



# COACHES CIRCLE

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



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THE BIG INTERVIEW WITH ►  
**SHUI QINGXIA**

## DEVELOPING ASIA'S YOUNG TALENT

Andy Roxburgh, AFC Technical Director

Asia abounds with young footballers. This is not surprising when the United Nations estimates that 4.7 billion people live on the world's largest Continent. With 60% of the global population, success should be a distinct possibility for the clubs and national teams that represent the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), but only Japan's women have won a World Cup (2011). In the men's game, Europe and South America have monopolised the FIFA gold medals, so population figures are not the only factor at play. Professional competitions, efficient scouting systems, elite youth academies, organised grassroots programmes, medical support, targeted coach education and clear player pathways which facilitate the nurturing of talent are all essential ingredients in delivering results at the highest level.

The goalscoring brilliance of Son Heung-min (Korea Republic and Tottenham Hotspur), the technical quality of Salem al-Dawsari (Saudi Arabia and Al Hilal), the vision and touch of Akram Afif (Qatar and Al Sadd) and the technical quality of Takumi Minamino (Japan and Liverpool) underline the star quality emanating from Asia. But, are there enough top players? Are the domestic club competitions intense and of a high quality? Are talents being



Korea Republic's Son Heung-min in action during against Islamic Republic of Iran defenders during the AFC Asian Qualifiers – Road to Qatar™ - Group A match at the Seoul World Cup Stadium on March 24, 2022 in Seoul, Korea Republic

identified and developed to a benchmark standard? Are youth and senior coaches educated to a level comparable with the world's best? The implication is that more needs to be done, and youth football in Asia is one area of particular concern. As the AFC General Secretary Datuk Seri Windsor John said recently: "There must be a greater push in the area of youth development."

We recognise that there is a big disparity between the Member Associations (MAs) in Asia, with some well-



Salem al-Dawsari



Akram Afif

advanced and others working with limited resources and reduced options. Having said that, there is generally a lack of domestic youth competitions, there are simply not enough games in both grassroots and elite youth football. In addition, when there are no Continental or regional competitions, there are no national youth teams. A shortage of scouting staff, a lack of sports science back-up and frequent changes of Technical Directors and coaching personnel limit the effectiveness of many player development

programmes. Investment in youth is always a challenge, even more so during a pandemic.

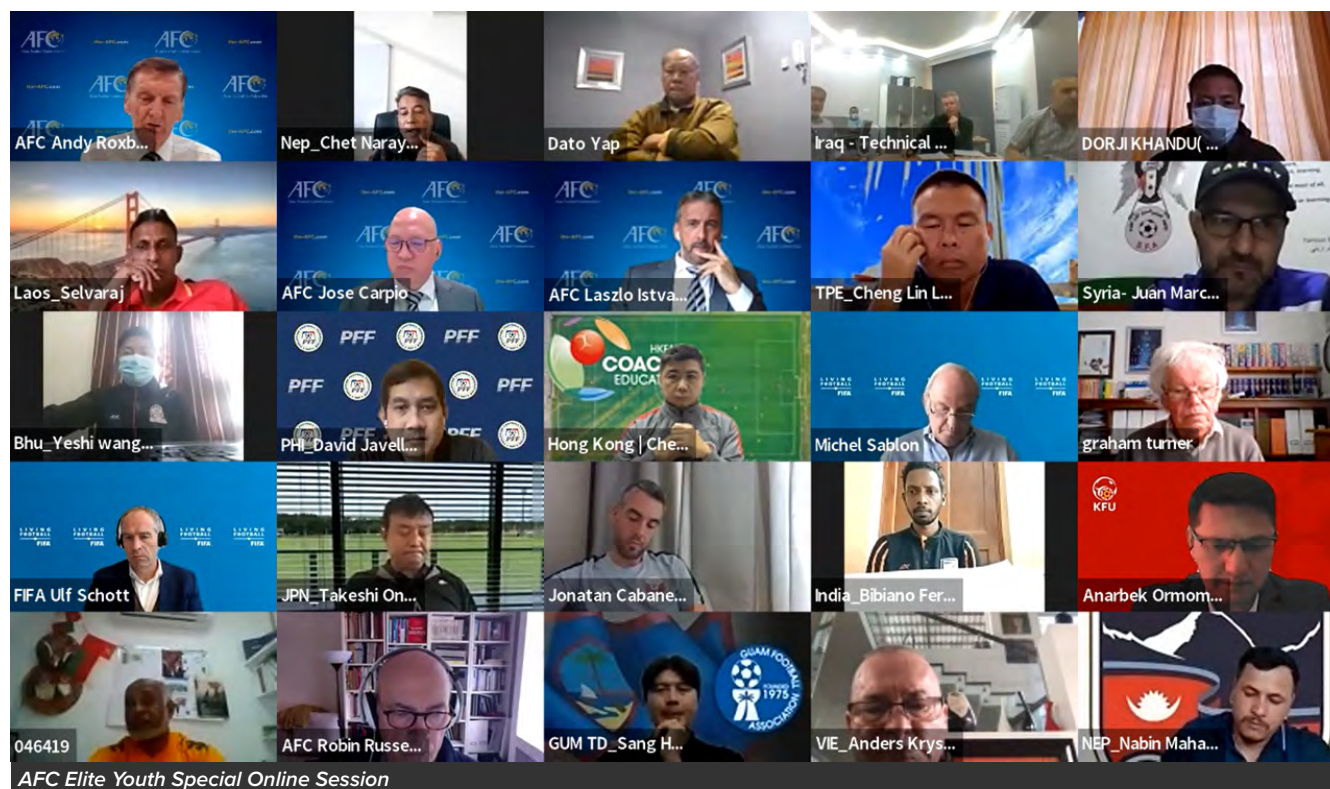
In order to stimulate greater interest and commitment in all aspects of youth football, the AFC has introduced an Elite Youth Scheme which sets out the benchmark criteria for national team football and the educational work carried out by youth academies. This project recognises and endorses the efforts of the MAs and provides specialist support where required. To date,

19 MAs have been approved by the AFC Youth Panel and steady progress is being made in this vital aspect of player development.

With the slogan: "Give every talent a chance," FIFA has also introduced a youth scheme. This will be a welcome addition because the world body will help to champion elite youth development. They will also give extra financial support, provide player development expertise, and offer more educational opportunities for those involved in top-level youth football.

Furthermore, the AFC will introduce an A-level youth Diploma as part of its Coaching Convention portfolio. The aim is to provide specific education for those coaching in elite youth academies. The nurturing of talented players requires professional know-how and the AFC has a duty to support the MAs in the design and implementation of advanced coach education courses which focus on the specialised work of high-performance technicians.

The importance of youth development was underlined by Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa, the AFC President, when he said: "The hallmark of every successful team begins at elite youth level, and the AFC's desire to develop our future generation - the stars of tomorrow - has never been stronger." The challenge is to identify and develop those who will follow in the footsteps of Salem al-Dawsari, Son Heung-min and other stars of Asian football. Korea Republic's talisman Son once said: "Football is my happiness". If there is commitment, investment and collective effort, then the next generation of talents, if they work hard, may reach their full potential and everyone involved in Asian football will be very, very happy.



## CONFIDENCE, COMMITMENT, RESPECT AND TRUST

SHUI QINGXIA

Some of the images after the final of lifting the AFC Women's Asian Cup™ trophy evoked memories of the past. Between 1986 and 1997 when a certain midfielder lifted the trophy five times during a sequence of seven successive finals when China PR won title after title without conceding a goal. When that midfielder carried her bags of experience into the coaching profession, her reward was a string of league titles and a hat-trick of Best Coach awards during a golden age for club football in Shanghai. When she returned to the national team – this time as head coach – barely three months elapsed before she became champion of Asia yet again. She is, of course...



## 1 HOW DID YOUR CAREER AS A PLAYER INFLUENCE YOUR DEVELOPMENT AS A COACH?

Firstly, I think I achieved great success as a player. It added much more confidence to my coaching career. Secondly, my coaches. They all had a great influence on me. Not only football coaches but also my first sports coach who trained me in athletics. They were all role models to me. Thirdly, I always admired teachers as a profession. They pass on knowledge. Once I started playing football, I fell in love with this sport and my coaches not only helped me to improve my skills

and play better football, but they also taught me a lot in life as well. Since way back then, I made the decision to make coaching my lifelong career.

Talking about my playing time, I played in almost all the different positions apart from goalkeeper in my club and national team. So, I knew and experienced all the roles and responsibilities in the different positions. It makes it easier for me to communicate with my players technically and tactically.

I was also the captain of my club and the national team, which always gave me a sense of responsibility, being the role model for others, taking the lead in difficult

times and getting people together to overcome them. The captain's role developed my character and established who I am today.

I also appreciate my club because after knowing my plan to become a coach, they started to prepare me towards my end days as a player by giving me the opportunity to take on coaching courses and allowed me to assist in training. I made lots of notes by observing and assisting. And my club also gave me the job as the head coach of the Shanghai elite youth teams in different age groups. And gradually I became the head coach of the Shanghai senior women's club team. So, my coaching career is largely because of my young dream, the club and the people around me who provided the opportunities and developed me.



## 2 WHY HAS CHINA PR ALWAYS BEEN GOOD IN TOP-LEVEL WOMEN'S FOOTBALL?

I think on one hand, it relies on our holistic elite sports development system, the Olympic strategy. Women's football started in China PR at the end of the 70's. The players were earning wages by playing football for a city or a provincial team. That means playing football is a job and players have regular training in a systematic way. That's why we were in a good place at that time. China PR also hosted the 1st FIFA Women's World Cup and we finished fifth. Then in 1996, the summer Olympics included women's football for the first time, and we made fourth place. So once the sport was in the Olympic Games and we made good achievements internationally, it guaranteed support and resources from the Government. China PR won the silver medal in the 1999 FIFA Women's

World Cup in the United States of America. Many people watched the final. It was a great game, and it gave the China PR women's team a great reputation and since then, we were named the 'Steel Roses'.

Nowadays, the women's football league in China PR has three divisions. The school programme for girls and boys also increased in participation. All that I mentioned above helped us to maintain a good level. Also, I think, we, Chinese women, all have that hard-working spirit and resilience, and the generations of women football players all have that sense of mission to protect the name of the 'Steel Roses' and the duty to carry on that glory and legacy.

### 3 HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR STYLE OF MANAGEMENT?

I am quite serious and strict in training. I am a result-oriented person. I believe that good results come from good preparations and processes. We, players and coaches, need to make 100% effort and commitment. But on the other hand, I do have a sense of humour off the pitch and in life. I like to listen to the players and make the connection with them. Everybody should be respected.

### 4 HOW DO YOU WANT YOUR TEAM TO PLAY?

I think nowadays the modern football trend is still quite technically oriented and focuses on fast transition and fast decision-making due to the time limitation. Personally, I prefer the passing game and

good combination play. I want to present entertaining football with quality technique and tactical sense.

### 5 WHAT IS YOUR VIEW ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WOMEN'S GAME IN THE USA AND EUROPE?

America has stayed at the top level since when I was playing, due to massive participation in women's football, I think. Their achievements internationally keeps the intensity and popularity of women's football domestically. Their professional league also attracts top players which guarantees the quality of the league. Also, structured, and well-organised collegiate league and school/club competitions create a competitive environment. These are the key to their success.

In Europe's case, firstly, I think European football is leading the trend in world football in general, with women's football doing the same nowadays. They have football history, culture and environment. It's the



land of football. Their women's football development is the outcome of more than decades of effort and investment by the Confederation and its national associations.

At the time when I was playing, you could only name a few strong women's teams in Europe like Germany, Sweden, Norway, etc. The leagues and clubs were quite amateur, and they only trained two to three times a week while we trained almost every day at that time. So technically, we were much better. But this is not the case anymore. Nowadays, there are many professional leagues and players in Europe.

The Continental club competition started 20 years ago and it gradually developed to today's Women's Champions League, which is a big boost to women's football in Europe. They are also doing a great job in promoting women's football. I think this is also due to the football culture and the love of the sport. Nowadays, there are more highly qualified female coaches in Europe as well. So, it's a holistic football development process and effort, and the outcome is obvious.

### 6 WHAT ARE YOUR REFLECTIONS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF YOUR TEAM AT THE AFC WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP™ IN INDIA 2022?

To think about the AFC Women's Asian Cup™ in India, I am still quite excited and emotional even now. This is the championship we lifted again after 16 years. The result itself is the reflection of our hard work and team unity. We dared to take on the challenge and

show what we've got, and the team spirit reached new heights after 16 years. I think we created a very positive environment where we trusted and supported each other. You can hear more laughter and the players were not afraid to make mistakes and dared to perform especially when we were behind. We adjusted quickly and focused on the game itself. The staff and players were all 100% committed. We paid much more attention to details especially when we faced so many uncertainties caused by COVID-19. We made precautionary plans to deal with it and simulated training for the situation that might happen on the field. In fact, we had zero cases (players and staff) throughout the whole tournament.

The result is due to the team effort with some senior and star players playing key roles in this tournament. For example, our captain Wang Shangshang No 10, the best player of the tournament. She is 32-years-old, and she is the one who made great contributions in



the front and the back lines. She is the one who led by example and made changes on the field. No. 18, Tang Jiali, was the only one who plays abroad but she showed a lot of desire in the competition and blended well with the team. No. 7, Wang Shuang, showed great improvement in her defending. No 6, Zhang Xi, is the only mum in the team. All the players were highly self-motivated and brought the best of themselves. All these strong individuals made the best team.

## 7 HOW DID YOU DEAL WITH THE EMOTIONAL ASPECT OF THE GAME DURING PREPARATION AND ACTUAL PLAY?

For the preparation, as I mentioned earlier, we did simulation training for the situation that might happen on the field, for example when we are behind with limited time left, or some players cannot play etc. So, we prepared well during down time, and I did communicate well with each of them not only with technical and tactical talks, but mostly to build up their self-confidence level.

During the match, my self-reflection is that I managed my emotions well in this tournament. If the players saw the coach was in the state of panic or hot-headed, it definitely would have had a negative impact on them. So I showed the players that I had faith in them, and we all prepared well for the situation beforehand. This was good practice for myself as well in terms of controlling my emotions. I grew in that. I also told the players that the coach is taking the responsibility for the result, and you (players) take the responsibility for the process. Give the best of yourself, don't have any regrets. And

we proved that we could manage that.

## 8 WHAT CAN BE DONE TO RAISE THE LEVEL OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN ASIA?

The football trend nowadays is very pragmatic and fast-paced. We need to be fast in transition, fast thinking and fast in movement with precise techniques. Asian players are more agile, in general, and have quick feet and fast movement. These are the advantages that we should leverage on well in accordance with modern football.

On the development side, the club competition is a great tool to boost the game. More playing opportunities and exposure for the players, coaches and referees will definitely help to level up Asian women's football. One of our clubs participated in the first pilot Asian Women's Club Championship in 2019 and I saw that it already brought positive impact to the club, more motivation, and interest from investors.

## 9 WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FIFA WORLD CUP IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND?

Result-wise, we want to progress further than the last FIFA Women's World Cup. Most importantly, I hope we show off our style of football and our tactical sense. The FIFA Women's World Cup is the biggest event in women's football, a chance to compete with the world's best, a great opportunity to learn and to gain experience, and we definitely want to enjoy every game and make the event more entertaining.

## 10 WHAT WILL YOU FOCUS ON DURING THE PREPARATION PHASE PRIOR TO THE NEXT WORLD CUP?

Firstly, reinforce what we gained from the last AFC Women's Asian Cup™ and further improvement on the technical and tactical side. Actually, after we won the AFC Women's Asian Cup™ title, the players received much more attention and were also busy with commercial and advertising activities. They really need to weigh and balance their time and focus. So, we will have more trials for youngsters in the various camps. We are preparing for the FIFA Women's World Cup but also for future events like the 2024 Olympics. Some other overseas players who are playing in Europe and US couldn't join us in the AFC Women's Asian Cup™. We will try to recruit them during our upcoming overseas camp as well. Before the FIFA Women's World Cup, we have the East Asian Cup and Asian Games to test different combinations of players and variations in tactics. And another focus is on injury prevention and recovery as we have several players who are already above 30 years old.

## 11 WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE TO INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN TO COACH AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL?

I think nowadays people are changing their perceptions about female coaches, not like in the past when it was dominated by men, as we already proved our quality in coaching. You see the FIFA Women's World Cup champion has a female coach. The Olympic, Women's



**I think nowadays people are changing their perceptions about female coaches, not like in the past when it was dominated by men, as we already proved our quality in coaching. There shouldn't be any discrimination towards female or male coaches. It's only about quality.**

**Shui Qingxia**  
(Head coach of the China PR Women's National Team)



EURO and AFC Women's Asian Cup™ champion coaches are all female. There shouldn't be any discrimination towards female or male coaches. It's only about quality. We should have the confidence and belief in ourselves. Also, the women's football stakeholders like the clubs and federations should pay attention to those female

players who want to be a coach after retirement. Have a plan and provide the opportunity and platform for them, like my own experience, thanks to the club who prepared me and paved the way for who I am today, and the trust from the Chinese Football Association (CFA) leadership as I am the first domestic female coach appointed to the national team. We female coaches who are in a good position should also have the initiative to tutor other young coaches and help them grow. And I believe women are improving our status in general nowadays, all we talk about is quality but not gender anymore.

## 12 WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A YOUNG COACH WHO IS WORKING WITH TALENTED PLAYERS IN THE ELITE LEVEL OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL?

As a coach, you should never stop learning no matter who you are coaching, keep updating ourselves with open eyes and open mind. Always seek for self-improvement not only in coaching ability, but also in management and people skills, etc, because we are dealing with people every day. Secondly, put the players at the centre, give them more encouragement and trust them to do better.

Lastly, I want to emphasise my biggest learning lesson during the AFC Women's Asian Cup™, which was managing my emotions. After the Semi-finals when we beat Japan on penalties, the players wanted to lift me up, but I stopped them and told them it's not the time to celebrate yet. Also, the several times when we were behind and catching up with the opponent, I managed to stay calm and passed my strength and trust to them. The players look up to you and you are influencing them all the time.

## AFC WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP FOLLOW UP

### FROM ASIA TO THE WORLD

“**H**igh intensity wasn't exactly the norm. The top four teams, maybe. Notably Australia and Japan, who were collective high pressing teams with 22% and 21% of their regains in the final third. China PR and Korea Republic were a bit more circumspect in selecting the right moments for high-intensity pressing – when they were chasing the game or needed to up the tempo. They had the ability to do it but didn't adopt that approach all the time.

“In India, especially in the early afternoon kick-offs, temperatures were quite high. And this made high-intensity pressing more difficult to sustain. But, at next year's FIFA Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, it will be our winter. So, I think teams must be prepared to cope with intense collective pressing higher up the pitch.”

The words belong to Australia's Raeanne Maree, one of the team of AFC Technical Observers at the AFC Women's Asian Cup™ staged in India earlier this year. And the comments by Rae, as she's more commonly known to her coaching colleagues, were delivered



during an AFC Special Online Session dedicated to women's football and, more specifically, a review of the expanded 2022 tournament and the potential ingredients for success when the AFC representatives line up at the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup to measure themselves against global opposition at the first final tournament to feature 32 contestants.

#### TECHNICAL TOPICS

The online session also acted as a prelude to the publication of AFC's Technical Report on the 25-match event in India, where China PR produced a remarkable comeback from a 2-0 half-time deficit to defeat Korea Republic 3-2 thanks to an added-time winner. High pressing was by no means the only technical topic to figure on the agenda – though it

certainly triggered reflections on other aspects to emerge from the final tournament. “A high percentage of teams preferred to sit back and defend in a mid or low block,” Rae added to the theme. “Most teams applied some sort of pressure on the ball. In some cases, it was extremely aggressive and, other times, it was just to provide the slight delay that would allow the defensive block to assemble – to get into an organised defensive structure without any serious attempt to win the ball back. Yet, of the 104 goals, only six were from counterattacks, illustrating that, for most of the teams, regaining possession was about regaining control and taking time to switch into attacking mode. Fast counterattacking was not something we saw a lot of.”

Her comments provided encouragement to reflect on two words: goalscoring efficiency. Allied with the half-dozen successful counterattacks in 25 matches, a salient feature of the tournament statistics was that only five goals were scored as a result of combination play - one by China PR and two apiece by Australia and Japan. No other team scored in this way, even though, as the technical report comments “the standard of combination play was a stand-out feature with Japan’s short-passing interchanges in all sectors of the pitch setting benchmarks, while Australia, China PR and Korea Republic also set out to pass their way through the thirds as a key concept in their playing philosophy. They were not alone, as Myanmar, Thailand (with Japanese coach Miyo Okamoto) and Vietnam also based their game on combination play.” The talking point was the scarcity of an end product.

So was the fact that no goals at all could be attributed to cut-backs from areas close to the bye-line, whereas more traditional crossing was the most frequently-trodden pathway to the net, providing 30% of the open-

play goals in a tournament where dead-ball situations accounted for one-third of the goal tally.

### QUESTION MARKS

The online review also addressed a spectrum of issues such as a notable improvement in standards of goalkeeping (reflecting training-ground work by goalkeeping coaches), the success rate from long-range shooting (the source of 21% of the tournament’s open-play goals), contributions to attacking play by full-

backs or the figures related to real playing time which registered a downturn of 8% in comparison with the previous edition of the tournament and averaged out at 52 minutes and 21 seconds per game. The statistic echoed concerns in the men’s game about ball-in-play times in AFC competitions and raised the identical question: whether, when AFC teams perform on international stages, this has a negative impact against opponents who regularly sustain high-intensity play for longer periods.



Korea Republic's Choo Hyojoo in the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022™ Quarter-final match against Australia



China PR's Gao Chen and Japan's Yui Hasegawa in the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022™ Semi-final at the Shree Shiv Chhatrapati Sports Complex in Pune, India

### MIND GAMES

However, one of the interesting facets of the online session had nothing to do with team structures, ball-possession, wing play, pressing, transitions or timekeeping. Champion coach Shui Qingxia placed great emphasis on the relevance of confidence and self-belief in a tournament where her side came from 1-0 down in the Quarter-final to beat Vietnam 3-1. In the Semi-final against Japan, they equalised in the penultimate minute of extra-time and held their nerves

in the penalty shoot-out. And, in the Final, they won the title by bouncing back from a 2-0 half-time deficit and scoring an added-time winner. China PR's success owed a great deal to resilience, mental strength and an outstanding rebound mentality.

Another taster of this ingredient in recipes for successful coaching was served up during the online review of the AFC Women's Asian Cup™ by Colin Bell, the head coach of the Korea Republic team who

travelled home with a bittersweet aftertaste. Silver medals were a badge of success; but relinquishing a 2-0 lead was hard to swallow. "We were very proud of the team and very pleased to get to the final," he commented. "And obviously when you're 2-0 up and so close to becoming champions of Asia it was a very bitter disappointment. But that's football, that's life and you have to pick yourself up and move on. We've reflected; we've analysed the tournament; we've looked at those last 22-23 minutes and we must try to find the right solutions and move forward."

He added: "I think there was definitely an emotional component attached to losing that lead and I think it was the most important lesson we learned from the tournament. And as head coach, I have to reflect on helping the girls to manage that sort of situation. OK, when you play against China PR, you can't always expect to keep a clean sheet. But conceding that goal in the Final, even though it was from a penalty, knocked us totally off balance. At half-time our emphasis had been on keeping the players calm and focused – and to look for the third goal which might have killed the game off. China PR made the changes that we had expected them to make so we thought we were well prepared. But there was that emotional moment. I was quite sure that the girls would stay relaxed, stay organised. But even when we got close to extra-time, we weren't able to maintain our composure and organisation. We let go of our principles, we let them slip out of our hands against a very good team with a strong mentality."

"The positive side," he commented, "was that we went to the tournament with that strong belief that I had been trying to instil in the girls over two years or so. We were convinced that, on our good days, we could



Korea Republic's Head Coach Colin Bell is all smiles after their victory against Uzbekistan in the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2022 Qualifiers - Group E at Pakhtakor Stadium in Tashkent, Uzbekistan

compete with and beat any nation. Our major target was to qualify for the FIFA Women's World Cup but before the tournament started, I said that our aim was to get to the Final of the AFC Women's Asian Cup™ and win it. The mood in the group was very positive; we did well after a shaky start – we responded well after conceding a goal to Japan after 30 seconds; got ourselves back into the game and I thought we looked the better team during the second half. Then against Australia, who everybody knew were a very good side, we started poorly and had to dig in very deep. And we ended up with a massive win against one of the best teams in the world. And then we got to the final against a very good Philippines team...there were a lot of positives about the way we performed and the way we were able to get results. We produced a good first half against China PR and our second goal was excellent. From my subjective standpoint, that goal by Ji was our best – a great



Ji So-yun at the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022™ Final against China PR on February 6, 2022 at the D.Y. Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai, India

movement, the way we utilised the space that China PR had given us and a great finish.”

Bell expressed full agreement with Shui Qingxia. “I think that confidence and self-belief are very important factors. Personally, I expected to beat China PR exactly as I had gone into the game against Australia expecting to beat them and the same against Japan, even knowing that they are strong opponents. But if we do our homework, get our preparation right and have that bit of luck that you always need I believe that we are able to beat these teams. So, my task is to instil that belief deep into the players hearts and minds.”

Asked about nourishing the development of women's football in Asia, Bell responded “We still question fitness levels and have to address this issue at the club level. I think the backing of a competitive national league at club level is an essential element. Australia are a very good side who I'm sure will do well at the FIFA Women's World Cup. And when you look at their squad you see that so many of them are at top teams in Europe or USA. I'm not saying players have to go abroad. But we need to work on raising our domestic game, exploiting the principle that the girls are constantly in training. We need to aim for higher quality, higher intensity. I think that in all Asian countries it's important for domestic football to be played at the highest possible level. And our national teams will obviously benefit from that.”

“In our training camps,” he added, “we see the levels in terms of high-intensity runs, acceleration, deceleration and so on increase dramatically. So, we know that the players are making advances and that they can achieve greater levels. But if we look at data from German clubs, for example, we can see a difference.”



**I think there was definitely an emotional component attached to losing that lead and I think it was the most important lesson we learned from the tournament.**

**Colin Bell**

*(Head coach of the Korea Republic Women's National Team)*



Looking back to the final tournament, he commented “Personally, I really enjoyed being in India. I really enjoyed the environment. The tournament was well-organised and the quality of the playing surfaces was very good. And it was a great experience for the nations who are growing. I'm a great fan of Vietnam and I enjoyed watching them. I'm so pleased they've qualified for the FIFA Women's World Cup because they've done so much good work, they're trying to play good football and do things in a way that is great to see. I'm convinced that in Asia, women's football will continue to grow. The nations who are prepared to invest time, enthusiasm and resources into women's football will progress and I'm sure that the Asian countries can do very well at the FIFA Women's World Cup. And I think that in Korea Republic we are beginning to believe that we can reach finals!”

## EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

### SOME FAQs ABOUT THE AFC EMOTIONS IN FOOTBALL PROJECT

Since the launch of the AFC Emotions in Football Project at the end of last year and the recent follow-up Workshop, many questions have been raised – to the extent that it seems worthwhile to jot down responses to some of the most Frequently Asked Questions. Without more ado...

**QUESTION: WHY HAS THE SUBJECT OF EMOTIONS IN FOOTBALL BECOME SUCH A HOT TOPIC?**

**ANSWER:** The pandemic was a factor in bringing mental health to the surface as a major issue. And, as so often, football held a mirror to something that affected society as a whole. The professional game provided many high-profile examples of players and coaches who were struggling with their emotions. In some cases, specialist help may have been needed. In competitive environments, a Sport Psychologist would have been welcomed with a view to providing very necessary guidance and support. What has come sharply into



focus is that, to be successful, coaches need to be aware of – and understand – their own emotions and those of their players. As the late, great, Gérard Houllier (former manager of Liverpool FC, Olympique Lyonnais and coach of France's national team) maintained, "when a player behaves differently, you need to be able to see behind the screen".

**QUESTION: WHAT IS THE VIEW OF THE AFC'S LEADERSHIP ABOUT THE SUBJECT AND THE EMOTIONS IN FOOTBALL PROJECT?**

**ANSWER:** Support from the AFC leadership and the leaders of many Member Associations (MAs) has been positive and enthusiastic. AFC President Shaikh Salman

bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa comments: “Football is an emotional game and the ability to control your emotions and to express yourself in a positive way is fundamental for the success of the individual and the team. It is our duty to support Asian coaches and players in this vital aspect of their development”.

Datuk Seri Windsor John, AFC’s General Secretary, is equally categorical: “As a footballer or as a coach,” he says, “technical know-how is not enough. You need to understand your emotions and to behave appropriately in the game. The AFC’s Emotions in Football project addresses the various aspects of emotional intelligence

and offers practical advice for coaches and their players at all levels of the game.”

**QUESTION: WHAT ARE AFC’S AIMS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE EMOTIONS IN FOOTBALL PROJECT?**

**ANSWER:** Coaches at all levels of the game from the professional peak through to the grassroots, are the key people when it comes to making the project tick. So, the immediate aim is to include the subject in coach education courses and, in this way, to promote discussion amongst coaches about the emotional

aspects of the game. An additional step would be to consider direct involvement, not only with players, but also with referees and, particularly at the grassroots level, with schools and community projects. This entails researching emotional topics in footballing contexts and providing material that MAs can inject into their coach education courses. The ultimate objective is to improve the self-awareness, emotional control and social interaction among Asian players in order to help individuals, the game of football and society in general.

**QUESTION: DO FRONT-LINE TECHNICIANS APPRECIATE A NEED FOR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN FOOTBALL MANAGEMENT?**

Very much so. And the topic is now being recognised as a valuable ingredient for successful coaching. Mikel Arteta, the current Arsenal FC coach and former assistant to Pep Guardiola at Manchester City, states: “players must learn to control their emotions. When we show frustration, we have to show it in the right way. Emotionally, we have to control situations better.”

Similarly, Fabio Capello, who coached AC Milan, Real Madrid, AS Roma, Juventus and the national teams of England and Russia before his spell in China PR, maintains: “As a coach, understanding emotions is very important because players look at you. They study and learn from what you say and how you react to situations”.

Gérard Houllier, talking about the qualities needed by today’s top footballers, always insisted: “A great player is one who masters, apart from the technical and tactical aspects, everything that’s at stake. A player



Johor Darul Ta'zim's goalkeeper Haziq Nadzli is all smiles after their AFC Champions League™ 2022 Group I match win against Ulsan Hyundai



The Hong Kong squad in jubilation after scoring

who can understand and control what's going on inside himself." And, switching to the credentials required in the coaching profession, one of his many inspirational messages was 'leadership is the transfer of emotions.'

Elsewhere in this issue, Colin Bell, head coach of the Korea Republic women's team reflects on the emotional impact of surrendering a two-goal lead. And, harking back to the last edition of the AFC Asian Cup™, Carlos Queiroz attributed IR Iran's semi-final defeat by Japan to "an emotional breakdown". Many readers may well have experienced situations where emotions had a big impact (good or bad) on the result of a match or competition. As the Chinese proverb reminds us, "control your emotions or they will control you"...

#### QUESTION: **IS AFC WORKING WITH ANY EXPERT SUPPORT IN DEVELOPING THIS PROJECT?**

The answer is strongly affirmative. For example, Mark Milton, the experienced educator and communicator who founded the Education4Peace organisation in Switzerland two decades ago; has been one of the prime movers in the specialised Working Group that has developed the AFC Emotions in Football project; and has been active in the pilot scheme in Japan, where Emotion has been injected as a component in JFA coach education courses.

A parallel pilot scheme was conducted in Qatar, where María Ruiz de Oña came into play. She spent many years working with the academy players at her home-town club in Spain, Athletic Club de Bilbao. The club has a singular, if not unique, tradition of only fielding players of Basque origin – a trait which makes development work at the academy at the heart of the club's culture.

She then took her expertise to Qatar, to work with coaches and players at the Aspire Academy, as leader of the Neurophysiology Department. To the average coach, the title might sound daunting. But her contribution might be clarified if we add that she is also president of the International Association of Psychology Applied to Football. In Qatar, her work focuses on creating a dynamic working environment, developing learning processes of coaches and managers, leading the learning process of players, responding to psychological needs and advising parents.

#### QUESTION: **IS AFC SUPPORTING THE PROJECT WITH MATERIALS SUCH AS RECOMMENDED PUBLICATIONS?**

Material support will be an ongoing part of the project, gathering information and feedback as the Emotions

component gathers momentum in coach education courses run by MAs. The starting point was Mark Milton's book Master of your Emotions published in Europe some years ago with support from UEFA.

During the pilot scheme in Japan, the JFA expressed an interest in producing a Japanese version of the book, customised to their own culture and needs. This was successfully done. Any other MAs interested in a similar move just need to contact the AFC to discuss this option in greater detail.

The bottom line is that the mastery of emotions is now recognised as an important element in football – and coaches at all levels of the game are prime movers in transmitting 'best practices' to players and promoting values which contribute not only to a healthy sport but also to a healthy society.

## INTERVIEW WITH MARK MILTON



4. In your view, who are the key people when it comes to implementing an Emotions-in-Football programme?

## MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

The remarkable fact is that, in the third year of the pandemic and the associated protocols, restrictions and consequences, momentum is being maintained on the AFC's three core projects.

The current balance sheet in the AFC Coaching Convention, for example, reveals that the number of endorsed Member Associations (MAs) has reached 39 and, with the Northern Mariana Islands joining Laos and Sri Lanka in the evaluation process for the 'B' level endorsement, Guam, Pakistan and Yemen now form a lonely trio of MAs who have not applied for membership.

Since our last issue, Kyrgyz Republic has been promoted to 'A' level recognition – bringing the total to 14 – while Mongolia, Nepal, Oman and Turkmenistan have lifted the tally on the 'B' rung of the ladder to 18. The list of ongoing evaluation procedures is not far short of 20, with the pandemic protocols evidently affecting schedules for coach education courses and the viability of visits by the panel members responsible for on-site assessments.

The latest news in the AFC Elite Youth Scheme features recognition of the JFA Girls' Academy in Fukushima to reinforce Japan's 3-star status. Similarly, Malaysia's 2-star membership has been strengthened by endorsement for the academy at Johor Darul Ta'zim FC, more commonly and simply known as JDT. There has also been AFC recognition for the Jordan FA's Al Hussein Sports City for Youth - Polo Stadium at the 2-Star level in June, 2022.



*The JFA Fukushima Girl's Academy is focused on nurturing the potential of students by providing good coaching for the lower and secondary school students*

At the 1-Star level, Hong Kong now boasts a second AFC-endorsed academy – corresponding to Lee Man FC based in Tseung Kwan O. There has also been AFC recognition for the BFF Girls' Academy in Bangladesh.

In a pandemic scenario where grassroots football has, globally, been seriously disrupted, the heartening news has been provided by notable progress within the framework of the AFC Grassroots Charter. The ratification of Qatar has allowed them to join Japan, Korea Republic



*Hong Kong FA youth players in training*

and Australia as Gold-standard members with the latter, incidentally, now engaging in a renewal process, having gained Gold status as far back as April 2018.

Endorsements for Bhutan, Guam and Malaysia have expanded the family of Silver-level members into double figures while successful applications by Kyrgyz Republic and Sri Lanka for Bronze status have lifted the number of endorsed MAs to 39. In other words, the ball is still rolling...

## AFC COACHING CONVENTION CATEGORIES

### PRO - Level



FOOTBALL AUSTRALIA



CHINESE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



JAPAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



JORDAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



KOREA FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



QATAR FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



UZBEKISTAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

### A - Level



BAHRAIN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



BANGLADESH FOOTBALL FEDERATION



BHUTAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



THE HONG KONG FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION LTD.



ALL INDIA FOOTBALL FEDERATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF INDONESIA



FOOTBALL FEDERATION ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN



KUWAIT FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



THE KYRGYZ FOOTBALL UNION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIA



PHILIPPINE FOOTBALL FEDERATION



SAUDI ARABIAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



VIETNAM FOOTBALL FEDERATION

### B - Level



AFGHANISTAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF BRUNEI DARUSSALAM



FOOTBALL FEDERATION OF CAMBODIA



CHINESE TAIPEI FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



DPR KOREA FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



IRAQI FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



LEBANESE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



MACAU FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF MALDIVES



MONGOLIAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



MYANMAR FOOTBALL FEDERATION



ALL NEPAL FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



OMAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



PALESTINE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE



TAJIKISTAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



FEDERAÇÃO FUTEBOL DE TIMOR-LESTE



FOOTBALL FEDERATION OF TURKMENISTAN

## AFC GRASSROOTS CHARTER CATEGORIES



### GOLD



FOOTBALL AUSTRALIA



JAPAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



KFA  
KOREA FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



QFA  
QATAR FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

### SILVER



BHUTAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



CHINESE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



GUAM FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



THE HONG KONG FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION LTD.



JORDAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIA



PHILIPPINE FOOTBALL FEDERATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE



TAJIKISTAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



UZBEKISTAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

### BRONZE



AFGHANISTAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



BAHRAIN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



BANGLADESH FOOTBALL FEDERATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF BRUNEI DARUSSALAM



CHINESE TAIPEI FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



ALL INDIA FOOTBALL FEDERATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF INDONESIA



IRAQI FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



KUWAIT FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



THE KYRGYZ FOOTBALL UNION



LAO FOOTBALL FEDERATION



LEBANESE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



MACAU FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF MALDIVES



MONGOLIAN FOOTBALL FEDERATION



MYANMAR FOOTBALL FEDERATION



ALL NEPAL FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



PALESTINE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL FEDERATION OF SRI LANKA



SYRIAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF THAILAND



FEDERAÇÃO FUTEBOL DE TIMOR-LESTE



FOOTBALL FEDERATION OF TURKMENISTAN



VIETNAM FOOTBALL FEDERATION

## AFC ELITE YOUTH SCHEME CATEGORIES

### ENDORSED MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

#### 3 - STAR



JAPAN FOOTBALL  
ASSOCIATION



KOREA FOOTBALL  
ASSOCIATION



QATAR FOOTBALL  
ASSOCIATION



VIETNAM FOOTBALL  
FEDERATION

#### 2 - STAR



ALL INDIA FOOTBALL  
FEDERATION



JORDAN FOOTBALL  
ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION  
OF MALAYSIA



TAJIKISTAN FOOTBALL  
FEDERATION



UZBEKISTAN FOOTBALL  
ASSOCIATION

#### 1 - STAR



BAHRAIN FOOTBALL  
ASSOCIATION



BANGLADESH FOOTBALL  
FEDERATION



BHUTAN FOOTBALL  
FEDERATION



THE HONG KONG FOOTBALL  
ASSOCIATION LTD.



THE KYRGYZ  
FOOTBALL UNION



LEBANESE FOOTBALL  
ASSOCIATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION  
OF MALDIVES



MYANMAR FOOTBALL  
FEDERATION



FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION  
OF SINGAPORE



THE FOOTBALL  
ASSOCIATION OF THAILAND

#### PROVISIONAL



MONGOLIAN FOOTBALL  
FEDERATION

## KEY DATES

	Jun 28	Jun 30	Jul 5		
Jun 2022	7th AFC Emotions in Football Working Group Meeting	AFC Future Football Forum	AFC Elite Futsal Coaching Instructors Online Meeting		
Jul 2022	Aug 9-10	Aug 10-28	Aug 15-21	Aug 16	Aug 17
	AFC Cup Zonal Semi-Final (Asean)	FIFA U20 Women's World Cup Costa Rica 2022	AFC Women's Club Championship 2022 - Pilot Tournament (East)	AFC Cup Zonal Final (South)	AFC Cup Zonal Final (Central)
Aug 2022	Aug 18-19	Aug 20 - 26	Aug 22	Aug 23-24	Aug 25
	AFC Champions League Round of 16 (East)	AFC Women's Club Championship 2022 - Pilot Tournament (West)	AFC Champions League Quarter Finals (East)	AFC Cup Zonal Final (Asean)	AFC Champions League Semi Finals (East)
Sep 2022	Sep 2	Sep 5-6	Sep 6-7	Sep 7	Sep 8
	AFC Futsal Fitness Instructors Webinar	AFC Cup Zonal Semi-Final (West)	AFC Cup Inter-Zonal Semi Finals (South & Central)	2nd AFC Coach Education Panel Meeting	2nd AFC Grassroots Panel Meeting AFC Women's Futsal Instructors Webinar
	Sep 10-18	Sep 13	Sep 15	Sep 21	Sep 27-Oct 8
	AFC U-20 Asian Cup 2023 Qualifiers	2nd AFC Youth Panel Meeting	AFC National U23 Coaches Online Session AFC Futsal Goalkeeping Instructors Webinar	7th AFC Elite Club Coaches Forum 2022	AFC Futsal Asian Cup Kuwait 2022 Finals
Oct 2022	Oct 1-9	Oct 4	Oct 5	Oct 6	Oct 11-30
	AFC U-17 Asian Cup 2023 Qualifiers	AFC Cup Zonal Final (West)	AFC Cup Inter-Zonal Final	AFC Coach Education Special Online Session	FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup India 2022
Nov 2022	Oct 12	Oct 13	Oct 20	Oct 22	
	5th AFC Technical Committee Meeting	AFC Elite Youth Special Online Session	AFC Grassroots Football Special Online Session	AFC Cup 2022 Final	
Dec 2022	Nov 3	Nov 21-Dec 18	Dec 6-10	Dec 13-15	
	AFC Women's Football Special Online Session	FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022	Beach Soccer Train the Trainers Instructors Course 2022	AFC Futsal and Beach Soccer Directors Online Workshop	

## AFC TECHNICAL REPORTS



ALL AFC TECHNICAL REPORTS CAN BE VIEWED AT:



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