalkeepers' capacity and readiness to cover the spaces behind the high lines.

Another striking feature among the scoring statistics was an increase in the number of long-range goals. From two in 2023 to 12 in 2025, aligning the success rate (17% of open-play goals) more closely with the 15% at the senior tournament in 2024. A quarter of Australia's goals were struck from outside the penalty area – three of them in the Knockout Stage and two of them in 'second phase' scenarios where the ball had been partially cleared to areas just outside the box. Three long-distance efforts appeared among the tournament's Top Ten goals with the fierce strike by Amoori Faisal that put Iraq 1-0 up in the Quarter-final against Australia earning top spot. The table below indicates the percentages of the top eight teams' goal attempts which originated outside the box. Statistics reveal that of 351 long-range goal attempts, 12 hit the net. The value, however, is that they also stood to generate deflections, rebounds, corners gained and, more importantly, encouraged defenders to venture out of deep defensive blocks.

Team	Long-range
Iraq	46%
Uzbekistan	44%
Australia	42%
Japan	38%
Saudi Arabia	38%
IR Iran	37%
China PR	36%
Korea Republic	22%

A total of 16 goals (17% of the total) were headed into the net: 10 in open play and six from dead-ball situations.

Counterattacking provided 14 goals – almost one-fifth of the open-play total – which makes it one of the issues addressed in the Technical Topics section of this report. But, once again, deliveries from the wide areas – crosses, cut-backs and diagonal passes into the box – proved to be the most fertile source of goalscoring, accounting for 40% of the tournament's open-play goals. The percentage is in line with the 41% registered at the previous tournament. But the pattern of deliveries has mutated – a feature which also emerged as a Technical Topic.





TALKING POINTS

PLAYING ON THE EMOTIONS?



Li Chunman, a member of the AFC Technical Team in Shenzhen, commented: "In comparison with previous tournaments, this one was impressive in that the players handled their emotions well, even in high-intensity, decisive matches. It suggests that the effects of the Emotions Project that the AFC is working on are gradually being spread among coaches." Prior to kick-off, AFC Technical Director Andy Roxburgh had remarked that "emotions could be a relevant factor, especially in the decisive Quarter-finals that determine who goes to the World Cup".

In the event, the top eight teams displayed emotional equilibrium in those crucial fixtures. Saudi Arabia, for example, struggled to cope with a China PR team that dominated play, cheered on by a capacity crowd of home fans. Marcos Soares' team, however, maintained concentration and focus - and struck a winning goal in stoppage time. In the other Quarter-finals, Japan and Australia both conceded the first goal to their opponents (IR Iran and Iraq) but channelled their emotions in a positive manner and achieved comeback successes by staying focused after falling behind. In the fourth Quarter-final, defending champions Uzbekistan showed great spirit by coming back from a 3-1 deficit with two stoppage-time goals – only to lose a penalty shoot-out to a Korea Republic side who needed emotional resilience to overcome the psychological blow of surrendering a seemingly comfortable advantage in the closing minutes.

The AFC Technical Team, having witnessed situations in previous tournaments where losses of emotional control had generated problems – not least defeat – highlighted emotional stability as one of the event's positive features and one of the facets which players will need if they are to go on to perform at top international level. Japan's head coach Yuzo Funakoshi commented that "playing in this kind of high-pressure situation is more beneficial for a player's development than any amount of training". Do you agree?

Happy birthday?

The squad lists reveal that Iraq, the Kyrgyz Republic and Syria had one player apiece born between October and December; IR Iran, DPR Korea and Uzbekistan only two. Fifteen members of the DPR Korea squad had birthdays in the first three months of the calendar year. Overall, 51 players had dates of birth in the last three months of the year; 152 in the first quarter. In other words, for every player with a birthday between October and December there were three born between January and March. Two out of three players had dates of birth in the first half of the year.

The statistics raise an obvious question. Can it possibly be argued that players born in the second half of the year – and especially in the last three months – have less talent than those born between January and June?

In a U17 competition, it might be understandable to see a majority of players born in the early months, bearing in mind that, in this age category, six to nine months may entail a significant difference in physical development. But is it normal to see this discrepancy carried through to U20 level? Does it indicate that players born later in the year, no matter how talented they may be, are not allowed to dislodge those who have appeared on squad lists at earlier stages of the development programme? Is a great deal of talent being allowed to slip through the net? What can be done to offer fair development pathways to players born in the second half of the year and, in particular, to those with birthdays in the last three months?

Going with the flow?

During recent years, actual playing time has regularly been a talking point at all age levels. In Shenzhen, during the Group Stage when all participants were in action (statistics from the Knockout Stage ties were distorted by the amount of extra time) the average was 55m28s – more or less in line with 55m39s at the senior AFC Asian Cup™. Champions Australia led the way with totals in excess of 60 minutes. Silver medallists Saudi Arabia were penultimate with only Iraq posting a lower average.

On the other hand, the AFC Technical Team remarked that "there was a lot of high-intensity, positive play on display and the referees' work was one of the factors that contributed to this. While controlling the game, they encouraged the players to play positively, and this created a flow to the game. This not only made for entertaining matches but also generated a positive environment for the development of young players". How important is this for age-limit teams?

Timed out?

After Korea Republic's shoot-out defeat by Saudi Arabia in the Semi-final, head coach Lee Chang-won acknowledged that fatigue had played a part. "Our last game had also gone to extra-time," he said, "and although our players did their best, they did not produce a great performance." Two key members of his midfield trio in a 1-4-2-3-1 started on the bench – one of them Kim Tae-won, supplier of four goals and one assist plus an 85% success rate of passing in the opponents' half. "After analysing their fitness level, we found they were not in good shape," he commented. Korea Republic had two rest days between the two matches; Saudi Arabia had three.

The talking point emerged because four of the seven knockout ties, including the Final, were decided by penalty shoot-outs. In all four, the 30 minutes of extra time failed to produce a goal. In other words, two hours of football were goal-less. In terms of the fatigue factor and player welfare, would it be preferable to eliminate extra time and, in games where the scores are level at the end of normal time, proceed directly to the penalty shoot-out?





TEAM PROFILES

AUSTRALIA



BASIC FORMATION : 1-4-4-2 (FLAT/DIAMOND)



COACH



TREVOR MORGAN (AUS)

A familiar name in Australia's youth football scene, Trevor Morgan's coaching resume includes roles at the A-League academies, and Football Australia's development programmes and guided Australia to the knockout stage of the FIFA U-17 World Cup in Brazil in 2019.

A mainstay across the national team setup, Morgan has led the Under-17 and Under-23 sides to fourth-place finishes at the AFC U-16 Championship 2018 and AFC U23 Asian Cup™ Uzbekistan 2022, respectively, before guiding the Young Socceroos to the AFC U20 Asian Cup™ 2025 title, ending the nation's decade-long trophy drought.

GROUP STAGE			QUARTER - FINAL	SEMI - FINAL	FINAL
5 - 1 KGZ	3 - 1 QAT	2 - 1 CHN	3 - 2 IRQ	2 - 0 JPN	1 -1 (P:5 - 4) KSA

KEY FEATURES

- Constructive build-up play from the back, including a goalkeeper
- Comfortable in possession when under pressure
- Effective use of running with the ball when building up plays
- Inverted and overlapping full-backs
- Good finishing ability, which led to scoring efficiency
- Shifting from midfield pressing to intensive high-pressing
- Effective combination play between the target striker and deep-lying striker
- Dangerous at set pieces with aerial strength
- Influential individual players
- Strong, hardworking players with well-controlled emotions
- Tactical flexibility (adapting to the state of play)

KEY PLAYERS

10	Alexander Badolato	Led the attack with outstanding technique
6	Paul Okon	Holding midfielder and skipper with good insight
1	Steven Hall	Goalkeeper who contributed to both attack and defence

SAUDI ARABIA



BASIC FORMATION : 1-4-3-3



COACH



MARCO ALEXANDRE de SOUZA SOARES (BRA)

Rio-born Marco Soares enjoyed a professional playing career across continents before turning to coaching in 2007. He worked with Brazilian youth sides including Santos Under-20 and Corinthians Under-17 before arriving at Al Hilal SFC to manage its youth side in 2021. Appointed head coach of Saudi Arabia's Under-20 team, he led the Green Falcons to a runners-up finish at the AFC U20 Asian Cup™ China 2025.

GROUP STAGE			QUARTER - FINAL	SEMI - FINAL	FINAL
1 - 0 JOR	0 - 1 IRQ	2 - 1 PRK	1 - 0 CHN	0 - 0 (P:3 - 2) KOR	1 -1 (P: 4 - 5) AUS

KEY FEATURES

- Patient and constructive build-up play from the back
- Comfortable in possession under pressure with excellent individual skills
- Effective use of full-backs, especially on the right; good crosses
- Shifting from midfield pressing into intensive high-pressing
- Quick forward movement after regaining possession, leading to counterattacks
- Quick transition from attack to defence to launch counter-pressing
- Attacking and defending power in one-on-one situations
- Influential goalkeeper who continuously inspired the team
- Excellent winning mentality with well-controlled emotions
- Tactical flexibility and depth of substitutes

KEY PLAYERS

22	Hamed Al Shanqiti	Goalkeeper who led from the back with a series of big saves
15	Amar Yuhaybi	Midfielder with amazing mobility and creativity
6	Saleh Barnawi	Defender who showed outstanding strength in duels

JAPAN



BASIC FORMATION : 1-4-2-3-1



COACH



YUZO FUNAKOSHI (JPN)

A former J1 League forward, Yuzo Funakoshi represented Japan at the 1993 FIFA U-17 World Cup before transitioning into coaching in 2013. The 47-year-old's coaching journey began when he joined the technical staff of Thespa Gunma before lending his services as manager to the Japan Football Academy (JFA)'s Under-18 side.

His experience at the JFA Academy paved the way for him to join the national team structure in 2022 and since then, Funakoshi has remained part of the Under-20 side, most recently leading them to a Semi-final finish in the AFC U20 Asian Cup™ 2025.

GROUP STAGE			QUARTER - FINAL	SEMI - FINAL	FINAL
3 - 0 THA	2 - 2 SYR	1 - 1 KOR	1 - 1 (P:3 - 2) IRQ	0 - 2 AUS	-

KEY FEATURES

- Progressive build-up play from a goalkeeper by interchanging positions
- Comfortable in possession by rotating midfielders even against pressure
- Influential holding midfielder as a skipper
- Effective use of overlapping full-backs both at the same time
- Game-opening diagonals from a short-pass-based game
- Assured combination plays in tight spaces around the box
- Intensive high-pressing and midfield pressing, according to the situation
- The goalkeeper covered the wide space behind the defenders
- Quick transition from attack to defence; counter-pressing
- Ability to stay focused after falling behind
- Well-disciplined team spirit with composure

KEY PLAYERS

S	Rion Ichihara	Leader of the defence with excellent passing ability
10	Yuto Ozeki	Playmaker with outstanding skills and creative plays
3	Niko Takahashi	Full-back dynamo who created several big chances

KOREA REPUBLIC



BASIC FORMATION : 1-4-4-2 (1-4-2-3-1)



COACH



LEE CHANG-WON (KOR)

As a player, Lee Chang-won predominantly featured for K League sides Pohang Steelers and Chunnam Dragons, winning multiple accolades with both sides, including the AFC Champions League™ in 2009 with the former.

Lee returned to Pohang Steelers as an assistant coach of the youth and reserve sides before assuming similar responsibilities for Daejeon Citizen. The 49-year-old finally joined the Under-20 national team in 2024 and led the young Taeguk Warriors to the Semi-finals of the AFC U20 Asian Cup™.

GROUP STAGE			QUARTER - FINAL	SEMI - FINAL	FINAL
2 - 1 SYR	4 - 1 THA	1 - 1 JPN	3 - 3 (P:3 - 1) UZB	0 - 0 (P:2 - 3) KSA	-

KEY FEATURES

- Constructive build-up play from the back
- Comfortable in possession even under pressure
- Effective use of wingers: left-footer on the right/right-footer on the left with individual penetrations and precise crosses
- Well-organised defence: intensive high-pressing from compact block
- Effective combination play between target striker and deep-lying striker
- Influential individual players
- Aerial dominance both in attack and defence
- Dangerous at set pieces with precise delivery and aerial strength
- Strong, hard-working, athletic players
- Excellent team spirit with a winning mentality

KEY PLAYERS

10	Kim Tae-won	Free-spirited attacker, who created chances and possessed a keen eye for goal
8	Shin Sung	Playmaker who controlled the game and finished plays
20	Shin Min-ha	Defender with strength in the air in both phases

COACH PROFILES

COACH PROFILES COACH PROFILES

A	CHN	Dejan Durdevic	Serbia	4 Jul 1967 (58)
	AUS	Trevor Brian Morgan	Australia	9 Jul 1971 (54)
	KGZ	Serhii Puchkov	Ukraine	17 Apr 1964 (63)
	QAT	Felix Sarriugarte	Spain	6 Nov 1964 (61)
B	IRQ	Emad Mohammed	Iraq	24 Jul 1982 (43)
	JOR	Peter Meindertsma	Netherlands	18 Nov 1974 (51)
	KSA	Marco Alexandre de Souza Soares	Brazil	30 Jul 1975 (50)
	PRK	Jon Chol	DPR Korea	6 Nov 1964 (61)
C	UZB	Farkhod Nishanov	Uzbekistan	20 Sep 1991 (34)
	IRN	Hossein Abdi	IR Iran	21 Mar 1967 (58)
	IDN	Indra Sjafri	Indonesia	2 Feb 1963 (62)
	YEM	Mohammed Al Baadani	Yemen	19 Jul 1969 (56)
D	JPN	Yuzo Funakoshi	Japan	12 Jun 1977 (48)
	KOR	Lee Chang-won	Korea Rep	10 Jul 1975 (50)
	SYR	Mohammad Kwid	Syria	9 Apr 1956 (69)
	THA	Emerson Pereira	Brazil	20 Aug 1973 (52)



TOURNAMENT RESULTS

GROUP STAGE

Group A	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
AUSTRALIA	3	3	0	0	10	3	7	9
CHINA PR	3	2	0	1	8	5	3	6
QATAR	3	1	0	2	6	5	1	3
KYRGYZ REPUBLIC	3	0	0	3	3	14	-11	0

No.	Date	Time	Team A	Score	Team B
2	12 Feb,25	17:15:00	AUSTRALIA	5-1 (4-0)	KYRGYZ REPUBLIC
1	12 Feb,25	19:30:00	CHINA PR	2-1 (2-0)	QATAR
9	15 Feb,25	17:15:00	QATAR	1-3 (1-1)	AUSTRALIA
10	15 Feb,25	19:30:00	KYRGYZ REPUBLIC	2-5 (1-2)	CHINA PR
17	18 Feb,25	19:30:00	CHINA PR	1-2 (1-2)	AUSTRALIA
18	18 Feb,25	19:30:00	KYRGYZ REPUBLIC	0-4 (0-2)	QATAR



GROUP STAGE

Group B	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
SAUDI ARABIA	3	2	0	1	3	2	1	6
IRAQ	3	1	2	0	2	1	1	5
JORDAN	3	1	1	1	2	2	0	4
DPR KOREA	3	0	1	2	3	5	-2	1

No.	Date	Time	Team A	Score	Team B
3	13 Feb,25	15:00:00	IRAQ	1-1 (1-0)	DPR KOREA
4	13 Feb,25	19:30:00	JORDAN	0-1 (0-0)	SAUDI ARABIA
11	16 Feb,25	15:00:00	DPR KOREA	1-2 (0-1)	JORDAN
12	16 Feb,25	19:30:00	SAUDI ARABIA	0-1 (0-1)	IRAQ
19	19 Feb,25	15:00:00	IRAQ	0-0 (0-0)	JORDAN
20	19 Feb,25	15:00:00	SAUDI ARABIA	2-1 (0-1)	DPR KOREA



GROUP STAGE

Group C	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN	3	3	0	0	11	1	10	9
UZBEKISTAN	3	2	0	1	5	3	2	6
INDONESIA	3	0	1	2	1	6	-5	1
YEMEN	3	0	1	2	0	7	-7	1

No.	Date	Time	Team A	Score	Team B
5	13 Feb,25	17:15:00	UZBEKISTAN	1-0 (1-0)	YEMEN
6	13 Feb,25	19:30:00	ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN	3-0 (1-0)	INDONESIA
13	16 Feb,25	17:15:00	YEMEN	0-6 (0-4)	ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN
14	16 Feb,25	19:30:00	INDONESIA	1-3 (1-1)	UZBEKISTAN
21	19 Feb,25	19:30:00	UZBEKISTAN	1-2 (0-0)	ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN
22	19 Feb,25	19:30:00	INDONESIA	0-0 (0-0)	YEMEN



GROUP STAGE

Group D	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
KOREA REPUBLIC	3	2	1	0	7	3	4	7
JAPAN	3	1	2	0	6	3	3	5
SYRIA	3	0	2	1	5	6	-1	2
THAILAND	3	0	1	2	3	9	-6	1

No.	Date	Time	Team A	Score	Team B
8	14 Feb,25	15:00:00	KOREA REPUBLIC	2-1 (2-0)	SYRIA
7	14 Feb,25	17:15:00	JAPAN	3-0 (2-0)	THAILAND
16	17 Feb,25	15:00:00	SYRIA	2-2 (2-1)	JAPAN
15	17 Feb,25	17:15:00	THAILAND	1-4 (1-1)	KOREA REPUBLIC
23	20 Feb,25	15:00:00	JAPAN	1-1 (1-0)	KOREA REPUBLIC
24	20 Feb,25	15:00:00	SYRIA	2-2 (0-0)	THAILAND



QUARTER-FINALS

No.	Date	Time	Team A	Score	Team B
26	22 Feb,25	16:15:00	SAUDI ARABIA	1-0 (0-0)	CHINA PR
25	22 Feb,25	19:30:00	AUSTRALIA	3-2 (1-2)	IRAQ
27	23 Feb,25	16:15:00	ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN	1-1 a.e.t. (1-1,1-1)3-4 PSO	JAPAN
28	23 Feb,25	19:30:00	KOREA REPUBLIC	3-3 a.e.t. (3-3,1-1)3-1 PSO	UZBEKISTAN





SEMI-FINALS

No.	Date	Time	Team A	Score	Team B
30	26 Feb,25	16:15:00	SAUDI ARABIA	0-0 a.e.t. (0-0,0-0)3-2 PSO	KOREA REPUBLIC
29	26 Feb,25	19:30:00	AUSTRALIA	2-0 (0-0)	JAPAN





AFC U20 ASIAN CUP AFC U20 ASIAN CUP AFC U20 ASIAN CUP AFC U20 ASIAN CUP

FINAL

No.	Date	Time	Team A	Score	Team B
31	01 Mar,25	19:30:00	AUSTRALIA	1-1 a.e.t. (1-1,1-1)5-4 PSO	SAUDI ARABIA





REFEREES

1. SUMMARY

A total of 31 match officials, comprising 12 referees and 16 assistant referees, including one Standby Referee and two Standby Assistant Referees, were appointed to the AFC U20 Asian Cup™ China 2025, epitomising a diverse range of nationalities with 18 Member Associations (MAs) represented across the five AFC regions.

1.1 AFC Match Officials

Refrees	MA
Alexander George King	AUS
Ammar Ebrahim Hasan Mahfoodh	BHR
Shen Yinhao	CHN
Thoriq Munir Alkatiri	IDN
Zaid Thamer Mohammed	IRQ
Hiroki Kasahara	JPN
Choi Hyun-jai	KOR
Abdullah M M H M H Jamali	KUW
Qasim Matar Ali Al-Hatmi	OMA
Abdulhadi Alasmar M A Al-Ruaile	QAT
Ahmed Eisa Mohamed Darwish	UAE
Asker Nadjafaliev	UZB

Assistant Referees	MA
James Andrew Lindsay	AUS
Mohamed Jaafar Mohamed Salman	BHR
Guo Jingtao	CHN
Luo Zheng	CHN
Bangbang Syamsudar	IDN
Hayder Abdulhasan Ali Ubaydee	IRQ
Takumi Takagi	JPN
Cheon Jin-hee	KOR
Ali T H A Jraq	KUW
Nasser Salim Abdullah Ambusaidi	OMA
So Kai Man	HKG
Khaled Aiad S H Khalaf	QAT
Pattarapong Kijsathit	THA
Ismoil Nuraliev	TJK
Yaser Sabeil Ahmed Mohamed Almurshidi	UAE
Ruslan Serazitdinov	UZB
Standby Referee	**MA**
Tuan Mohd Yaasin Bin Tuan Mohd Hanafiah	MAS
Standby Assistant Referees	**MA**
Ali Muhammad	PAK
Amirmohamad Davoudzadeh	IRN

Technical Instructors/Assessors	MA
Suresh Srinivasan	IND
Awni Abdel Karim Said Hassouneh	JOR
Ryuji Sato	JPN
Mohammed Abdulla Hassan Mohammed	UAE
Valentin Kovalenko	UZB
Fitness Instructors	**MA**
Ganesan S/O Maniam	SGP
Zayed Dawood Salman Kamal	UAE



1.2 Support Team

Referees' Liaison Officers (LOs): A team of LOs supported the coordination of all logistic requirements.

Players Team: Local teams took part in the referees practical training sessions.

Medical Team: A medical doctor was stationed at the AFC HQ hotel throughout the competition, while a team of physiotherapists and masseurs ensured the referee's physical conditioning. Additionally, an ambulance and paramedics were stationed at the training venue daily to provide emergency and first aid treatment as needed.

2. Preparatory Course

The referees and assistant referees participated in a four-day preparatory course from February 8 to 11, consisting of theoretical sessions, fitness check, practical training sessions with Instant Feedback set up.

2.1 Fitness Check

All match officials were declared physically qualified to cope with the match demands upon the successful completion of:

- Yo-Yo Intermittent Test for referees (target: 18.8)
- Assistant Referee Intermittent Endurance Test (ARIET) for assistant referees (target: 15.54)

2.2 Practical Sessions

Two teams and a coach assisted to simulate match incidents based on the instructors' training plan. Fitness training was conducted alongside Instant Feedback sessions to ensure match officials were suitably prepared for their upcoming appointments.

2.3 Theoretical Sessions

The theoretical sessions were designed to further enhance the technical knowledge of the match officials and optimise the level of consistency in their application of the Laws of the Game. Numerous match incident videos were reviewed and discussed in order to facilitate the match officials' participation, analysis and consensus, while relevant information on fitness and administration was also shared.

Technical Topics
- Game Management
- Handball
- Offside
- Positioning and Reading of the Game
- Tactical Fouls
- Penalty Area Incidents
- Challenges

Fitness Topics
- Weight Control
- Fitness Check
- Recovery Exercises

2.4 Preparation in Non-Refereeing Technical Topics

A few non-refereeing topics were covered in the preparatory course, including the Prevention of Match Fixing, Understanding Severe Injuries, and Competition Operations at the Stadiums. These sessions aimed to enhance referees' awareness of the crucial roles and discipline required both on and off the pitch during the competition.

3. During Competition

3.1 Practical Sessions

Daily practical training sessions were conducted with an emphasis on fitness conditioning and maintenance. Referees and assistant referees appointed for matches performed customised exercises planned for matchday minus 2 (MD -2) and minus 1 (MD -1). Gymnasium and pool recovery sessions were also delivered as part of their post-match programme.



3.2 Match Assessment

All match footages were analysed live by a video referee assessor at the Remote Monitoring Room located in the referees' hotel. The video referee assessor tracked the match situations, compiling all relevant details, which included time and nature of incidents, decisions and sanctions, officials involved and other inputs for discussion.

Referee assessors were also assigned to observe the match officials' performance live at the match venue. The referee assessors closely monitored the team's officiating capabilities and decisions made throughout the match and provided first-hand feedback.

3.3 Match Debriefing Sessions

The match debriefings conducted for the appointed match officials served as a vital learning tool, whereby significant incidents from the previous day's matches were analysed to prepare the officials for upcoming challenges.

By addressing specific match incidents and providing guidance on officiating standards, the instructors highlighted areas for improvement and provided advice to ensure consistency and uniformity in foul recognition and Laws of the Game interpretation.

3.4 Match Preparation Sessions

Mr. Takeshi Ono, AFC Deputy Technical Director, presented insights related to team tactics, individual players' styles and behaviours, which proved to be beneficial for the match officials' preparation and understanding of football dynamics. An emphasis was also put on the pivotal role that the match officials play as a football developer.



4. VIDEO ASSISTANT REFEREE (VAR) SYSTEM

The VAR system was implemented from the Semi-Finals onwards, for a total of three matches.

4.1. Technical Setup

A decentralised system was implemented for the competition, meaning that there was a Video Operations Room (VOR) located at each venue from where the VMOs operated. Each VOR was situated in a room within the stadium, near the broadcast compound to allow camera feeds to be easily provided to the VAR System.

Technology Provider
- Rigour Tech

VOR
- Located at each stadium
- Reception of all camera feeds from the Host Broadcaster (HB)
- Personnel setup:
  - VAR, AVAR

Referee Review Area (RRA)
- Pyramid Monitor
- Located next to or behind the fourth official's bench at each venue
- Displays VAR output screen for referees to review incidents in the case of an On-field Review (OFR)

4.2 VAR Implementation Statistics

There were no reviews (On-field Review or VAR Only Review) from the three matches that were played with VAR implementation.

5. TECHNICAL SUMMARY

5.1 General Performance

The referee assessors and instructors' team, through their match reports and close monitoring, rated the match officials' performance as 'good'. The daily training, match debriefings and other activities and resources organised to raise the refereeing standards contributed significantly to decision-making as the tournament progressed.

5.2 General Management

A total of 125 disciplinary sanctions were issued at the AFC U20 Asian Cup™ China 2025, of which 118 were cautions (yellow cards). Four (4) sending-offs took place after a second caution and three (3) direct red cards were shown. There was a match average of 3.81 yellow cards and 0.23 red cards.





BEST PLAYERS / BEST GOALS / AWARDS

BEST PLAYERS BEST PLAYERS BEST PLAYERS

GOALKEEPERS



NO.1
ARSHA SHAKOURI
IRN



NO.22
HAMED AL SHANQITI
KSA



NO. 1
STEVEN HALL
AUS

DEFENDERS



NO. 7
DANIEL BENNIE
AUS



NO. 5
MOHAMMED BARNAWI
KSA



NO. 3
NIKO TAKAHASHI
JPN



NO. 3
SEBASTIAN ESPOSITO
AUS



NO. 5
RION ICHIHARA
JPN

MIDFIELDERS



NO.6
AHMAD ALKALOU
SYR



NO.15
AMAR AL YUHAYBI
KSA



NO. 10
AMOORI FAISAL
IRQ



NO. 6
PAUL OKON-ENGSTLER
AUS



NO. 10
REZA GHANDI POUR
IRN



NO. 8
SHIN SUNG
KOR



NO. 10
YUTO OZEKI
JPN

FORWARDS



NO.10
ALEX BADOLATO
AUS



NO.10
KIM TAE-WON
KOR



NO. 10
MUKHAMMADALI URINBOEV
UZB



NO. 11
WANG YUDONG
CHN



NO. 7
THANAWUT PHOCHAI
THA



NO. 7
ESMAEIL GHOLIZADEH
IRN

BEST GOALS



Rank-ing	Player	No.	Country	Match	Time	Type
1	IRQ	10	Amoori Faisal	AUS	15	Well-controlled shot from outside the box
2	UZB	23	Abdugafur Khaydarov	KOR	90+4	Last-minute goal with composure
3	AUS	10	Alexander Badolato	IRQ	74	Fantastic first touch and volley
4	KSA	15	Amar Al Yuhaybi	CHN	90+5	Decisive last-minute goal, accurate volley
5	AUS	19	Musa Toure	JPN	48	Overlap, cross, shot, high quality of play
6	CHN	9	Liu Chengyu	QAT	21	Good turn and defence-splitting pass
7	PRK	3	Han Jae Yong	KSA	28	An amazing one-touch, long-range shot
8	IRQ	9	Mustafa Qabeel	AUS	26	Speed, fast running with the ball, feint, shot
9	JPN	6	Kosei Ogura	IRN	30	Long-range shot
10	IRN	16	Abolfazl Zamani	YEM	26	Long-range shot

TOP GOALS SET PLAY

VIDEO LINK

Rank-ing	Team	No.	Name	VS	Min	Comment
1	IRQ	10	Amoori Faisal	KSA	25	Direct free kick
2	AUS	9	Luka Jovanovic	IRQ	22	Direct free kick, long-range
3	SYR	8	Aland Abdi	KOR	60	Indirect free kick
4	SYR	10	Ahmad Soufi	JPN	33	After beautiful free kick, good shot taken
5	AUS	21	Dean Bosnjak	QAT	52	Corner



AWARDS AWARDS AWARDS AWARDS AWARDS







BEST GOALKEEPER: HAMED YOUSEF (SAUDI ARABIA)

MVP: ALEX BADOLATO (AUSTRALIA)

TOP GOALSCORER: MUKHAMMADALI URINBOEV (UZBEKISTAN)

AFC FAIR PLAY AWARD



SOCIAL MEDIA

DIGITAL STATISTICS

SOCIAL MEDIA

IMPRESSIONS

2023
250,109,840

2025
182,906,170

27%

VIEWS

2023
42,787,763

2025
101,507,756

137%

THE-AFC.COM

PAGE VIEWS

2023
2,982,052

2025
1,142,688

USERS

2023
784,322

2025
416,373

AFC U17 ASIAN CUP™

AFC U17 ASIAN CUP SAUDI ARABIA 2025

TECHNICAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The 20th edition of the competition, which over the years has involved U17 or U16 national teams, was the first to align with the parameters of the newly-remodelled 48-team FIFA U-17 World Cup. The fact that all eight quarter-finalists would qualify for the event to be hosted by Qatar in November 2025 signified a shift in focus in that it gave greater weight to results in the Group Stage of the 16-team final tournament, which featured nine former champions. The 43 participants in the qualifying phase had been divided into 10 groups, with the five best second-placed teams joining the group winners. The five unsuccessful runners-up included Qatar, champions in 1990, and Iraq, title-winners as recently as 2016.

Saudi Arabia qualified automatically as hosts of a final tournament staged at four venues in the adjacent cities of Jeddah and Taif, where maximum temperatures in excess of 30°C made it logical for kick-off times to be scheduled for late in the day. Each city used one lower-capacity venue—the King Abdullah Sports City Hall Stadium in Jeddah and the Okaz Stadium in Taif—along with the 25,000-capacity Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City Stadium in Jeddah and the 20,000-capacity King Fahd Sports City Stadium in Taif, which hosted the final on April 20, 2025.

The 16 head coaches at the tournament included four non-native technicians: one apiece from Brazil, Japan, Portugal and San Marino. Six of the eight who qualified for the FIFA U-17 World Cup were coaching in their native countries. In terms of squad rotation and player development, the coaches used 286 of the 310 substitutions available to them.

During the U20 tournament played a few weeks earlier, dates of birth had emerged as a talking point, which was echoed by squad lists in Saudi Arabia where 176 of the 368 players had been born in the first three months of the year, compared with 50 in the last quarter. Overall, 70.1% of the emerging talents had dates of birth in the first half of the year and 29.9% in the last six months.

At a tournament where VAR was in operation during the knockout rounds, a team of 29 match officials featured 11 graduates from the AFC Referee Academy and, for the first time, included four female officials – two referees and two assistant referees. The use of VAR signified a learning opportunity for officials who had no previous experience of the system in their national competitions.

Led by AFC's Head of Coach Education Wim Koevermans, the Technical Observer Team at the final tournament was formed by Fahad Al Zarraa (Qatar), Nihad Souqar (Jordan) and the head coach of the Afghanistan senior national team, Usmon Toshev (Uzbekistan).





STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

OVERVIEW

The AFC U17 Asian Cup™ Saudi Arabia 2025 was held on April 3 to 20, 2025.

Uzbekistan emerged champions after defeating Saudi Arabia 2-0 in the Final at the King Fahd Sports City Stadium in Taif.

The Okaz Stadium in Taif was also utilised while matches were also played in Jeddah, with games contested at the King Abdullah Sports City Hall Stadium and Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Stadium.

The eight Quarter-finalists sealed their spots at the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2025.



GROUP STAGE

GROUP A





Uzbekistan stamped their mark on Group A from their opening match, defeating Thailand 4-1.

Seeking to emerge champions for a second time after having won the title in 2012, Uzbekistan easily topped the group with subsequent victories over China PR (2-1) and Saudi Arabia (3-0).

Saudi Arabia also advanced to the Quarter-finals with victories against China PR (2-1) and Thailand (3-1) securing them the runners-up spot.

STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

GROUP B

Japan and United Arab Emirates advanced from Group B after an extremely tight contest saw the four teams finishing on four points.

Defending champions Japan got off to a fine start, defeating UAE 4-1 but were then held 1-1 by Vietnam. That was followed by a 3-2 defeat to Australia, who had opened their campaign with a 1-1 stalemate with Vietnam.

A 2-0 defeat to UAE on Matchday Two ultimately cost Australia as they exited the competition on the head-to-head ratio, with Japan topping the group and UAE finishing second.





STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

GROUP C





Indonesia were unstoppable in Group C, with the Southeast Asian side finishing top with a perfect record of nine points.

A stunning 1-0 win against former champions Korea Republic on Matchday One was followed by victories against Yemen (4-1) and Afghanistan (2-0) as Indonesia sealed qualification to the FIFA U-17 World Cup on merit for the first time.

Korea Republic advanced as the group runners-up thanks to victories against Afghanistan (6-0) and Yemen (1-0).

STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

GROUP D

Tajikistan, runners-up in 2018, topped Group D after a tight contest which saw DPR Korea also advancing with Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran missing out.

A 2-1 win over Oman on Matchday One gave Tajikistan the perfect start but the Central Asian side then suffered a 3-0 defeat to DPR Korea.

Tajikistan were back at their best in their final match, defeating Iran 3-1 to finish a point ahead of DPR Korea.

The East Asian side's win against Tajikistan on Matchday Two came either side of stalemates with Iran (1-1) and Oman (2-2).





QUARTER-FINALS

JAPAN 2-2 SAUDI ARABIA
(AET, SAUDI ARABIA WON 3-2 ON PENALTIES)

Saudi Arabia ended Japan's reign with a thrilling penalty shootout win after their last eight tie ended 2-2.

Both sides exchanged leads in a topsy turvy match with Taiga Seguchi putting Japan ahead from the penalty spot in the eighth minute after Abu Baker Saeed handled the ball in the area.

There was redemption for Saeed nine minutes later when Saudi Arabia were awarded a penalty of their own after Makoto Himeno hauled down Abdulaziz Al Fawaz, with the central defender slotting home the equaliser.

Saudi Arabia went ahead in the 37th minute after Nasser Al Fihani produced a precise diagonal pass to Abdulrahman Sufyani on the right flank, who drove into the box and committed Japanese custodian Shuji Muramatsu before cutting the ball back for Sabri Dahal to slot home.

Japan head coach Nozomi Hiroyama adjusted his frontline after the break with Hiroto Asada and Minato Yoshida sent on and it had the desired effect in the 72nd minute.

Yoshida's quick pass found Tani, who released Asada to slot past Al Otaibi as the match went to penalties.

Al Otaibi starred in the shoot-out, saving Yuito Kamo's attempt with Shota Fujii and Ryota Hariu's efforts hitting the woodwork as Saudi Arabia stayed on course for a third title.



STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

UZBEKISTAN 3-1 UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Asilbek Aliev struck a first-half brace to send Uzbekistan into the Semi-finals after an impressive 3-1 win against the United Arab Emirates.

Uzbekistan started off on the front foot and had a great opportunity to take the lead in the second minute, but Abubakir Shukurullaev shot tamely from close range after a neat one-two with Sadriddin Khasanov.

Khasanov fired just wide from outside the penalty box, before Sayfiddin Sodikov was denied by a last-ditch block from Ali Hassan Aljasmi with Uzbekistan seizing control of proceedings.

The Central Asians were rewarded for their dominance in the 14th minute through a magnificent 25-yard free-kick from Aliev, who struck the ball beautifully from the outside of his right foot into the top left corner.

In the 35th minute, the Odil Junior striker made it five goals at the AFC U17 Asian Cup, using his thigh to turn home Sodikov's left-wing cross.

Sodikov put his name on the scoresheet with a penalty in the 45th minute to close out a thoroughly dominant first half performance from Uzbekistan.

With a three-goal advantage, Uzbekistan were content to sit back in the second half but UAE could only find a consolation, with Mohamed Buti Almarar scoring off a corner in the 66th minute.





STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

INDONESIA 0-6 DPR KOREA

Six players found the back of the net as DPR Korea overpowered Indonesia 6-0 to march into the Semi-finals.

DPR Korea wasted no time in getting down to business when Pak Kwang Song's seventh minute corner landed nicely for Choe Song Hun, who first-timed his shot past a diving Dafa Al Gasemi.

The East Asians extended their lead in the 19th minute when captain Kim Yu Jin's volley from inside the box took a deflection off defender Mathew Baker and bounced past a flat-footed Al Gasemi.

They widened their lead three minutes after the break, when Pak's cut back on the right found Ri Kyong Bong in the middle of the six yard box, whose shot hit the crossbar and bounced into goal.

Tae Guk made it 4-0 in the 60th minute when he converted a penalty after a handball from Putu Panji, and Ri Kang Rim got onto the scoresheet a minute later when he dashed into the box, evaded two defenders and Al Gasemi and sent his shot into an unguarded net.

Their sixth goal came courtesy of Pak Ju Won, who capitalised on Fabio Azkairawan's error following a corner in the 77th minute to bury his shot from the middle of the box to cap the commanding win.





STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

TAJIKISTAN 2-2 KOREA REPUBLIC
(KOREA REPUBLIC WON 5-3 ON PENALTIES)

Korea Republic advanced to the Semi-finals after defeating Tajikistan 5-3 on penalties, with the Quarter-final tie ending 2-2.

Korea Republic captain Koo Hyeo-bin emerged as their hero after putting away the winning penalty in the shootout, with goalkeeper Park Do-hun playing a big role after saving Tajikistan's second spotkick.

With both sides unable to put away their chances in the first half, the match finally burst into life in the 67th minute when Jeong Hyeon-ung scored from Kim Ji-sung's cross from the right.

Lim Ye-chan thought he had given Korea Republic a second goal with a sweet strike in the 74th minute, but the goal was rescinded upon a VAR review, with the ball having hit Ji-sung's hand in the build-up.

Tajikistan's Abdullo Ibragimzoda proved lively after coming on, forcing goalkeeper Do-hun into a diving save in the 80th minute.

The substitute turned the game around shortly after as Tajikistan scored two goals in as many minutes.

The Central Asian side drew level in the 83rd minute through Mukhammad Nazriev, who turned the ball home from close range after great work from Ibragimzoda on the left.

Nazriev turned provider two minutes later with a lovely backheel for Ibragimzoda to rifle the ball home.

But there was late drama as Korea Republic were awarded a penalty six minutes into time added on after a VAR check, and Ji-sung made no mistake from the spot to force the game into a shoot-out.

Do-hun first saved Furqon Rahimzoda's effort, before Hyeo-bin kept his cool by converting the fifth spot-kick to steer his team into the semis.



SEMI-FINALS



STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

SAUDI ARABIA 1-1 KOREA REPUBLIC
(SAUDI ARABIA WON 3-1 ON PENALTIES)

Saudi Arabia came back from the cusp of defeat to beat Korea Republic 3-1 on penalties to reach the Final.

Abu Baker Saeed's equaliser in stoppage time took the Semi-final into a penalty shoot-out, with the match having ended 1-1.

Goalkeeper Abdulrahman Al Otaibi emerged the hero after saving attempts from Jeong Hyeon-ung and Kim Do-yeon in the shootout.

After both sides went close several times, Korea Republic took the lead just before the break when Kim Ye-geon chased down a long free-kick to send the ball back across the face of the goalmouth for Oh Ha-ram, who slotted home the rebound after his initial attempt had been saved by Al Otaibi.

It took Saudi Arabia until the 74th minute to create their first opening of the second half, substitute Thari Saeed embarked on a surging run on the left before cutting the ball back for Sufyani, who did well to create space but saw his shot blocked by Hyeon-bin.

Saudi Arabia, however, were not to be denied the equaliser, drawing level in the 12th minute of time added on after Do-hun bundled Abdulhadi Al Fawaz in the box with Saeed stepping up to convert the spot-kick to send the match to penalties.

Al Otaibi then denied Jeong and Kim in the shoot-out to take Saudi Arabia into the Final.





STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

UZBEKISTAN 3-0 DPR KOREA

Uzbekistan stormed into the Final after an impressive 3-0 victory against 10-man DPR Korea.

Both sides entered the tie having scored 24 goals between them, but it was Uzbekistan who were the first to go close when Sadriddin Khasanov was tripped in the box in the 26th minute with captain Muminkhon Bakhhodirkhonov stepping up for the spot-kick.

Bakhhodirkhonov shot straight at goalkeeper Jong Hyon Ju and while the rebound was turned into his own net by DPR Korea defender Ri Kang Song, the effort was ruled out after a VAR review.

Khasanov, however, set the game alight in the 31st minute, cutting inside his marker before firing a shot into the top corner to give Uzbekistan a deserved lead.

Things got worse for DPR Korea in the 40th minute after they were reduced to 10 men when Kang Myong Bom received his marching orders for a second yellow card.

Uzbekistan made their numerical advantage count and doubled their lead in the 62nd minute through Jamshidbek Rustamov.

The substitute controlled Abubakir Shukurullaev's perfectly flighted cross before finishing with a curling effort into the top corner for his third goal after coming off the bench.

Three minutes later, Shukurullaev got his name on the scoresheet with a simple tap-in after great work from Khasanov, who teed him up to stab the ball into an empty goalmouth as Uzbekistan marched into the Final in style.





THE FINAL

UZBEKISTAN 2-0 SAUDI ARABIA

Nine-man Uzbekistan overcame the odds to win the AFC U17 Asian Cup™ Saudi Arabia 2025 title after defeating Saudi Arabia 2-0 in the Final.

Uzbekistan stayed resilient despite losing two players to red cards in the first half to lift the coveted trophy for a second time, having also emerged champions in 2012.

Saudi Arabia started the Final strongly, with Abdulrahman Sufyani releasing Abdulhadi Matari in the eighth minute but the striker's low shot was well claimed by Uzbekistan custodian Nematulloh Rustamjonov.

Uzbekistan then started to impose themselves but were limited to half-chances with efforts from Nurbek Sarsenbaev and Abubakir Shukurullaev, though the duo failed to trouble Saudi Arabia goalkeeper Abdulrahman Al Otaibi.

STORY OF THE TOURNAMENT

The cagey game took an unexpected twist in the 40th minute when a tussle between Sarsenbaev and Adel Hibah on the touchline saw the Uzbekistan player shown the red card for kicking out at his opponent while on the ground.

Matters got worse for the Central Asian side in the second minute of time added on as they went down to nine players following Miraziz Abdukarimov's last man challenge on Sabri Dahal.

Uzbekistan, however, remained on the front foot after the interval and took the game to Saudi Arabia despite their numerical disadvantage.

Their aggression paid off in the 51st minute after a VAR check confirmed Yazeed Al Dosari's handball, with Muhammad Khakimov making no mistake from 12 yards.

The home fans at King Fahd Sports City Stadium were then stunned into silence in the 70th minute after a quick break saw a surging Sadriddin Khasanov evading Alwaleed Aloufi on the left before slotting past Al Otaibi to seal Uzbekistan's amazing victory.

Having impressed throughout the tournament, Uzbekistan's Khasanov was named the Most Valuable Player of the Tournament while teammate Asilbek Aliev picked up the Top Scorer award after finishing with five goals.

Uzbekistan custodian Rustamjonov was named the Best Goalkeeper, having only conceded three goals in five appearances.







THE WINNING COACH

THE WINNING COACH

LESSONS AND MOTIVATIONS

When Uzbekistan lifted the AFC U20 Asian Cup™ trophy in 2023 with a tally of five goals in six games including an own goal and a penalty, head coach Ravshan Khaydarov acknowledged that "every team has a weakness and ours is our finishing".

The AFC Technical Observers in Saudi Arabia in 2025 highlighted that Islombek Ismoilov's squad "displayed individual and collective excellence in attack and defence, good organisation, the ability to penetrate with wing play or through the middle, effective finishing in the box or from long range and dangerous set plays. They had the full range of qualities". The champions won all six games and – Khaydarov would have smiled – were the event's top scorers with 17 goals.

At 32, Ismoilov was the youngest of the head coaches at the tournament, yet he had already shown his mettle at 27 with a spell at FK Turon of Yaypan in the Uzbekistan Superliga. This was enough to prompt an invitation from the Uzbekistan Football Association to take charge of the U14 national team and develop the squad that he led to Jeddah, and it was a balanced squad that he felt freely able to rotate. Only one of the reserve goalkeepers remained unused; 11 different players provided goals or assists; and the seven scorers included the tournament's top marksman Asilbek Aliev, who featured in only two of Ismoilov's six starting line-ups.

The basic premise in Ismoilov's coaching credo is to play on the front foot. "The teams we played against defended around their own penalty areas," he said before the Semi-final against an impressive DPR Korea side, "while we have tried to build our defence starting from the opponent's penalty area." A dismissal after 40 minutes helped to propel Uzbekistan towards a 3-0 win against "an opponent that puts you under constant pressure for 90 minutes". "Of course, the red card helped us a little," he said afterwards. "But I can say for sure that even if DPR Korea had played with a full team, we would not have deviated from our style of play. During the break, we gave the players instructions not to relax even for one moment and to increase the number of attacks."



THE WINNING COACH THE WINNING COACH

At that point, Ismoilov could not have predicted that the Final against Saudi Arabia would represent a steep gradient on a young coach's learning curve. Just before half-time, a dismissal challenged him to deal with moments of personal agitation and, with the scoreboard showing 45'+2, a second red card obliged him to use the interval to wake his players from the nightmare scenario of playing the entire second half with nine men against the host nation backed by passionate support.

"After the first red card," he recalls, "our players were in shock and, before they could recover, a second red card was a real blow to morale. I myself fell into a deep state of despair. The worst thoughts were running through my mind about how disastrous the second half might turn out. But thanks to people close to me, I managed to pull myself together. I realised that my mental state shouldn't affect the players. When I entered the changing room, all the players were sitting there with dimmed eyes, in complete despair — some even in tears. The first thing I told them was 'Believe me — we will win this match'. I explained that this was a test, and we had to prove that we remained strong under any circumstances. I told them that the whole nation stood behind them and believed in us. We were in a difficult situation after losing two players, one forward and one defender. It changed our plans but it was now about trying to calm the players and finding solutions to win the match."

Ismoilov made two substitutions and set up his outfielders in two compact lines of four who were, as the Technical Observers put it, fully focused and committed – and ready to counterattack with purpose. "I don't know if I have ever seen any other team come back in such conditions," he reflected afterwards. "The victory was not only an important moment for our football, but also a powerful lesson and source of motivation for people in other fields as well: to fight until the very end, and as long as we are breathing, never to lose hope." Later in his coaching career, Ismoilov will surely look back at the 2-0 win in Taif as one of his most satisfying achievements.







TECHNICAL TOPICS

TECHNICAL TOPICS

Australia v Vietnam, Yemen v Afghanistan, Tajikistan v Oman the opening round of the 31-match fixture list heralded an event of great diversity. The Yemen squad contained 16 players born in 2009 or 2010; the lists of DPR Korea and Tajikistan eight apiece, whereas the players of China PR, Korea Republic and Saudi Arabia belonged exclusively to the Class of 2008. They were indicators that the final tournament was a variety show starring players at different stages of physical and footballing maturity on various rungs of the development ladder, and this diversity was reflected in the way that teams were able to implement their strategies.

Forward planning

The AFC Technical Observers commented, for example, that most coaches opted to follow trends in the senior game by encouraging their pupils to build from the back. But, as Nihad Souqar acknowledged, "everyone would like to do it, but not many succeed". The top four teams and Japan were especially adept at playing through the thirds – the champions providing a prime example during the Semi-final against DPR Korea when a move started by the goalkeeper set up the second of Uzbekistan's three goals. Accurate distribution to the left prompted a long diagonal to the right of the opponent's penalty area, followed by an impressive left-foot finish. The Final then illustrated that Saudi Arabia's build-up play was of a slightly different kind – based on more patient possession play at a lower tempo.



Other teams, however, ran into the problem of playing out under pressure. "Quite often," the Technical Observers noted, "the ball went from the goalkeeper to a defender – often a centre-back drifting wide – but then, after a couple of passes at the back, reaction to pressure was frequently a long ball launched upfield, entailing a high risk of losing possession. If teams are to build successfully through the thirds, a prime requirement is sufficient technical quality to deal with high pressure by opponents."

The pressure gauge

Similar concepts could be applied to the question of pressing. There was a desire to press high – but again, with varied degrees of success. The 'high press' often boiled down to individual pressure on the ball-carrier, combined with a general retreat into a mid or low defensive block. Organised collective high pressing was executed by teams like Japan, Australia, Korea Republic, Uzbekistan and DPR Korea, all of whom were set up to operate as a compact unit, whether in possession or out of possession, thus providing support in numbers for immediate counter-pressing in advanced areas after losing the ball. The Observers acknowledged that in this age group, the tactical understanding, physical demands and concentration levels can be challenging requirements in terms of continually moving the unit up and down the pitch. Hence, the observation that some teams fell short on coordination and left inviting areas of space between lines. They also noted a lack of



TECHNICAL TOPICS

awareness that committing fouls when seeking high regains offers opponents an easy escape from pressure and an opportunity to regroup.

The art of defending

The legendary AC Milan and Italy defender Paolo Maldini insisted that "if I have to make a tackle, I've already made a mistake". In Saudi Arabia, there was agreement that learning to anticipate the opponent's passing intentions and make interceptions affords a better basis for launching attacking moves than going to ground in a tackle – a thesis endorsed by Australia's second goal in the 3-2 win against Japan when Max Anastasio intercepted a square pass in midfield and ran clear to score.

Maldini's words re-emerged during discussion about how much training-ground time is dedicated to the art of defending. And, as Nihad Souqar remarked, "the tournament showed that defensive organisation is not that simple and quite a few teams had problems with it". Apart from logistical issues such as the space between lines, the observers highlighted the different levels of discipline. "The top teams were good," said Fahad Al Zarraa, "but many others started to struggle during the second half – which can be linked to physical preparation bearing in mind that fatigue provokes mistakes and more yellow cards for mistimed defending."

Breaking points

Anastasio's goal was one of the counterattacks which supplied 18% of the tournament's open-play goals. None of them, incidentally, originated from ball-winning in advanced areas – a statistic which underlines the relative scarcity of effective high pressing. Nine goals resulted from collective counters – one of the key weapons in Uzbekistan's armoury, as witnessed during the Group A meeting with Saudi Arabia when stealing the ball in midfield created a 4v3 scenario which the champions exploited with a quick diagonal pass and a finish by the tournament's top scorer Asilbek Aliev. Similarly, a midfield regain gave Indonesia a 4v2 numerical advantage and a diagonal pass set up their crucial opening goal against Afghanistan. Three classic back-to-front counterattacks from deep positions included Saudi Arabia's winning goal by Osama Al Daghmah as they broke at speed after a corner in favour of China PR. The silver-medallists were then caught out themselves when Japan countered straight through the middle to draw level at 2-2 in the Quarter-final. The top teams demonstrated that, even when the general emphasis was on building through the thirds, the ability to counter at speed was a valuable item in the attacking repertoire.

Thinking outside the box

Without doubt, the best goal from a counterattack was in the Final, when the Saudi Arabia players were jogging back after a corner in their favour, Nematulloh Rustamjonov jumped to his feet after gathering the ball and volleyed it with pinpoint accuracy to Sadriddin Khasanov on the left wing. The Uzbekistan No. 7 set off on a solo run, rounding it off by firing the ball through the goalkeeper's legs to clinch the unlikely victory for the nine-man team.

Rustamjonov picked up the Best Goalkeeper Award at a tournament which, as usual in this age group, served examples of outstanding shot-stopping mixed with youthful errors. Distribution with the feet was not always as impressive as Rustamjonov's and, looking for



flaws for goalkeeper coaches to work on, the observers mentioned issues of decision-making and, above all, timing when it came to sprinting out of the box to cover large areas behind high back-lines while the team was in attacking mode. The 11th minute of the Group A game between Saudi Arabia and China PR offered a prime example. Firstly, the Saudi goalkeeper decided to dribble past an advancing opponent and narrowly avoided gifting a goal. Immediately, a long ball was played into space wide on the right, where the China PR goalkeeper's sortie ended with a slip and a misjudgement which presented the attacker with an unguarded net.

The observers also noted that the practice of throwing themselves to the ground after gathering the ball (even when unopposed) was less prevalent than it had been in 2023, with goalkeepers increasingly aware that lying prone on the ground pre-empts any possibility of launching a fast counterattack.

A perfect combination?

As the Goalscoring section of this review reports, only one goal in 31 matches stemmed clearly from a combination move. The statistic seemed to be totally out of alignment with praise for the standard of combination play at the tournament, notably by teams such as Japan, DPR Korea and the two finalists. So, the big question mark was about the lack of an end product. It was rational to discuss the difficulties when it came to central penetration of compact defensive blocks or the quality of finishing. And, with 38 of the 71 open-play goals originating in wing play, it was logical to argue that much of the impressive combination play was related to approach work in the wide areas rather than more central zones in and around the box. Japan provided a good example with a neat high-tempo combination on the right allowing Kosuke Imai to cut the ball back for Daichi Tani's first-touch finish to bring them back to 2-3 against Australia.



Overall, the final tournament produced 905 crosses at an average of 29 per game. Korea Republic (23 per match), DPR Korea (21), Japan (20) and Uzbekistan (19) were the most prolific suppliers of crosses while silver-medallists Saudi Arabia's average was pegged back to 15 by their two encounters with the champions when their wing play led to only 23 crosses, five of which reached team-mates.



TECHNICAL TOPICS

Passing with flying colours

One of the points raised by the Technical Observers was the quality of passing in opposition territory and, more precisely, in the attacking third. It prompted a review of statistical evidence of each team's passing accuracy in the final third. The chart shows completion rates – in other words the percentages of passes received by a team-mate.

Japan	70.2%
DPR Korea	69.7%
Tajikistan	67.6%
Uzbekistan	63.8%
Korea Republic	61.2%
Australia	60.9%
Saudi Arabia	56.3%
Yemen	56.3%
Indonesia	54.4%
Vietnam	53.4%
Thailand	52.5%
China PR	52.3%
UAE	51.6%
Afghanistan	50.0%
IR Iran	49.4%
Oman	47.3%

Statistics related to the numbers of passes in the final third offer an insight into teams' attacking styles. Japan averaged 179 passes per game in the opposition's defensive third – more than any other team at the tournament, ahead of Australia (143), Uzbekistan (131), DPR Korea (129), Korea Republic (124) and Tajikistan (106). Among the other Quarter-finalists, Saudi Arabia's more patient approach was reflected by averages of 96 passes per game in the final third compared with 147 in their own half. Similarly, UAE's statistics show 64 passes in the attacking third and 139 in their own half, while Indonesia posted 83 and 173 respectively.

Amplifying the topic of 'completion rates', the codicil is that they involve two players – the passer and the receiver. Deliveries, the observers stressed, may have been accurate but they were not necessarily user-friendly if, for instance, they arrived at knee-height. Receivers, they added, were not always spot-on with their first touch. Allowing the ball to bounce upwards, for example, slowed down ball control and often created a difficult second touch. Reception technique and skill under pressure, they remarked, are important issues in this age group where most of the players are gaining their first experience of intensely competitive football at international level.

Linking passing to possession, DPR Korea and Japan were the only two teams to dominate the ball in all their matches. Korea Republic would have become the third but for their 43% share in the Semi-final against Saudi Arabia who, for the first time in the tournament, had the lion's share of possession. They did so again in the Final – but this was playing the second half against nine-man opposition.

Encouraging creativity

The debating point is whether accuracy is the prime requirement when it comes to attacking in the final third. During discussion of team performances in this area of the pitch, Usmon Toshev mused: "As coaches we have to be careful in this age group. In a way it's natural to put the emphasis on team structure and tactical organisation. But we mustn't run the risk of producing players who are like robots, especially in the attacking third. They also need some freedom to express themselves and to be creative in attacking areas."



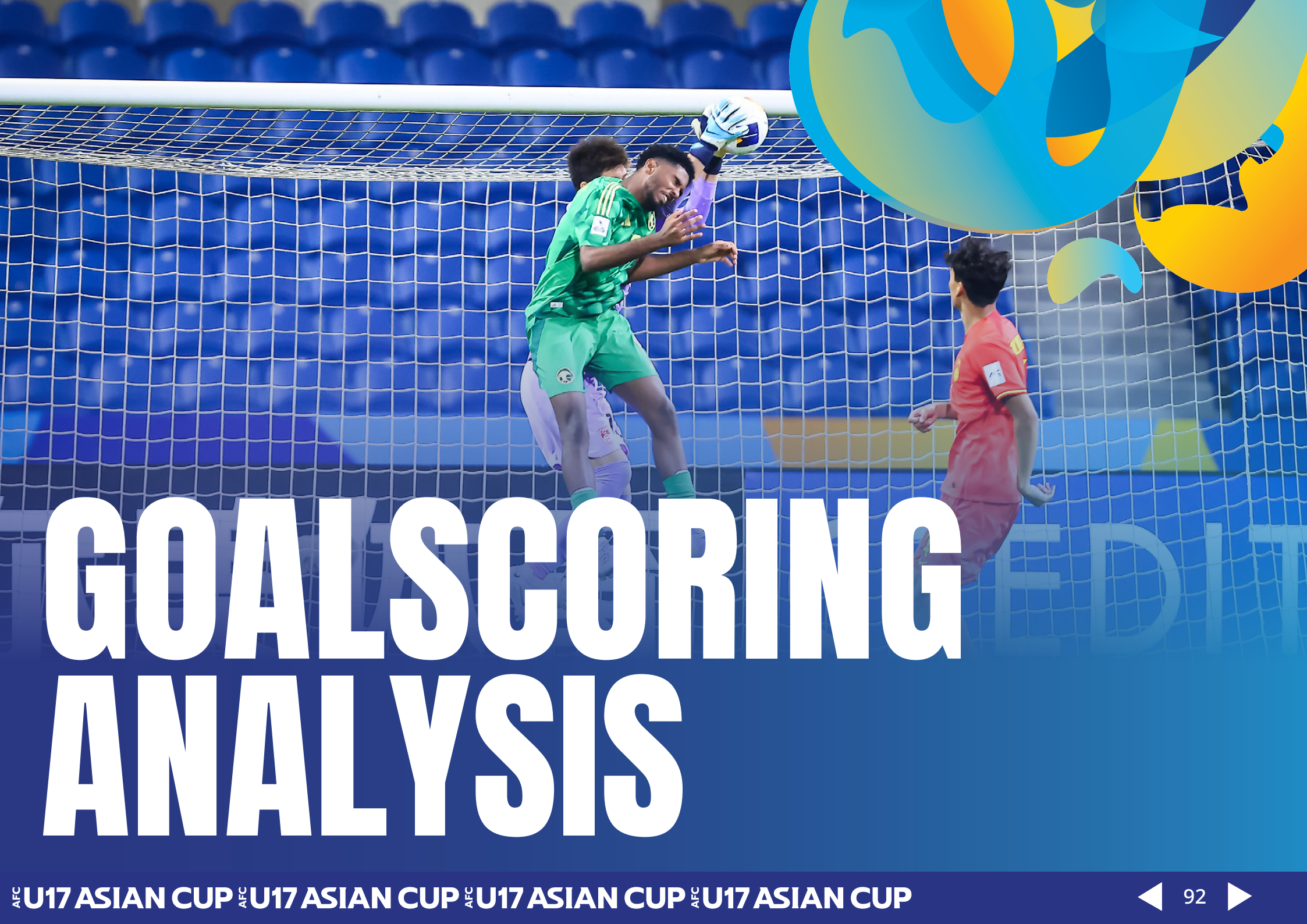
The tournament did provide some tales of the unexpected in terms of improvisation: Oman's opening goal in the 3-2 victory over IR Iran, for example. After a defender had skied a clearance towards a corner of the penalty area, Osama Al Ma'mari launched himself into a scissors-kick to deliver a cross which was headed into the net by Al Walid Al Rashdi. Or UAE's consolation goal against Japan when Faysal Mohammed shot home after Jayden Adetiba had conjured up a headed through pass. They emphasised that, in an age when collective mechanisms are becoming more and more sophisticated, it is often individual magic which makes the difference.

The bottom lines

Building from the back, wing play, crosses, passes in the final third... many of the teams ticked boxes. But the bottom line is putting the ball in the net. The tournament featured two main categories when it came to the role of the striker, seen by coaches either as a finisher or primarily as a creator of spaces in the final third. Unusually, the top scorer, Uzbekistan's Asilbek Aliev, started only two of his team's six games but scored five times in his 283 minutes on the pitch, suggesting that efficiency in front of goal was the decisive factor. The champions scored 17 times from 38 on-target attempts; runners-up Saudi Arabia scored eight from 39.

But maybe the real bottom line is that the event represented a major learning experience for players at a critical stage of their development. As one of the coaches in Saudi Arabia said: "Overall there has been a significant development in the technical levels of the tournament. Matches were more tactical than before and the teams' preparation and readiness to compete have reached a higher level of professionalism and attention to detail."





GOALSCORING ANALYSIS

GOALSCORING ANALYSIS

THE WINGS TAKE FLIGHT

The statistics hint at stability. On the face of it, a tournament total of 101 goals at an average of 3.26 per game looks remarkably similar to the 99 at 3.19 posted in Thailand in 2023, when the figures were inflated by an 8-4 victory for Japan over India. Prolific goalscoring, with averages in excess of three goals per game, has been a regular feature in the AFC U17 and U16 competitions and in Saudi Arabia, there were two 6-0 scorelines (Korea Republic v Afghanistan and DPR Korea v Indonesia) but margins were generally slimmer during a 31-match tournament which produced no goal-less draws. Just as Japan had been in 2023, the champions in 2025 were also the top scorers with 17 goals in their six fixtures, leaving Uzbekistan well ahead of DPR Korea who scored half of their dozen goals in the Quarter-final against Indonesia. Silver-medallists Saudi Arabia totalled eight goals in their six matches, with two of their three in the Knockout Stage coming from the penalty spot.

For the record, 42 goals were scored during the first half; 59 after the interval. The most prolific periods were the opening quarter-hour and the 61st-75th-minute segment with 19 goals apiece. The least productive spell was the last half-hour of the first half. Of the eight goals timed at 90+, three were scored by Indonesia.

Even though the overall statistics seem to reflect the parameters of the 2023 tournament, exploration below the surface confirms that appearances can be deceptive

Set Plays

A quick glance, for example, reveals that 30% of the goals scored in Saudi Arabia stemmed from dead-ball situations, as opposed to the abnormally low figure of 18% in Thailand. The notion of a 'recovery', however is fictitious. The difference can be traced exclusively to penalty kicks, which generated 16 goals in 2025 (compared with four in 2023) and accounted for 53% of the set-play total. This is one of the topics broached in the Talking Points section of this review. The figure, incidentally, includes the spot-kick by Evandra Florasta, who turned in the rebound to give Indonesia their 1-0 added-time victory against Korea Republic.

The goalscoring chart reveals that the other four categories of set-play situations yielded only 14 goals – the same number as in Thailand.

Direct free kicks, for instance, again supplied four goals of an impressive nature – not least Uzbekistan's opener in the Quarter-final against the UAE when the tournament's top scorer Asilbek Aliev hit, using media language, an absolute screamer into the top corner. A more technical description would be a powerful strike with the right instep from a position just right-of-centre some 30m from goal. Osama Al Mamari also used his right foot to strike from wide on the left, hitting the ball over the DPR Korea wall and beating the goalkeeper at the near post. IR Iran's Mahan Bereshti's left-footed free kick from the right flashed over the Oman goalkeeper's head to put his side 1-0 ahead, and Mohamed Buti supplied the UAE's consolation goal against Uzbekistan, also by using his left foot on the right to bend a free kick into the top corner via a slight deflection. All four were spectacular rewards for training-ground practice on technique.

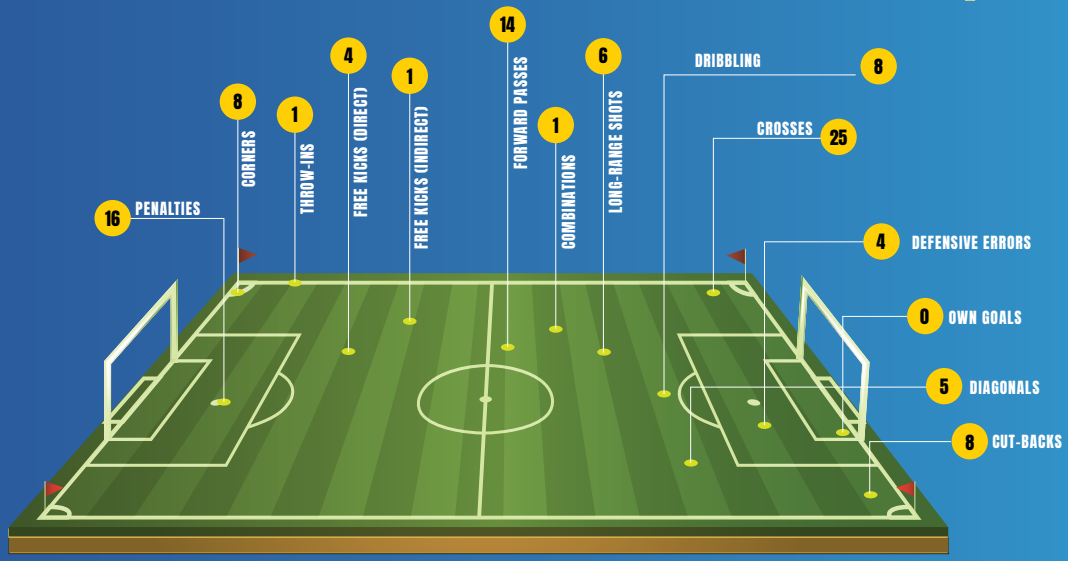


GOALSCORING ANALYSIS GOALSCORING ANALYSIS

A single success derived from a throw-in also replicated the Thailand tally, thanks to Dau Hong Phong's quickly-taken throw, nodded-on for Hoang Trong Duy Khang to equalise for Vietnam against Australia.

The main talking point, however, was one solitary success in 31 matches from an indirect free kick – the left-footed delivery from the right which was nodded-on for Hazaa Faisal to equalise for the UAE against Vietnam. One goal in 2,790 minutes of football inevitably raises questions about creativity and the quality of deliveries. On the other side of the coin, the resounding success in defending set plays is an invitation to wonder if more training-ground time is spent on defensive aspects than on rehearsals of attacking ploys.

Corner kicks were the only category to register an increase on the 2023 statistics, with eight goals to show from 295 deliveries at a success rate of 1:37, which is made to look healthy by the ratio of 1:58 in 2023 and the 1:61 posted at the senior AFC Asian Cup™. DPR Korea led the field with three successes from corners while Japan, Australia and Korea Republic were consistently threatening on the basis of good deliveries and heading ability. Six of the successes came from inswinging deliveries (left-footed from the right and vice versa) and four were headed into the net. Impressive examples were two right-footed corners from the left and conclusive headers by DPR Korea's Choe Chung Hyok (against IR Iran) and Japan's Minato Yoshida (against Vietnam).



GOALS FROM SET PLAY

ACTION	GUIDELINES	GOALS
Corners	Directly / indirectly from a corner	8
Free kicks (direct)	Direct from a free kick	4
Free kicks (indirect)	Indirectly from a free kick	1
Penalties	Spot kicks, including rebounds	16
Throw-ins	Following a throw-in	1

TOTAL GOALS SCORED : 101

GOALS FROM OPEN PLAY

ACTION	GUIDELINES	GOALS
Combinations	Combination moves involving 2/3/4 players	1
Crosses	Crosses from the wing	25
Cut-backs	Backward passes from the goal-line	8
Diagonals	Diagonal passes into the penalty box	5
Dribbling	Dribbling and finishing or providing an assist	8
Long-range shots	Shot from outside the penalty box including rebounds	6
Forward passes	Penetrating or aerial passes	14
Defensive errors	Exploiting mistakes by goalkeeper or defenders	4
Own goals	Players scoring against their own team	0

Open Play

A total of 71 goals were scored in open play – 10 fewer than in 2023. A significant slice of the shortfall was due to a 33% downturn in successes attributable to the penetrating through pass – although there were some impressive examples such as the vertical pass by Mehrubon Odilzoda that allowed Ahmadjon Shoev to put Tajikistan 2-1 up in their group-winning 3-1 victory over IR Iran. The through pass was the origin of three of Tajikistan's seven goals while Japan, DPR Korea, Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan registered two successes apiece. In other words, 11 of the 14 goals in this category were shared among five of the 16 teams; where the defence-splitting forward pass had delivered 26% of open-play goals in Thailand, the share dropped to 20% in 2025.

The most eye-catching statistic, however, underlined words which have been written into technical reviews of almost all AFC competitions for clubs and national teams. In Saudi Arabia only one goal could be clearly attributed to combination play: the neat move, backheel included, that allowed Abdullo Ibragimzoda to put Tajikistan momentarily 2-1 ahead during the Quarter-final against Korea Republic. The solitary success in 31 matches provokes comment in the Technical Topics section of this report.

GOALSCORING ANALYSIS GOALSCORING ANALYSIS

The relevance of long-range shooting is not only about goals but also about luring defenders out of deep blocks or provoking deflections, or it can be an indicator of a team's difficulties in working attacking moves into the penalty area. In Saudi Arabia, the majority of the shooting by Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Yemen was from outside the box while attempts by IR Iran and Australia were evenly distributed between areas inside and outside the penalty area. The six long-range efforts which hit the net included the spectacular strikes by Uzbekistan's Jamshidbek Rustamov (in the Group Stage against Saudi Arabia), Australia's Quinn MacNicol (v Vietnam) and Indonesia's Zahaby Gholy (v Yemen). However, half a dozen successes signified 8.5% of the open-play total compared with 11% at the previous tournament.

In the meantime, the take-away message transmitted by tournament data was that wing play was the key component in the goal-manufacturing process. Crosses, cut-backs and diagonal passes from wide areas accounted for 53.5% of open-play goals. Five of DPR Korea's goals stemmed from crosses while two of Uzbekistan's four gave them their 2-1 comeback victory over China PR. Diagonal passing allied with good off-the-ball movement was more successfully exploited than in 2023, when it had produced only one goal. The two finalists were especially adept at delivering diagonal passes – such as the lofted pass from the left which, despite the presence of six China PR players in the box, permitted Osama Al Daghmah to put Saudi Arabia 2-0 ahead. Or the lofted right-footed diagonal from the left by Abubakir Shukurullaev which allowed Rustamov to do likewise for Uzbekistan in the Semi-final against DPR Korea.

The parting shot from the Technical Observers was to highlight the absence of own goals on the goalscoring chart, along with the modest figure of four directly attributable to defensive errors – statistics they regarded as remarkably healthy among players at this stage of their development.





TALKING POINTS

WHAT NEXT?

At this level, there is a lot of talk about development pathways. But where do they lead? If the question were to be thrown on to the table at a coach education course, how many of the responses would simply be about preparing players for the senior team? While this is valid as the ultimate objective, is it the only one? If so, what is the success rate?

While the ball was rolling at the final tournament, a sample examination of current senior squads in two of the AFC's most potent footballing nations provided some statistical fuel for debate. The players in the Japan squad, for example, spanned 18 years – from 20 to 38. If the most veteran components are excluded, the remainder span 12 years. Over that period, nine years featured players who had successfully climbed the ladder from the U17s to the senior team. But no single year had produced more than four, and three were blank. In other words, none of the U17 players born in that year had broken into the senior team.

The Saudi Arabia squad emerged as younger (an average age of 25 compared with Japan's 27) with an age-span of 13 years, but the pattern was different. Two years were especially prolific: in one, six players progressed from the U17s to the senior team; in the other, five. But in three of the 13 years, nobody managed to complete that journey.

So much for the statistics. The next question is simply: what happened to the rest? Some of them, of course, have forged careers in the professional game – but without achieving international status at senior level. Some might be playing their football in lower divisions. Others might have dropped out of the game completely. Some readers might be able to think of former U17 internationals who have gone into coaching or football administration.

This serves to highlight the reality-based fact that, in the U17 age-group, it is difficult – and risky – to predict which squad members will successfully mature into senior international football. In the meantime, U17 football is enjoying a phase of explosive development. Staging a FIFA U-17 World Cup on an annual basis with a starting line-up of 48 teams means that more and more young talents have opportunities to appear on the international stage. For the first time, with a view to deciding who qualifies, the AFC is organising an annual U17 Asian Cup for boys and girls. For some – perhaps many – of them, this could be the highlight or pinnacle of their footballing careers.

The bottom line is that, for most of the contestants, representing their countries at the U17 level is a lifetime learning experience – but with no guarantees of a top-level career in football. For the technicians working in this sector of the game, is it appropriate to have a tunnel-vision objective of producing players for the senior team? Or is it also about the broader perspectives of preparing teenagers for a fulfilling adult life in which football may play a more – or less – prominent role?

Putting them on the spot?

One of the striking statistics to emerge in Saudi Arabia was the 400% increase in the number of goals scored from the penalty spot – even though the tournament produced fewer fouls and fewer yellow cards than the 2023 event in Thailand (where the final balance had been four goals from penalties). So, there was



TALKING POINTS

TALKING POINTS TALKING POINTS

little room for debate about the impact of VAR when it was injected into the Knockout Stage of the 2025 finals. The seven matches were punctuated by three of the tournament's six red cards and by eight penalties. During the 24 fixtures in the Group Stage, referees had pointed to the spot 10 times. During the knockout rounds, there was not a single match without a penalty. In one, after a VAR review to confirm the spot-kick, the penalty was saved by the DPR Korea goalkeeper and, when the rebound ended up in the net, a second VAR review confirmed that the Uzbekistan goal should be disallowed. The impact was undeniable.

However, the talking point has nothing whatsoever to do with the decision-making process. It is about the technician's approach to the question of penalty kicks. No fewer than three of the seven knockout ties at the top end of the final tournament were settled by penalty shoot-outs, and the crucial opening goal in the Final was scored from the penalty spot. From a development perspective, how much time – if any – should be spent on equipping players to deal with penalty-taking, not only in terms of execution technique but also the mental aspects of the shoot-out? And, in open play, how can members of defending teams be deterred from giving penalties away?



Time is on our side?

Bearing in mind that the issue of real playing time has become a perennial talking point in AFC competitions, the Technical Observers in Saudi Arabia were keen to record what they regarded as a positive evolution. In addition, they emphasised, credit was due to match officials for setting out to let games flow – and to decree substantial periods of added-time. Overall, 17 of the 31 matches had a total duration of 100 minutes or more. Even so, the actual playing time fell short of 50 minutes in seven of the 31 matches, including the Semi-final between Uzbekistan and DPR Korea when the ball was not in play during 54m50s of 100m55s. It was the only match in the Knockout Stage with an actual playing time below 50 minutes but conversely, none of the 12 matches with real playing times in excess of 55 minutes corresponded to the knockout rounds. And where five matches at the 2023 edition had exceeded 60 minutes, the only one to do so in Saudi Arabia was the Group C game between Afghanistan and Indonesia. Should match officials be asked to make absolutely sure that time spent on VAR reviews is properly compensated? And what more can be done to eliminate the various forms of time-wasting, which are ultimately damaging to the players' development and to the game itself?



TEAM PROFILES

JAPAN



COACH



NOZOMI HIROYAMA (JPN)

The AFC Special Elite Youth Awards 2024 Youth Coach of the Year recipient Nozomi Hiroyama took helm of the Japan Football Association (JFA) Academy Fukushima from 2014 to 2018. As assistant coach of the Under-17 national team, he guided the young Samurais to notable success, including defending the AFC U17 Asian Cup™ title in 2023 and a Round of 16 finish at the FIFA U-17 World Cup Indonesia 2023. The former Montpellier HSC midfielder was promoted to the Under-17 head coach role in 2024.

ATTACKING



ATTACKING AND TRANSITION TO DEFEND

- 1-3-4-3
- Assured build-up from the back through midfield
- Rotation of midfield players to get on the ball
- Attack through central areas or to the wings
- Quick movement of the ball
- When the ball is lost, immediate organised pressure to regain possession

DEFENDING AND TRANSITION TO ATTACK

- 1-5-4-1
- Compact defending and pressure on the ball
- Middle third/own half
- After regaining possession, players quickly move forward

DEFENDING



SAUDI ARABIA



COACH



MARIO DA SILVA (BRA)

Hailing from Rio de Janeiro, Mario da Silva is a former futsal coach who made the switch to football in 2015. Brazilian club Vasco da Gama was his first port of call, managing the Under-15s for a year before moving to another household name in Flamengo. At Flamengo, da Silva had his hand in the full youth portfolio - having coached from the Under-13s all the way up to the Under-20s during a nine-year stint at the club.

ATTACKING



ATTACKING AND TRANSITION TO DEFEND

- 1-4-4-2
- Build-up from goalkeeper, but often through a long forward ball
- Good switch of play at times
- Direct movement at the opponent's goal, mainly through individual attempts
- Physical power
- Quick retreat in own half while applying pressure at the same time

DEFENDING AND TRANSITION TO ATTACK

- 1-4-4-2/1-4-5-1
- Tend to drop off when in their own half
- Quick forward movement after regaining possession
- Individual attempts

DEFENDING



UZBEKISTAN



COACH



ISLOMBEK ISMOILOV (UZB)

At just 32 years of age, title-winning head coach Islombek Ismoilov was the youngest in the tournament. It all started even earlier for Ismoilov, who at 27, managed FK Turon in the Uzbekistan Superliga between 2020 and 2021. His qualities were hugely admired and when the national team came calling, there was only one answer with the Under-14 side the first squad assigned to him before he was entrusted with the Under-17 side.

ATTACKING



ATTACKING AND TRANSITION TO DEFEND

- 1-4-3-3
- Assured build-up from the back through midfield
- Attacking full-backs
- Rotation of midfielders to get on the ball
- Wing play, good crosses; central attacks
- Switch of play from one side to the other
- Low tempo in own half; acceleration in the final third
- When the ball is lost, immediate organised pressure to regain possession

DEFENDING AND TRANSITION TO ATTACK

- 1-4-5-1
- Compact and active pressure on the ball
- Very quick forward movement, usually through three to four players

DEFENDING



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



COACH



MAJED SALEM (UAE)

United Arab Emirates head coach Majed Salem showcased his technical resilience in Saudi Arabia 2025, spearheading his side's qualification for the FIFA U-17 World Cup for the first time since 2013. Rebounding from their 4-1 defeat to Japan on the opening day, Salem led the West Asians to a 2-0 victory over Australia before holding Vietnam to a 1-1 draw to secure their place at the global age-group showpiece.

ATTACKING



ATTACKING AND TRANSITION TO DEFEND

- 1-4-3-3
- Attempt to build up from the back, but mainly resort to long forward balls
- Physically strong centre-forwards
- No. 8 plays an important role in midfield
- No. 7 makes good runs with the ball

DEFENDING AND TRANSITION TO ATTACK

- 1-4-5-1
- Tend to drop off in own half
- Quick long forward balls to lone striker after regaining possession

DEFENDING



INDONESIA



COACH



NOVA ARIANTO (IDN)

The former Indonesia international held various roles in the national team set-up, including serving as assistant coach to the senior men's, U23 and U20 sides before being elevated to the U17 role in 2024. Nova Arianto created history in Saudi Arabia 2025 by becoming the first Indonesian coach to take the national U17 team to the FIFA World Cup via qualification after making their debut in 2023 as hosts.

ATTACKING



ATTACKING AND TRANSITION TO DEFEND

- 1-3-4-3
- Build-up from the Goalkeeper and defenders into midfield
- Combination play, short combinations in and around the box
- Wing-backs push up high on the pitch and supply good crosses
- Quick retreat into their own half while applying pressure at the same time after losing the ball
- Goalkeeper covers the space behind the defence

DEFENDING AND TRANSITION TO ATTACK

- 1-4-5-1
- Defending starts from top mid-circle, with players retreating in their own half
- Organised, aggressive defending
- Very quick forward movement after winning the ball
- Good counterattacking goals

DEFENDING



DPR KOREA



COACH



O THAE SONG (PRK)

Under head coach O Thae Song, DPR Korea finished runners-up behind Tajikistan in Group D, and were unfortunate to slip from pole position when they drew 2-2 with Oman in their last group match. The two-time champions performed admirably against Islamic Republic of Iran before displaying their mettle in dispatching Indonesia 6-0 in the Quarter-finals, but subsequently bowed out to eventual winners Uzbekistan in the final four.

ATTACKING



ATTACKING AND TRANSITION TO DEFEND

- 1-4-4-2
- Build-up from the Goalkeeper to the flanks and central areas
- Full-backs push on
- Wingers cut inside
- High-tempo combination play, pressurising opponent
- Immediate pressure on the ball after losing possession
- Key players: No. 10, 9 and 6

DEFENDING AND TRANSITION TO ATTACK

- 1-4-4-2
- Compact aggressive defending, high on the pitch
- Prevent the opponent from building up and force them into long forward balls
- Compact and pressure on the ball when in their own half
- Very quick transitions after winning the ball

DEFENDING



TAJIKISTAN



COACH



MARCO RAGINI (SMR)

San Marino-born tactician Marco Ragini's first foray in Asian football began in 2018 when he was appointed manager of Mongolia's FC Ulaanbaatar. In 2021, Ragini was appointed manager of Malaysian outfit Kelantan before eventually taking charge of the Tajikistan Under-17 national team in November 2024. His appointment proved to be a masterstroke as he led the Central Asians to claim their berth at the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2025.

ATTACKING



ATTACKING AND TRANSITION TO DEFEND

- 1-4-4-2
- Build up from the Goalkeeper; long forward balls under pressure
- Combination play in the opponents' half
- Accurate switches of play by No. 10 and 6 in midfield
- Retreat in their own half; compact organisation

DEFENDING AND TRANSITION TO ATTACK

- 1-4-5-1
- Compact defending in their own half, aggressive on the ball
- Quick transitions, long passes or dribbling whilst switching play
- Full-backs support counterattacks

DEFENDING



KOREA REPUBLIC



COACH



BACK KI-TAE (KOR)

Having spent most of his playing and coaching career in his native Pohang, Back Ki-tae was tasked with ending Korea Republic's 23-year wait to reclaim the coveted title. Despite being eliminated at the hands of the host in the Semi-finals, the 46-year-old was able to chart his side's recovery after suffering an opening shock defeat to Indonesia with impressive wins over Afghanistan, Yemen and Tajikistan in the latter stages.

ATTACKING



ATTACKING AND TRANSITION TO DEFEND

- 1-4-4-2
- Constructive build-up play, both full-backs in attacking role
- Combination plays through central midfield to strikers
- Good wing play, good crosses
- Excellent passing game
- Immediate organised pressure on the ball after losing possession
- Retreat in their own half; compact defending

DEFENDING AND TRANSITION TO ATTACK

- 1-4-4-2
- Aggressive, compact defending
- Quick forward movement after winning the ball
- Dangerous counterattacks
-

DEFENDING





TOURNAMENT RESULTS

GROUP STAGE

Group A	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
UZBEKISTAN	3	3	0	0	9	2	7	9
SAUDI ARABIA	3	2	0	1	5	5	0	6
CHINA PR	3	1	0	2	4	4	0	3
THAILAND	3	0	0	3	2	9	-7	0

No.	Date	Time	Team A	Score	Team B
2	03 Apr,25	18:00:00	UZBEKISTAN	4-1 (2-1)	THAILAND
1	03 Apr,25	20:15:00	SAUDI ARABIA	2-1 (2-0)	CHINA PR
9	06 Apr,25	18:00:00	CHINA PR	1-2 (1-1)	UZBEKISTAN
10	06 Apr,25	20:15:00	THAILAND	1-3 (1-1)	SAUDI ARABIA
17	09 Apr,25	20:15:00	SAUDI ARABIA	0-3 (0-0)	UZBEKISTAN
18	09 Apr,25	20:15:00	THAILAND	0-2 (0-0)	CHINA PR



GROUP STAGE

Group B	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
JAPAN *	3	1	1	1	7	5	2	4
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES *	3	1	1	1	4	5	-1	4
AUSTRALIA *	3	1	1	1	4	5	-1	4
VIETNAM	3	0	3	0	3	3	0	3

* The standing table is based on points, goal difference and number of goals scored of the teams tied

No.	Date	Time	Team A	Score	Team B
3	04 Apr,25	18:00:00	AUSTRALIA	1-1 (1-0)	VIETNAM
5	04 Apr,25	20:15:00	JAPAN	4-1 (3-0)	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
11	07 Apr,25	18:00:00	VIETNAM	1-1 (0-1)	JAPAN
13	07 Apr,25	20:15:00	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	2-0 (1-0)	AUSTRALIA
19	10 Apr,25	18:00:00	JAPAN	2-3 (1-0)	AUSTRALIA
20	10 Apr,25	18:00:00	VIETNAM	1-1 (1-0)	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



GROUP STAGE

Group C	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
INDONESIA	3	3	0	0	7	1	6	9
KOREA REPUBLIC	3	2	0	1	7	1	6	6
YEMEN	3	1	0	2	3	5	-2	3
AFGHANISTAN	3	0	0	3	0	10	-10	0

No.	Date	Time	Team A	Score	Team B
4	04 Apr,25	18:00:00	KOREA REPUBLIC	0-1 (0-0)	INDONESIA
6	04 Apr,25	20:15:00	YEMEN	2-0 (2-0)	AFGHANISTAN
12	07 Apr,25	18:00:00	INDONESIA	4-1 (2-0)	YEMEN
14	07 Apr,25	20:15:00	AFGHANISTAN	0-6 (0-3)	KOREA REPUBLIC
21	10 Apr,25	20:15:00	KOREA REPUBLIC	1-0 (1-0)	YEMEN
22	10 Apr,25	20:15:00	AFGHANISTAN	0-2 (0-0)	INDONESIA



AFC U17 ASIAN CUP AFC U17 ASIAN CUP AFC U17 ASIAN CUP AFC U17 ASIAN CUP

GROUP STAGE

Group D	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
TAJIKISTAN	3	2	0	1	5	5	0	6
DPR KOREA	3	1	2	0	6	3	3	5
OMAN	3	1	1	1	6	6	0	4
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN	3	0	1	2	4	7	-3	1

No.	Date	Time	Team A	Score	Team B
7	05 Apr,25	18:00:00	TAJIKISTAN	2-1 (1-1)	OMAN
8	05 Apr,25	20:15:00	ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN	1-1 (1-1)	DPR KOREA
15	08 Apr,25	18:00:00	DPR KOREA	3-0 (0-0)	TAJIKISTAN
16	08 Apr,25	20:15:00	OMAN	3-2 (0-1)	ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN
23	11 Apr,25	20:15:00	ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN	1-3 (0-1)	TAJIKISTAN
18	11 Apr,25	20:15:00	OMAN	2-2 (0-1)	DPR KOREA



QUARTER-FINALS

No.	Date	Time	Team A	Score	Team B
25	13 Apr,25	17:00:00	JAPAN	2-2 a.e.t. (2-2,1-2)2-3 PSO	SAUDI ARABIA
26	13 Apr,25	20:15:00	UZBEKISTAN	3-1 (3-0)	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
27	14 Apr,25	17:00:00	INDONESIA	0-6 (0-2)	DPR KOREA
28	14 Apr,25	20:15:00	TAJIKISTAN	2-2 a.e.t. (2-2,0-0)3-5 PSO	KOREA REPUBLIC





SEMI-FINALS

No.	Date	Time	Team A	Score	Team B
29	17 Apr,25	17:00:00	SAUDI ARABIA	1-1 a.e.t. (1-1,0-1)3-1 PSO	KOREA REPUBLIC
30	17 Apr,25	20:15:00	UZBEKISTAN	3-0 (1-0)	DPR KOREA







TOURNAMENT RESULTS

FINAL

No.	Date	Time	Team A	Score	Team B
31	20 Apr,25	18:00:00	UZBEKISTAN	2-0 (0-0)	SAUDI ARABIA





REFEREES

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1. SUMMARY

A total of 31 match officials, comprising 12 referees and 16 assistant referees, including one Standby Referee and two Standby Assistant Referees, were appointed to the AFC U17 Asian Cup™ Saudi Arabia 2025. The delegation included two women referees and assistant referees, respectively, epitomising the AFC's efforts to nurture top women match officials across the Continent.

1.1 AFC Match Officials



Refrees	MA
Daniel John Elder	AUS
Jin Jingyuan	CHN
Dong Fangyu (Ms.)	CHN
Venkatesh Ramachandran	IND
Morteza Mansourian	IRN
Mahmoud Ahmad Mazin Alsawalmeh	JOR
Koki Nagamine	JPN
Kim Yu-jeong (Ms.)	KOR
Faisal Sulaiman A Albalawi	KSA
Mohammed Ahmed K D Al-Shammari	QAT
Torphong Somsing	THA
Abdullo Davlatov	TJK

Technical Instructors/Assessors	Nationality/ MA
Jim Ouliaris	AUS
Qin Liang	CHN
Raymond John Henry Olivier	GBR
Ali Sabah Adday Al-Qaysi	IRQ
Ali Ahmed I Altraifi	KSA
Fitness Instructors	**MA**
Zhang Lingling	CHN
Troy Anthony Perry	AUS

Assistant Referees	MA
Andrew Meimarakis	AUS
Bao Mengxiao	CHN
Wu Mingfeng	CHN
Lam Nai Kei, Sam	HKG
Vairamuthu Parasuraman	IND
Alireza Moradi	IRN
Hamza Abdelmajeed Younis Sa'Adeh	JOR
Isao Nishihashi	JPN
Sergei Grishchenko	KGZ
Faisal Nasser R Alqahtani	KSA
Ibrahim Abdullah M Aldakhil	KSA
Muhammad Farhan bin Abdul Aziz	MAS
Yousuf Aref M A Al-Shamari	QAT
Nuannid Dornjangreed	THA
Vafo Karaev	TJK
Kuo Chan-Yu	TPE

Standby Refereses	MA
Ali Alachkar	LBN
Standby Assistant Referees	**MA**
Ahmed Abdulla	MDV
Ashraf A.A.Abuzubaida	PLE

1.2 Support Team

- **Referees' Liaison Officers (LOs):** Responsible for supporting the execution of the program and coordinating all logistical requirements. These LOs played a crucial role in facilitating communication with the hosts, ensuring smooth operations and addressing any logistical issues that arose during the event.
- **Masseurs/Physiotherapists:** Two (2) physiotherapists were available to assist match officials with recovery and injury prevention strategies. Their presence ensured that officials received proper care to maintain their physical condition throughout the competition.
- **Medical Team:** An ambulance accompanied by medical staff was stationed daily at the training venue. This arrangement was in place to facilitate emergency response and provide first aid treatment if any medical issues or injuries occurred during training sessions or practical matches.



2. PREPARATORY COURSE

- The referees and assistant referees underwent a comprehensive four-day preparatory course from March 30 to April 2, 2025.
- The course comprised both theoretical and practical sessions aimed at enhancing their readiness and capabilities for officiating matches effectively.

2.1 Fitness Checks

- All match officials successfully passed the fitness assessments, except for two (2) Assistant Referees.
- The fitness checks included:
  - Dynamic Yo-Yo Intermittent Test (DYY): Conducted for referees, with a target score of 18-8.
  - Assistant Referee Intermittent Endurance Test (ARIET): Administered for assistant referees, with a target score of 15-5.3.
- Meeting these fitness standards demonstrated the officials' readiness to perform their duties effectively on the field, maintaining the required levels of endurance and agility throughout the competition.

2.2 Practical Sessions

- During the preparatory course for match officials, daily practical sessions were held at the Youth Permanent Camp TS 1/2 pitch, with assistance from local team players.
- These sessions covered:
  - Positioning and Movement: Practicing optimal positioning on the field for clear visibility and decision-making.
  - Concentration: Enhancing officials' ability to maintain focus throughout the matches.
  - Teamwork: Promoting effective communication and collaboration among officials.
  - Fitness Activities: Including drills to improve endurance and agility.
- These sessions aimed to provide hands-on training, preparing officials both physically and mentally for officiating matches effectively.

2.3 Theoretical Sessions

- During the preparatory course for match officials, various theoretical sessions were conducted with the aim of enhancing their technical knowledge and ensuring consistency in the application of the Laws of the Game.
- The sessions included:
  - Review of Match Incident Videos: Numerous match incident videos were reviewed and discussed to engage match officials in analysis and consensus-building, facilitating their understanding and application of rules in different game scenarios.
  - Sharing Important Information and Feedback: At the conclusion of the course, match officials received important feedback and information regarding both fitness and technical aspects to aid in their preparation for officiating matches.
- The theoretical sessions covered the following subject areas:
  - Technical:
    - Game Management
    - Handball
    - Offside

- Positioning and Reading of the Game
- Tactical Fouls
- Penalty Area Incidents
- Challenges (2 sessions)

- Fitness:
  - Weight control
  - Recovery exercises

- Sessions by other Departments:
  - Competition Operations
  - Medical Emergency

- By addressing these technical and fitness topics comprehensively, the preparatory course aimed to equip match officials with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively officiate matches while ensuring their physical well-being throughout the tournament.

2.4 Preparation in Non-Refereeing Technical Topics

- Competition Overview & Match Procedures:
  - Encompassed rules, regulations, and procedures governing the competition from start to finish.
  - Included competition format, scheduling, venues, match duration, tie-breaking rules, and disciplinary procedures.
  - Clear communication of these details ensured fairness, consistency, and smooth operation throughout the competition.

- Management of Communication System and Flags:
  - Involved effective communication between match officials using headsets or earpieces.
  - Ensured proper use of flags by assistant referees to signal decisions such as offside, fouls or substitutions.
  - Functional communication systems and proper flag coordination are essential for maintaining the integrity and flow of the game.
  - These aspects were vital for organising and executing a successful competition, contributing to fair play, efficient officiating, and an enjoyable experience for all involved.

3. DURING THE COMPETITION

3.1 Practical Sessions

- The daily practical training sessions implemented during the competition focused on two key areas: fitness conditioning and maintenance, as well as post-match recovery.

- Fitness Conditioning and Maintenance: These sessions were designed to ensure that match officials were in optimal physical condition to perform their duties effectively throughout the competition. They included a combination of cardiovascular exercises, strength training, agility drills, and flexibility exercises tailored to the specific demands of refereeing. Emphasis was placed on building endurance, speed, and resilience to sustain performance levels over the course of multiple matches.

- Post-Match Recovery: Following each match, match officials participated in gymnasium and pool recovery sessions. These sessions were integral to the officials' post-match routine, aimed at facilitating physical and mental recovery after exertion on the field. Gymnasium sessions involved light exercises, stretching, and foam rolling to alleviate muscle tension and promote recovery. Pool sessions included activities such as swimming and hydrotherapy to soothe muscles and enhance relaxation, using both the hot pool and cold pool facilities available in the hotel.



- Incorporating both fitness conditioning and post-match recovery sessions into the officials' daily schedule demonstrated a commitment to supporting the well-being and performance of match officials. This holistic approach to training and recovery likely contributed to the officials' ability to maintain high standards of officiating throughout the competition while minimising the risk of fatigue or injury.

- The Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system was implemented from the Quarter-Final stage onwards and training on the VAR simulator was conducted for the referees as part of preparations.

3.2 Match Assessment

- The utilisation of video referee assessors and on-site referee assessors played a pivotal role in ensuring the quality and consistency of officiating throughout the competition.

- Video Referee Assessor: Situated in the Remote Monitoring Room at the referees' hotel, the video referee assessor had the crucial task of analysing all matches in real-time. They closely tracked match situations using video feeds and compiled relevant details for subsequent debriefing sessions. This approach allowed for comprehensive oversight of all matches and facilitated the identification of key incidents and officiating decisions.

- Referee Assessors: In addition to the video referee assessors, referee assessors were deployed to the match venues to observe the officials' performance. These assessors closely monitored the match officials throughout each game, providing immediate feedback and assessment of their decisions and actions. Their presence ensured that officials received timely guidance and support to maintain consistent and high-quality officiating standards.



- By combining the expertise of video referee assessors with the direct observations of referee assessors, a robust system was established to evaluate and support match officials. This comprehensive approach contributed to the overall improvement of refereeing standards over the course of the competition.

3.3 Match Debriefing Sessions

- The match debriefings conducted for the appointed match officials served as a vital learning tool, focusing on significant incidents from the previous day's matches. These incidents were carefully analysed to glean insights and lessons that would help prepare the officials for upcoming matches.

- During these debriefings, instructors emphasised areas for improvement, offering valuable advice aimed at ensuring consistency and uniformity in foul recognition and interpretation of the Laws of the Game.

- By addressing specific incidents and providing guidance on officiating standards, the debriefings aimed to enhance the officials' understanding and application of the rules, ultimately contributing to fair and effective officiating in future matches.

3.4 Match Preparation Sessions (Technical Observer Team)

- Mr. Wim Koevermans from the Technical Division presented the analysis by the Technical Observer Team in a session that helped the match officials to understand each of the teams in the Quarter-Finals.

- They presented insights related to team tactics, individual players' styles, and behaviours, which proved to be beneficial for the officials' preparation and understanding of football dynamics.

- This exchange of information was aimed at improving the officiating and management of the upcoming matches.

4. VAR SYSTEM

The VAR system was implemented from the Quarter-Finals onwards, for a total of seven (7) matches.

4.1 Technical Setup

A decentralised system was implemented for the competition, meaning that there was a Video Operations Room (VOR) located at each venue from where the VMOs operated. Each VOR was situated in a room within the stadium, near the broadcast compound to allow camera feeds to be easily provided to the VAR System.

Technology Provider
- Rigour Tech

Video Operation Room
- Located at each stadium
- Reception of all camera feeds from the Host Broadcaster (HB)
- Personnel setup:
  - VAR, AVAR

Referee Review Area (RRA)
- Pyramid Monitor
- Located next to or behind the fourth official's bench at each venue
- Displays VAR output screen for Referees to review incidents in the case of an On-field Review (OFR)

4.1 VAR Implementation Statistics

VAR REVIEW	TOTAL	DECISIONS CHANGED	DECISIONS CONFIRMED
TOTAL REVIEWS	5	5	0
On Field Reviews	4	4	0
Only VAR Reviews	1	1	0
Penalty area incidents reviewed	3	3	0
Goals reviewed	1	1	0
Encroachment by GK in PK reviewed	0	0	0
Encroachment in PK reviewed	1	1	0
Potential **red card incidents** reviewed	0	0	0
Mistaken identity situations reviewed	0	0	0
Average reviews per match	0.71	-	-
1 Review every # matches	1.4	-	-



5. TECHNICAL SUMMARY

4.1 VAR Implementation Statistics

- The referee assessors and instructors played a crucial role in monitoring and evaluating the performance of the match officials throughout the competition. Their close observation and detailed match reports provided valuable feedback to the officials, helping them improve their performance over time.
- Based on their assessments, the referee assessors and instructors rated the overall performance of the match officials as 'good'. This indicates that the officials demonstrated a high level of competency and professionalism in their officiating duties.Furthermore, it's noted that the refereeing standards improved as the competition progressed. This suggests that the officials were receptive to feedback and actively worked on addressing any areas of weakness, resulting in an overall enhancement of refereeing quality as the tournament advanced.
- Overall, the efforts of the referee assessors and instructors, coupled with the dedication of the match officials, contributed to the maintenance and eventual improvement of refereeing standards throughout the competition.
- A total of 104 disciplinary sanctions were issued at the AFC U17 Asian Cup™ Saudi Arabia 2025, of which 98 were cautions (yellow cards). Three (3) sending-offs took place after a second caution and three (3) direct red cards were shown. There was a match average of 3.16 yellow cards and 0.19 red cards.



BEST PLAYERS / BEST GOALS / AWARDS

BEST PLAYERS BEST PLAYERS BEST PLAYERS

GOALKEEPERS



NO. 21
NEMATULLOH RUSTAMJONOV
UZB



NO. 1
PARK DO-HUN
KOR

DEFENDERS



NO. 4
SHOTA FUJII
JPN



NO. 4
MUMINKHON BAKHODIRKHONOV
UZB



NO. 12
ADEL BIN HIBAH
KSA



NO. 16
KAIJI CHONAN
JPN



NO. 20
KOO HYEON-BIN
KOR

MIDFIELDERS



NO. 6
AN JIN SOK
PRK



NO. 8
PARK BYEONG-CHAN
KOR



NO. 8
ABDULLA RASHED MOHAMED
UAE



NO. 10
ABDULRAHMAN SUFYANI
KSA



NO. 18
ABUBAKIR SHUKURULLAEV
UZB

BEST PLAYERS BEST PLAYERS BEST PLAYERS

FORWARDS



NO. 7
SADRIDDIN KHASANOV
UZB



NO. 9
PAK KWANG SONG
PRK



NO. 9
ABDULHADI MATARI
KSA



NO. 10
KIM YU JIN
PRK



NO. 10
MINATO YOSHIDA
JPN



NO. 15
RYOTA HARIU
JPN



NO. 17
JAMSHIDBEK RUSTAMOV
UZB



NO. 20
ASILBEK ALIEV
UZB

BEST GOALS



Rank-ing	Country	No.	Player	Match	Time	Type
1	PRK	10	Kim Yu Jin	OMA	10	Dribble inside box left side, shot right foot top right corner
2	UZB	7	Sadriddin Khasanov	PRK	31	Dribble left side inside box, shot right foot top right corner
3	UZB	7	Sadriddin Khasanov	THA	2	Dribble inside box on left side, shot right foot top right corner
4	UZB	18	Abubakir Shukurullaev	THA	85	Shot outside the box, left corner
5	UZB	7	Sadriddin Khasanov	KSA	69	Dribble left side 1v1 defender + 1v1 goalkeeper
6	UAE	11	Mohamed Buti Almarar	AUS	53	Dribble left side; strike left top corner outside the box
7	UZB	17	Jamshidbek Rustamov	PRK	62	Control ball right side of the box, shot left foot, top left corner
8	IDN	7	Muhamad Zahaby Gholy	YEM	15	Dropkick top left corner
9	KSA	17	Jamshidbek Rustamov	UZB	69	Volley edge of the box
10	JPN	10	Minato Yoshida	UAE	15	Cross from left flank, header through the middle

BEST GOALS BEST GOALS BEST GOALS BEST GOALS

TOP GOALS
SET PLAY
VIDEO LINK

Ranking	Player	No.	Country	Match	Time	Type
1	Asilbek Aliev	20	UZB	UZB v UAE	13'	Direct Free-kick, incredible strike top corner
2	Ibrahim Salim Al Tamimi	14	OMA	OMA v PRK	65'	Direct Free-kick, right foot top left corner
3	Mohamed Buti Almarar	11	UAE	UZB v UAE	66'	Direct Free-kick, left foot top right corner
4	Choe Chung Hyok	3	PRK	IRN v PRK	8'	Corner left side, powerful header after high jump far post
5	Minato Yoshida	10	JPN	VIE v JPN	13'	Corner left side, powerful header through middle



AWARDS

AWARDS AWARDS AWARDS AWARDS



BEST GOALKEEPER: NEMATULLOH RUSTAMJONOV (UZBEKISTAN)

MVP: SADRIDDIN KHASANOV (UZBEKISTAN)

TOP GOALSCORER: ASILBEK ALIEV (UZBEKISTAN)

AFC FAIR PLAY AWARD



SOCIAL MEDIA

DIGITAL STATISTICS

SOCIAL MEDIA

IMPRESSIONS

2023
273,569,635

2025
291,912,860

↑ 7%

VIEWS

2023
50,928,227

2025
110,113,847

↑ 116%

THE-AFC.COM

PAGE VIEWS

2023
813,002

2025
1,496,746

USERS

2023
146,402

2025
333,968



COMMITTEES

AFC COMPETITIONS COMMITTEE

NAME	POSITION	MEMBER ASSOCIATION
DR. TRAN QUOC TUAN	CHAIRPERSON	VFF
MR. DASTANBEK KONOKBAEV	DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON	KFU
MR. JAMES JOHNSON	Member	Football Australia
MR. KAZI MD. SALAHUDDIN	Member	BFF
MR. YANG XU	Member	CFA
MR. IWAN BOEDIANTO	Member	PSSI
MR. TSUNEYASU MIYAMOTO	Member	JFA
MR. CHUN HANJIN	Member	KFA
MR. OSAMA HUSAIN SULTAN	Member	KFA
MR. SEMAAN DOUAIHY	Member	LFA
MR. TUN TUN AUNG	Member	MFF
DR. AHMED KHELLIL ABBASSI	Member	QFA
MR. IBRAHIM S. ALKASSIM	Member	SAFF
MR. DAVLATMAND ISLOMOV	Member	TFF
MR. PAIRIT TANPAIREE	Member	FA Thailand
MR. MOHAMMED ABDULLA HAZZAM ALDHAHERI	Member	UAE FA

AFC TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

NAME	POSITION	MEMBER ASSOCIATION
MR. KOHZO TASHIMA	CHAIRPERSON	JFA
MR. ADNAN DARJAL MOTAR	DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON	IFA
MR. MOHAMMAD YOSUF KARGAR	Member	AFF
MS. HEATHER GARRIOCK	Member	Football Australia
MR. CHENG XU	Member	CFA
DR. SEYED MIRSHAD MAJEDI	Member	FFIRI
DR. LEE YOUNG SOO	Member	KFA
MR. TIN MYINT AUNG	Member	MFF
MR. FAHAD ABDULLA AL ZARRAA	Member	QFA
MR. MOHAMMED AMEEN HAIDAR	Member	SAFF
MR. MUHANNAD ALFAKEER	Member	SFA
MR. BAKHTIYOR DADAMATOV	Member	UFA

AFC REFEREES COMMITTEE

NAME	POSITION	MEMBER ASSOCIATION
MR. HANY TALEB B S AL-RAEESI	CHAIRPERSON	QFA
MR. RAVSHAN IRMATOV	DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON	UFA
MR. CUI ENLEI	Member	CFA
MS. SACHIKO YAMAGISHI	Member	JFA
MR. MUN JIN HEE	Member	KFA
MR. NURDIN BUKUEV	Member	KFU
MR. ALI ALTRAIFI	Member	SAFF
MR. SALEM ALI ALSHAMSI	Member	UAE FA



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EDITORIAL GROUP
Andy Roxburgh
Graham Turner
Isaac Christian
Teo Teng Kiat
Proma Sanyal
Rhee Changseok

TECHNICAL OBSERVER TEAM
Takeshi Ono (AFC) - Captain
Narayanan Sivaji (Singapore)
Nihad KH S Souqar (Jordan)
Li Chunman (China PR)

PRODUCTION TEAM
Masahiro Sugiyama
Jose Marcelino Carpio
Nur Syafiah Woo
Muhammad Shafiq
Mandy Leong

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEOGRAPHY
SJ Sai
Alson Yue

DESIGN
Faridah Zetty

AFC U17 AC SAUDI ARABIA 2025

EDITORIAL GROUP
Andy Roxburgh
Graham Turner
Isaac Christian
Teo Teng Kiat
Proma Sanyal
Rhee Changseok

TECHNICAL OBSERVER TEAM
Wim Koevermans (AFC) - Captain
Fahad Abdullah AlZarraa (Qatar)
Nihad KH S Souqar (Jordan)
Toshev Usmon (Uzbekisan)

PRODUCTION TEAM
Masahiro Sugiyama
Jose Marcelino Carpio
Khalid Idris
Muhammad Shafiq
Mandy Leong

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEOGRAPHY
Adam Aidil Padali
Alson Yue

DESIGN
Faridah Zetty

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