



**AFC
CHAMPIONS
LEAGUE
ELITE™**

COMPETITION REGULATIONS

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE 2025/26





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DEFINITIONS

In these Competition Regulations, capitalised terms shall have the following meanings, unless the context specifically indicates otherwise:

Accreditation Device	Any device which: (i) is issued by, or at the instruction of, the AFC and/or the Host Association to persons conducting an Official Function in connection with the Competition and/or an Official Function at a Site; and (ii) permits its holder to access such Sites as well as any areas and zones needed to be accessed to perform the function, including (without limitation) any Accreditation Card, bib, wristband and any supplementary access devices (SAD).
ACL Elite	The AFC Champions League Elite.
AFC Club Competitions Ranking	Has the meaning given to it in the Entry Regulations.
AFC Competitions Committee	The Standing Committee of the AFC described in Article 44 of the AFC Statutes.
Association-Trained Player	A player who, between the start of the Domestic Sporting Season during which he turns fifteen (15) years of age and the end of the Domestic Sporting Season during which he turns twenty-one (21) years of age, irrespective of his nationality, has been registered with a Club or with one (1) or more Clubs affiliated to the same Member Association as that of his current Club for a period, continuous or not, of at least thirty-six (36) months.
Away Club	A Participating Club playing a Match in the Competition away from their home Stadium.
Champion	The Participating Club that wins the final Match of the Competition.
Club-Trained Player	A player who, between the start of the Domestic Sporting Season during which he turns fifteen (15) years of age and the end of the Domestic Sporting Season during which he turns twenty-one (21) years of age, irrespective of his nationality, has been registered with his current Club for a period, continuous or not, of at least thirty-six (36) months.
Competition	The AFC Champions League Elite 2025/26, which includes without limitation, all Matches, all activities on the Field of Play (other than Matches), opening ceremonies, presentation or closing ceremonies, press conferences or Official Functions connected therewith.
Domestic Sporting Season	A consecutive twelve (12)-month period fixed by a Member Association in line with the FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players during which its official competitions, such as the domestic top division league and domestic cup, occur.

East Region	The region comprising Member Associations and Participating Clubs from the ASEAN geographic zone and East geographic zone as identified in Article 7 of the AFC Statutes.
Entry Regulations	The AFC Club Competitions – Entry Regulations.
Extra Time	Two (2) equal periods of additional time which shall be played in accordance with these Regulations should there be no winner at the conclusion of normal playing time.
Field of Play	The area described in Law 1 of the Laws of the Game issued by the International Football Association Board (IFAB) and administered by FIFA.
Finals	The centralised final stage of the ACL Elite comprising a total of seven (7) Matches (i.e. four [4] quarter finals, two [2] semi finals and one [1] final Match of the Competition.
Financial Contribution	The payment(s) to be made to a Participating Club in accordance with Article 51 of these Regulations.
Homegrown Player	A player who is either an Association-Trained Player and/or a Club-Trained Player.
Host Association	A Member Association approved by the AFC to organise, host and stage Matches in the Competition. In the context of the Finals, this means the “Organising Association” as described in the OAA.
Host Club	A Participating Club which is approved by the AFC to organise, host and stage Matches in the Competition in collaboration with the respective Host Association.
International Competition	An international football competition organised by the AFC in conjunction with other continental football confederations and/or by FIFA in conjunction with other continental football confederations.
Knockout Stage	The third stage of the Competition comprising the round of 16 and Finals held in accordance with these Regulations.
League	A professional league and/or amateur league which consists of a combination of Clubs within the territory of a Football Association and which is subordinate to and under the authority of that Football Association.
League Stage	The second stage of the Competition held in accordance with these Regulations.
Manual	The AFC Competition Operations Manual which sets out the operational responsibilities of the relevant stakeholders in relation to the organising, hosting and staging of Matches and Competitions.
Neutral Venue	Any Stadium utilised for a Match which is not the regular home Stadium or Venue utilised by the Participating Club designated as the Host Club, unless expressly authorised by the AFC. The designation of a Stadium as a Neutral Venue must be expressly authorised by the AFC in accordance with these Regulations.

OAA	Organising Association Agreement concluded between the AFC and the Host Association for the organisation, hosting, and staging the Finals of this Competition.
Official Team Delegation	The delegation of a Participating Club which is registered on AFCAS for each Match of the relevant stage of the Competition as provided for in these Regulations.
Participating Club	A Club which is approved by the AFC to participate in the Competition.
Preliminary Stage	The first stage of the Competition held in accordance with these Regulations.
Regulations	These Competition Regulations.
West Region	The region comprising Member Associations and Participating Clubs from the West geographic zone, South geographic zone and Central geographic zone as identified in Article 7 of the AFC Statutes.

For the purposes of these Regulations, and provided the context so permits:

- (a) the singular shall include the plural and vice-versa;
- (b) the feminine gender shall include the masculine and vice-versa;
- (c) references to natural persons shall include any legal person or corporation;
- (d) references to the AFC shall include its successors and permitted assigns, and where the context requires, the AFC Committees;
- (e) references to the AFC Commercial Rights Partner or Commercial Affiliates shall include where advised by the AFC, their successors and permitted assigns;
- (f) all defined terms, unless otherwise stated herein shall bear the same meaning as ascribed in the AFC Statutes and the Manual, unless the context indicates otherwise; and
- (g) references to Articles shall mean the Articles of these Regulations, unless expressly stated otherwise.

SECTION 1: GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE 2025/26

- 1.1. The AFC stages the ACL Elite annually for Participating Clubs.
- 1.2. These Regulations govern the rights, duties, and responsibilities of the AFC, the Participating Clubs (as well as their Member Associations and Leagues), Host Associations, Participating Players and Participating Officials taking part in the Competition.
- 1.3. These Regulations and all related directives, decisions, guidelines, and circulars issued by the AFC shall be binding upon all parties participating and involved in the preparation, organisation, and hosting of Matches in the Competition. Further details in relation to various aspects of the Competition may be communicated to the Participating Clubs (through their affiliated Member Associations) via circular letters. In the event of any discrepancy between the circular letters and these Regulations, the circular letters shall prevail to the extent of the inconsistency.
- 1.4. The Manual forms an integral part of and shall be read in conjunction with these Regulations. The Manual shall be binding upon all parties participating and involved in the preparation, organisation, and hosting of Matches in the Competition. Failure to adhere to any matter set out in the Manual may lead to the imposition of sanctions as set out in the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code and/or circular letters (where relevant). In the event of any discrepancy between these Regulations and the Manual, these Regulations shall prevail to the extent of the inconsistency.
- 1.5. Any rights and Proprietary Interests associated with the Competition that are not granted by these Regulations and/or specific agreements to any Member Association and/or any Participating Club shall vest in the AFC.
- 1.6. Any reference to the AFC Statutes and the AFC and FIFA regulations refer to those valid at the time of application.

2. THE ASIAN FOOTBALL CONFEDERATION

- 2.1. The AFC Competitions Committee shall be responsible for overseeing the organisation of the Competition in accordance with the AFC Statutes. The AFC General Secretariat shall carry out the necessary administrative work in support of the AFC Competitions Committee.
- 2.2. The responsibilities of the AFC General Secretariat shall include, but are not limited to:
 - 2.2.1. supervising general preparations and deciding on the Competition format, the draws, and the entries to the Competition;
 - 2.2.2. determining the Match Schedule (cf. Article 11);

- 2.2.3. selecting Stadiums for the Competition after consultation with the Host Clubs and Host Associations (*cf.* Article 14);
- 2.2.4. appointing Match Officials and any other AFC Delegation for each Match;
- 2.2.5. choosing and/or approving the official football and stipulated technical material;
- 2.2.6. approving the choice of WADA-accredited laboratories that will carry out doping analyses (*cf.* Article 47);
- 2.2.7. reporting cases where appropriate to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee (*cf.* Article 56);
- 2.2.8. providing insurance coverage for the AFC Delegation appointed to any Match from the time of their departure from their home Member Association to their departure from the Venue (*cf.* Article 48); and
- 2.2.9. dealing with any other aspect of the Competition that is not the responsibility of any other body pursuant to these Regulations or the AFC Statutes (*cf.* Article 67).
- 2.3. All decisions made by the AFC Competitions Committee and/or AFC General Secretariat in relation to the Competition are final and binding and not appealable.
- 2.4. All decisions made by the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee in relation to the Competition are subject to the operation of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.
- 2.5. All decisions made by the AFC Entry Control Body in relation to the Competition are subject to the operation of the Procedural Rules Governing the AFC Entry Control Body.

3. PARTICIPATING CLUBS AND MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

- 3.1. The principal obligations and responsibilities of each Participating Club and its Member Association are stipulated in the Participating Team Agreement (PTA), these Regulations, the Manual, the AFC Statutes, and all other AFC regulations, directives, guidelines and circulars.
 - 3.1.1. Each Participating Club that has qualified for the Competition must submit a PTA.
 - 3.1.2. The PTA and other such documents as requested by the AFC in relation to the PTA shall be completed and submitted to the AFC via AFCAS in accordance with the deadline provided by the AFC.
 - 3.1.3. Failure to submit a validly completed PTA to the AFC by the deadline shall result in the non-participation of the relevant Participating Club.

- 3.2. Each Participating Club shall ensure as a condition of its participation in the Competition that every member of its Official Team Delegation for each Match is aware of and agrees to comply with the PTA.
- 3.3. Each Participating Club shall undertake to:
 - 3.3.1. observe all obligations set out in the PTA, these Regulations, the Manual, the AFC Statutes, and all other AFC regulations, directives, guidelines and circulars, and applicable national and supra-national laws;
 - 3.3.2. comply with the Laws of the Game;
 - 3.3.3. accept that all the administrative, disciplinary and refereeing matters connected with the Competition shall be settled by the AFC in compliance with these Regulations;
 - 3.3.4. field its strongest team throughout the Competition;
 - 3.3.5. observe the principles of fair play;
 - 3.3.6. ensure the good conduct of its Official Team Delegation and of any person carrying out duties on its behalf throughout the Competition, which includes but is not limited to their arrival on the territory of any Host Association until their departure;
 - 3.3.7. as Host Club, make the appropriate arrangements for the staging of Matches in conjunction with its Member Association and the AFC General Secretariat in accordance with these Regulations and any instructions from the AFC;
 - 3.3.8. accept all arrangements made by any Host Club and/or Host Association (as appropriate) in agreement with the AFC;
 - 3.3.9. ensure that its Participating Players and Participating Officials attend and participate in all official activities and events, including without limitation any team arrival meeting, match coordination meeting, press conference, and other media and marketing activities in accordance with the instructions issued by the AFC;
 - 3.3.9.1. failure to attend and/or fully participate in any official activity or event shall result in the Participating Club being fined at least USD10,000; and
 - 3.3.9.2. the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may issue further sanctions at its discretion.
 - 3.3.10. provide to the AFC, free of charge, prior to the Competition, any photographs, audio/visual materials and/or information regarding the Participating Club, Participating Players and/or Participating Officials including without limitation statistics and historical information and any further information as requested by the AFC;

- 3.3.11. link the official URL for the Competition on its official website; and
- 3.3.12. not establish any digital, media or social media platform in connection with the Competition without the involvement and express approval of the AFC.
- 3.4. Each Participating Club and its Member Association shall, at their own expense, be solely responsible throughout the Competition for:
 - 3.4.1. the procurement of insurance coverage for:
 - 3.4.1.1. its Official Team Delegation which shall include without limitation hospital and surgical insurance, travel insurance, and sports equipment insurance for all Matches; and
 - 3.4.1.2. all risks in connection with staging and organising Matches, including but not limited to public liability insurance. The AFC shall be expressly identified as a named insured party in all such insurance policies;
 - 3.4.2. all other necessary insurance policies, which must provide an appropriate guaranteed sum for injury and damage to persons, objects, and property, and correspond with the specific circumstances of the Participating Club. Such policies must cover all risks connected with the organising, hosting, and staging of Matches in the Competition, exempt the AFC from all claims and liabilities, and name the AFC as a co-insured. The AFC must be notified of all insurance policies and may request copies of any and all policies at its discretion;
 - 3.4.3. payment of incidental expenses and for any costs incurred by its Official Team Delegation (*cf.* Article 48);
 - 3.4.4. payment of any costs of extending the stay of any member of its Official Team Delegation in any Host Association (*cf.* Article 48);
 - 3.4.5. obtaining visas to enter the territory of any Host Association. This includes all costs related to the visa application process;
 - 3.4.6. payment of all taxes, fees, duties and any other costs related to the importation and/or exportation of equipment, merchandise and/or goods to be used for the Competition; and
 - 3.4.7. guaranteeing safety and security at its Stadium (*cf.* Articles 14 and 44).

- 3.5. Each Participating Club and/or its Member Association shall indemnify, defend, and hold the AFC and all of its officers, directors, employees, representatives, agents, subsidiaries, local organising committees and all other auxiliary persons free and harmless against any and all liabilities, obligations, losses, damages, penalties, claims, actions, fines, and expenses (including reasonable legal expenses) of whatsoever kind or nature resulting from, arising out of, or attributable to, any non-compliance with these Regulations by the Participating Club and/or its Member Association, its Official Team Delegation, its affiliates and any third-parties contracted to the Participating Club and/or its Member Association.
- 3.6. The Member Association of the Host Club is responsible for nominating a local general coordinator, a local media officer and a local safety and security officer for each Match that is played within its territory and shall submit the nomination to the AFC for approval (together with the Venue information) in accordance with the deadline(s) notified by the AFC. Should a Match be played at a Neutral Venue in another Member Association, the Member Association of the Host Club shall still be held accountable for the relevant nomination, and this must be done in collaboration with the Host Association.
- 3.7. Each Participating Club shall arrive at the Venue for an away Match at least two (2) days before the Match and depart from the Venue no later than one (1) day after the Match.
 - 3.7.1. Should an Away Club wish to arrive at the Venue only one (1) day before the relevant Match, it shall submit a request via an official letter to the AFC with valid reasons and arrival flight itinerary details at least seven (7) days prior to the Match for the AFC's approval (to be accepted at its sole discretion).
 - 3.7.2. Should the AFC accept such a request, the late arrival of the relevant Club shall not interrupt the timing of Official Functions and/or the participation of the relevant Participating Club in Official Functions.
 - 3.7.3. The requirements and timings set out in Article 3.7 shall also apply to any Host Club which is hosting a home Match at a Neutral Venue.
 - 3.7.4. Participating Clubs shall not play in any non-official matches when travelling to and from the Venue of an away Match.
- 3.8. It is acknowledged that one or more Participating Clubs may qualify directly for one or more International Competitions as a result of their performance in the Competition. Where applicable, each such Participating Club undertakes to participate in the relevant International Competition(s).
- 3.9. Participating Clubs are not authorised to represent the AFC or the Competition without the prior written approval of the AFC.
- 3.10. All Participating Players and Participating Officials are encouraged to attend the AFC Annual Awards if they are nominated for an award.

- 3.11. Each Participating Club and its Member Association shall ensure that any decision made by the AFC relating to its duties and responsibilities is enforced immediately.

Finals

- 3.12. The principal obligations and responsibilities of the Host Association will be stipulated in the relevant Organising Association Agreement, as well as in these Regulations, the Manual, the AFC Statutes and all other applicable AFC regulations, directives, guidelines, and circulars.

4. ENTRY

- 4.1. Entry to the Competition is governed by the Entry Regulations. To be eligible to participate in the Competition, Clubs must meet the requirements set out in the Entry Regulations.
- 4.2. All decisions regarding entry to the Competition are subject to the provisions set out in the Entry Regulations and the jurisdiction of the AFC Entry Control Body as set out in the Procedural Rules Governing the AFC Entry Control Body.
- 4.3. Eligible Clubs must complete a PTA and submit it to the AFC in accordance with Article 3 to confirm their entry into the Competition.
- 4.3.1. The name and logo of a Participating Club shall be the same as the popular name and logo submitted to the AFC General Secretariat for the purposes of complying with the club licensing criteria set out in the Entry Regulations.
- 4.3.2. Subject to Article 4.3.3, the name and logo of a Participating Club shall not refer to the name and/or logo of any third-party entity, regardless of whether that third-party entity is a commercial partner or sponsor of the Participating Club.
- 4.3.3. The AFC General Secretariat may grant an exception to the restriction(s) in Article 4.3.2 in the following circumstances:
- 4.3.3.1. the name/logo of any Participating Club that refers to any third-party entity is a pre-existing name/logo which has been utilised on a long-term basis by the Participating Club and either the third-party entity was directly involved in the creation of the Participating Club (by financial or other means) or the third-party entity holds a majority of the shareholders' voting rights in the Participating Club; and/or
- 4.3.3.2. the Participating Club has previously competed in an AFC competition utilising the name/logo.

The burden of proof shall rest on the relevant Participating Club to prove its compliance with the provision(s) of Article 4.3.3 and the AFC shall be entitled, at its discretion, to request information from the relevant Participating Club in this regard. The AFC shall decide on any exceptions at its sole discretion, and any such decisions shall be final and binding and not appealable.

- 4.4. Participating Clubs are not permitted to change their name for the Competition after the first Match in the Competition has been played.

5. WITHDRAWAL FROM THE COMPETITION

- 5.1. All Participating Clubs undertake that they shall play all their Matches in the Competition until elimination.
- 5.2. Without limitation, any Participating Club that (for any reason):
- 5.2.1. informs the AFC in writing that it does not intend to or is unable to report to a Venue and/or for a Match;
 - 5.2.2. fails to report to a Venue and/or for a Match;
 - 5.2.3. refuses or fails to continue a Match;
 - 5.2.4. leaves the Stadium prior to the completion of a Match;
 - 5.2.5. is excluded, suspended or banned by any competent body from participating in the Competition (or any stage of the Competition) at any time after the draw of the Competition (or stage, as appropriate); or
 - 5.2.6. is excluded, suspended or banned by any competent body from participating in any Match in the Competition at any time after the relevant Match has been scheduled,
- shall be considered to have withdrawn from the Competition.
- 5.3. Subject to Articles 5.5 to 5.7, the AFC Competitions Committee shall be responsible for making the necessary decisions where a Participating Club withdraws from the Competition, whether before or after commencement of the Competition (as applicable), and shall be entitled to take any action it considers appropriate in such circumstances, including without limitation regarding whether or not to change the technical regulations (*cf.* Section 4) and/or the competition system (*cf.* Article 6) and, where applicable, the means of effecting such change(s).
- 5.4. The AFC Competitions Committee shall be responsible for determining events of Force Majeure in connection with any withdrawal and shall, subject to Articles 5.5 to 5.7, be entitled to take any action it considers appropriate in such circumstances. Any Participating Club that wishes to put forward a case of Force Majeure for the consideration of the AFC Competitions Committee must do so in writing (with supporting evidence) no later than thirty (30) days after the date of its withdrawal. The AFC General Secretariat may put forward cases of Force Majeure for the consideration of the AFC Competitions Committee at its discretion at any time (provided that the case has not been referred to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee).

- 5.5. In the event that a Participating Club withdraws from the Competition, whether before or after commencement of the Competition (as applicable), the Competition shall continue with the remaining Participating Clubs and Matches without any replacement.

For the avoidance of doubt, this Article 5.5 shall apply in all instances and is applicable even in cases of Force Majeure determined by the AFC Competitions Committee.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the AFC General Secretariat may, at its discretion, put forward a request to replace the relevant Participating Club and, where applicable, the means of effecting such replacement, for the consideration of the AFC Competitions Committee, in which case the AFC Competitions Committee shall be entitled to take a decision on the matter.

- 5.6. Any Participating Club that withdraws from the Competition after it has commenced shall have all its Matches cancelled and considered null and void. **No yellow cards, red cards**, points and goals in those Matches shall be taken into consideration when determining the final rankings in a league pursuant to Articles 8.3 **or** 8.4.

For the avoidance of doubt, this Article 5.6 shall apply in all instances and is applicable even in cases of Force Majeure determined by the AFC Competitions Committee.

- 5.7. Where any Participating Club fails to comply with Article 5.1 and withdraws from the Competition at any stage, the case shall be referred to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee.

In this regard, any Participating Club that withdraws from the Competition:

- 5.7.1. before it has commenced, shall be fined:

- 5.7.1.1. at least USD10,000 if its withdrawal occurred thirty (30) days or more before its first Match in the Competition; or
- 5.7.1.2. at least USD20,000 if its withdrawal occurred less than thirty (30) days before its first Match in the Competition.

- 5.7.2. after it has commenced, shall be fined:

- 5.7.2.1. at least USD30,000 if its withdrawal occurred after the commencement of the Preliminary Stage; or
- 5.7.2.2. at least USD50,000 if its withdrawal occurred after the commencement of the League Stage; or
- 5.7.2.3. at least USD100,000 if its withdrawal occurred after the commencement of the Knockout Stage.

- 5.7.3 may be disqualified from participating in one (1) or more future seasons of the AFC club competitions; and
- 5.7.4 where relevant, may be disqualified from participating in any tournament organised under Article 3.8, if qualification has been attained.

In addition, in all instances, the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee shall order the relevant Participating Club to return to the AFC any subsidy that has been paid in support of its participation in the Competition (or, if not yet paid, to forfeit its right to that subsidy) and to pay compensation for any and all damages or losses suffered by, where applicable, the other Participating Clubs, the AFC, the AFC Commercial Rights Partner, Commercial Affiliates and the Host Associations. The amount of compensation shall be determined by the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee.

This Article 5.7 is not applicable in cases of Force Majeure determined by the AFC Competitions Committee, but shall apply in all other instances.

- 5.8. All decisions of the AFC Competitions Committee under Articles 5.3 to 5.5 shall be final and binding and not appealable.

SECTION 2 : COMPETITION SYSTEM AND MATCH SCHEDULE

6. COMPETITION SYSTEM

- 6.1. The Competition shall consist of three (3) stages:
 - 6.1.1. the Preliminary Stage;
 - 6.1.2. the League Stage; and
 - 6.1.3. the Knockout Stage.
- 6.2. Participating Clubs shall be divided into two (2) regions in accordance with the geographic zones identified in the AFC Statutes as follows:
 - 6.2.1. Participating Clubs from the West, South and Central zones shall form the West Region;
 - 6.2.2. Participating Clubs from the East and ASEAN zones shall form the East Region;
 - 6.2.3. Participating Clubs shall play against other Participating Clubs within the same region except for the Finals; and
 - 6.2.4. the AFC General Secretariat may decide to exceptionally depart from this system, taking into account sporting, geographic, security and economic factors. The Entry Regulations may provide further information.
- 6.3. The Entry Regulations set out the principles to determine the number of slots allocated to the Clubs of eligible Member Associations in the Preliminary Stage and League Stage in accordance with the AFC Club Competitions Ranking. The AFC Competitions Committee shall decide upon the format of the competition system.
- 6.4. Depending on the number of entries, or in the case of withdrawal or suspension of any Participating Clubs, the AFC Competitions Committee may change the competition system and/or technical rules. Such decisions are final and binding and not appealable.

7. PRELIMINARY STAGE

- 7.1. The Preliminary Stage shall consist of a maximum of three (3) rounds, with each round consisting of Participating Clubs tied in pairings to be played in a single-leg knockout format. The pairings will be determined by the AFC General Secretariat depending on the number of Participating Clubs and in accordance with the following principles:
 - 7.1.1. All Participating Clubs shall be seeded in accordance with the AFC Club Competitions Ranking applied to determine the slot allocation for the Competition and in accordance with the principles set out in the Entry Regulations;

- 7.1.2. Participating Clubs with a higher seed shall play at a later round of the Preliminary Stage and be given priority in the event that any bye(s) is available due to the number of Participating Clubs;
- 7.1.3. For each round, Participating Clubs with a higher seed shall be given priority to be paired against Participating Clubs with the lowest possible seed in the relevant round. Notwithstanding the above, Participating Clubs from the same Member Association shall not be paired against each other, except in cases where it is unavoidable (e.g. cases where all Participating Clubs in one [1] round are from the same Member Association); and
- 7.1.4. The Participating Club with the higher seed shall host each Match, unless otherwise determined by the AFC General Secretariat at its sole discretion.
- 7.2. For each round of the Preliminary Stage, Participating Clubs shall play one (1) Match each in accordance with the Match Schedule.
- 7.3. At the conclusion of each round of the Preliminary Stage:
 - 7.3.1. the winner of each pairing shall qualify for the next round of the Preliminary Stage. If it is the final round of the Preliminary Stage, the winner of each pairing shall qualify for the League Stage; and
 - 7.3.2. the losing Participating Club of each pairing shall be eliminated from the Competition. Eliminated Participating Clubs shall enter the AFC Champions League Two at the Group Stage in accordance with the Entry Regulations.

8. LEAGUE STAGE

- 8.1 The League Stage shall consist of twenty-four (24) Participating Clubs, drawn into two (2) leagues of twelve (12) Participating Clubs each, with each league played in a league format as described in Article 8.2.
 - 8.1.1. One (1) league shall contain Participating Clubs from the West Region.
 - 8.1.2. One (1) league shall contain Participating Clubs from the East Region.
- 8.2. Participating Clubs shall play four (4) home and four (4) away Matches against eight (8) different Participating Clubs within their respective league in accordance with the Match Schedule. Participating Clubs from the same Member Association shall not play against each other.
- 8.3. **Subject to Article 8.4**, the ranking in each league shall be determined in accordance with Article 1 of the Manual and in descending order as follows:
 - 8.3.1. higher number of points obtained in all league Matches;

- 8.3.2. superior goal difference from all league Matches;
 - 8.3.3. higher number of goals scored in all league Matches;
 - 8.3.4. higher number of wins in all league Matches;
 - 8.3.5. Penalties if only two (2) Participating Clubs still have an equal ranking and have played their last league Match against each other;
 - 8.3.6. the lower score calculated according to the number of yellow and red cards received in the league Matches (Appendix 1 of the Manual); or
 - 8.3.7. the drawing of lots.
- 8.4. In the event there is an unequal number of matches played between the Participating Clubs in the same league for any reason after the completion of the League Stage, then Article 8.3 shall not apply, and the following criteria shall apply to determine the ranking in the relevant league (in descending order):
- 8.4.1. higher number of points obtained per Match (i.e. total points divided by number of matches played);
 - 8.4.2. superior goal difference per Match (i.e. goal difference divided by number of matches played);
 - 8.4.3. higher number of goals scored per Match (i.e. total goals divided by number of matches played);
 - 8.4.4. Match win rate (i.e. total number of wins divided by number of matches played);
 - 8.4.5. lower score calculated according to the number of yellow and red cards received per Match (i.e. total score calculated pursuant to Appendix 1 of the Manual divided by number of matches played); and
 - 8.4.6. the drawing of lots.
- The calculations made under Articles 8.4.1 to 8.4.5 shall be rounded up or down, as appropriate, to the third decimal point (e.g. 1.1234 becomes 1.123 and 1.1235 becomes 1.124).
- 8.5. At the conclusion of the League Stage:
- 8.5.1. the top eight (8) Participating Clubs in each league shall qualify for the Knockout Stage; and
 - 8.5.2. all other Participating Clubs shall be eliminated from the Competition.

9. KNOCKOUT STAGE

- 9.1. The Knockout Stage shall consist of the round of 16 (played in a home and away knockout format) and the Finals (played in a centralised knockout format).
- 9.2. The sixteen (16) Participating Clubs that qualify from the League Stage shall play in the round of 16 against other Participating Clubs within the same region and the pairings of these Matches shall be determined based on the League Stage rankings as follows:

R16-1: West Region 1st-ranked vs West Region 8th-ranked
R16-2: West Region 2nd-ranked vs West Region 7th-ranked
R16-3: West Region 3rd-ranked vs West Region 6th-ranked
R16-4: West Region 4th-ranked vs West Region 5th-ranked
R16-5: East Region 1st-ranked vs East Region 8th-ranked
R16-6: East Region 2nd-ranked vs East Region 7th-ranked
R16-7: East Region 3rd-ranked vs East Region 6th-ranked
R16-8: East Region 4th-ranked vs East Region 5th-ranked

Subject to Article 11, the first leg of each pairing shall be hosted by the lower-ranked Participating Club while the second leg shall be hosted by the higher-ranked Participating Club, in principle.

For the avoidance of doubt, the above list does not necessarily represent the chronological order in which the matches will be played.

Finals

- 9.3. The eight (8) winners of the round of 16 shall play in the quarter finals against other Participating Clubs from a different region (cross-regional pairings) and the pairings of these Matches shall be determined by a draw.
 - 9.3.1. The highest-ranked Participating Club of the League Stage of each region shall be the highest-seeded Participating Club from the region for the draw. Between the highest-seeded Participating Clubs of each region, the Participating Club with a higher-rank in its region shall be the highest-seeded Participating Club among all Participating Clubs for the Draw (e.g., if West Region 1st-ranked and East Region 2nd-ranked – West Region 1st-ranked is highest-seed regardless of no. of points, goals etc.). If the rank between the highest-seeded Participating Clubs of each region is equal (e.g., if West Region 1st-ranked and East Region 1st-ranked), the Participating Club with a better sporting result (in accordance with Article 8.3 and/or 8.4, as applicable) shall be the highest-seeded Participating Club among all Participating Clubs for the draw.

- 9.3.2. The highest-seeded Participating Clubs of each region shall only play each other in the Final, should they advance to that stage. Depending on the region of the highest-seeded Participating Club among all Participating Clubs for the draw, the quarter finals shall be played as below:

If the highest-seeded Participating Club is from the West:

- QF1: West Region 1st-ranked vs Participating Club of East Region
 QF2: Participating Club of West Region vs Participating Club of East Region
 QF3: East Region 1st-ranked vs Participating Club of West Region
 QF4: Participating Club of East Region vs Participating Club of West Region

If the highest-seeded Participating Club is from the East:

- QF1: East Region 1st-ranked vs Participating Club from West Region
 QF2: Participating Club of East Region vs Participating Club of West Region
 QF3: West Region 1st-ranked vs Participating Club of East Region
 QF4: Participating Club of West Region vs Participating Club of East Region

- 9.4. The four (4) winners of the quarter finals shall play in the semi finals as follows:

- SF1: Winner QF1 vs Winner QF2
 SF2: Winner QF3 vs Winner QF4

For the avoidance of doubt, the above list does not necessarily represent the chronological order in which the matches will be played.

- 9.5. The two (2) winners of the semi finals shall play in the final Match of the Competition as follows:

Final Match: Winner SF1 vs Winner SF2

10. EXTRA TIME AND PENALTIES

- 10.1. If no winner is determined at the end of normal playing time in any Match in the Preliminary Stage, the second Match of any pairing of the round 16 or any Match in the Finals, Extra Time comprising two (2) periods of fifteen (15) minutes each shall be played.
- 10.2. Extra Time shall be played after an interval of five (5) minutes at the end of normal playing time. A short drink break (which should not exceed one [1] minute) is permitted at the interval of half-time in Extra Time.
- 10.3. If no winner is determined at the end of Extra Time, Penalties shall be taken in accordance with the Laws of the Game and the Manual.

11. MATCH SCHEDULE

- 11.1. All Matches shall be played in accordance with the AFC Competitions Calendar. The dates are final and binding and not appealable.
- 11.2. The Match Schedule for the Preliminary Stage shall be determined following the confirmation of the Participating Clubs. The Host Clubs shall propose the kick-off times in writing to the AFC General Secretariat for approval by the deadline set by the AFC General Secretariat. The AFC General Secretariat reserves the right to change the proposed kick-off times in consultation with the Participating Clubs.
- 11.3. The Match Schedule for the League Stage and Knockout Stage shall be determined following the official draws for the relevant stages of the Competition. The date, format and draw mechanism of the official draws shall be determined by the AFC General Secretariat.
 - 11.3.1. Following the relevant draws, the AFC General Secretariat shall determine the Match Schedule taking into consideration sporting, organisational (including safety and security), marketing and broadcasting matters, in accordance with the principles set by the AFC Competitions Committee.
- 11.4. The AFC General Secretariat shall have the sole discretion to amend the Match Schedule at any time and for any reason in accordance with the principles set by the AFC Competitions Committee.

12. CANCELLATION OF MATCHES

- 12.1. For any Match which is cancelled as a result of Force Majeure, the AFC Competitions Committee shall decide on the matter at its sole discretion and take whatever action deemed necessary.
 - 12.1.1. Decisions made pursuant to Article 12.1 are final and binding and not appealable.
- 12.2. Any Match which is cancelled, except in cases of Force Majeure recognised by the AFC Competitions Committee, may lead to the imposition of sanctions by the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee against the relevant party that caused the cancellation in accordance with the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.
- 12.3. If a Match cannot commence for any reason, the procedure described in Article 6 of the Manual shall be followed.

13. ABANDONMENT OF MATCHES

- 13.1. For any Match which is abandoned as a result of Force Majeure, the AFC Competitions Committee shall decide on the matter at its sole discretion and take whatever action is deemed necessary.
 - 13.1.1. Decisions made pursuant to Article 13.1 are final and binding and not appealable.
- 13.2. Any Match which is abandoned, except in cases of Force Majeure recognised by the AFC Competitions Committee, may lead to the imposition of sanctions by the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee against the relevant party that caused the abandonment in accordance with the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.
- 13.3. If a Match is stopped by the referee for any reason, the procedure described in Article 7 of the Manual shall be followed.

SECTION 3 : STADIUMS AND OFFICIAL TRAINING SITES

14. STADIUMS

Preliminary Stage, League Stage and Round of 16

- 14.1. The Participating Clubs shall ensure that their home Matches are played in Stadiums which meet the requirements defined in the AFC Stadium Regulations and all other applicable AFC regulations. The AFC General Secretariat may carry out inspections at any time before and during the Competition to check whether the requirements are met. All costs related to any such inspection shall be borne by the relevant Participating Club.
 - 14.1.1. Each Participating Club shall, by no later than the deadline set by the AFC General Secretariat, nominate the Stadium to be utilised for all its home Matches when entering the Competition. The Stadium nominated shall be the normal home stadium of the Participating Club for matches in its League. In case the normal home stadium of the Participating Club does not meet the requirements set out in Article 14.1, the Participating Club may exceptionally nominate a Neutral Venue located within the territory of its Member Association or another Member Association.
- 14.2. Unless an exception is granted by the AFC General Secretariat at its sole discretion, each Participating Club must play all its home Matches in the one and only Stadium approved by the AFC General Secretariat throughout the Competition. Any request for an exception shall be submitted to the AFC General Secretariat in writing at least thirty (30) days prior to the relevant Match.
- 14.3. The AFC General Secretariat may reject the nomination of any Stadium and take any decision under this Article 14.3 at its sole discretion. If the AFC General Secretariat deems, for whatever reason, that a Stadium is unfit to stage any Match(es), the relevant Participating Club shall propose an alternative Stadium. Should the Participating Club not propose an acceptable alternative Stadium by the deadline set by the AFC General Secretariat, the AFC General Secretariat may select a Neutral Venue to stage the Match(es).
 - 14.3.1. In all cases, the Participating Club concerned shall remain responsible as the Host Club for all arrangements for the staging of its home Match(es), including but not limited to all costs as set out in these Regulations.
 - 14.3.2. Should the Participating Club refuse to participate in the Match(es) at the Neutral Venue selected by the AFC General Secretariat, it shall be considered to have withdrawn from the Competition and be subject to Article 5.
- 14.4. For any Match played at a Neutral Venue, the Host Club must organise and stage the Match in accordance with these Regulations, the Manual and any instructions from the AFC, in cooperation with the Host Association and the local authorities.

- 14.5. Host Clubs shall ensure that no football matches and/or any other events or activities are held at any Stadium during the period starting at least two (2) days prior to each Match until one (1) day after the Match, unless prior written permission has been obtained from the AFC General Secretariat. The Stadium shall be delivered to the AFC for its exclusive use during this period.
- 14.5.1. A Host Club that fails to comply with Article 14.5 shall be fined at least USD10,000.
- 14.5.2. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

Finals

- 14.6. The Host Association shall ensure that all Matches of the Finals are played in Stadiums which meet the requirements defined in the AFC Stadium Regulations and any other applicable AFC regulations. The AFC General Secretariat may carry out stadium inspections at any time before and during the Competition to check whether the requirements are met. All costs related to any such inspection shall be borne by the Host Association.
- 14.7. The relevant Host Association shall ensure that no football matches and/or any other events or activities are held in any Stadium during the period starting at least fourteen (14) days prior to the first Match of the Finals until two (2) days after the completion of the last Match in the Stadium in the Finals unless prior written permission has been obtained from the AFC.
- 14.8. Unless otherwise specified or directed by the AFC, each Stadium shall be made available to the AFC for its exclusive use during the period starting at least ten (10) days prior to the first Match of the Finals until two (2) days after the last Match in the Stadium in the Finals.
- 14.9. A Host Association that fails to comply with Articles 14.7 or 14.8 shall be:
- 14.9.1. fined at least USD10,000; and
- 14.9.2. the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

15. FIELD OF PLAY

- 15.1. If a Host Club considers the Field of Play unfit for a Match, it shall immediately inform the AFC, the Away Club and the Match Officials before their departure to the Venue.
- 15.1.1. A Participating Club that fails to comply with Article 15.1 shall be liable for all costs incurred for the travel, board and lodging expenses of the parties involved.

- 15.2. The AFC Match Commissioner and Match Officials will inspect each Stadium prior to the Match and ensure that all arrangements are in accordance with the Laws of the Game. If the arrangements and the conditions of the Field of Play including the dimension of the goal and field are not in accordance with the Laws of the Game, the AFC Match Commissioner shall issue instructions to the Host Club to ensure rectification.
- 15.2.1. If, in the opinion of the referee, the instructions issued pursuant to Article 15.2 are not complied with by the start of the Match, the Host Club shall forfeit the Match in accordance with the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.

16. OFFICIAL TRAINING SITES

Preliminary Stage, League Stage and Round of 16

- 16.1. Each Participating Club shall nominate the Official Training Sites to be utilised for its home Matches when entering the Competition. The AFC General Secretariat makes the final decision to approve any Official Training Site and may carry out inspections at any time before and during the Competition to check whether the requirements are met. All costs related to the inspection shall be borne by the relevant Participating Club.
- 16.1.1. The AFC reserves the right to refuse the nomination of an Official Training Site and require a Participating Club to nominate an alternative Official Training Site.
- 16.1.2. Official Training Sites shall be situated no more than thirty (30) minutes or thirty (30) kilometres away from the Accommodation of the Away Club, unless otherwise approved by the AFC.
- 16.2. Official Training Sites shall contain a fully equipped training field prepared to match condition.
- 16.2.1. A Host Club that fails to comply with Article 16.2 shall be fined at least USD10,000.
- 16.2.2. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.
- 16.3. Official Training Sites shall be made available at least two (2) days prior to each Match until the commencement of the Match. They shall not be used for any other purpose during this period, unless prior written permission has been obtained from the AFC.
- 16.3.1. A Host Club that fails to comply with Article 16.3 shall be fined at least USD10,000.
- 16.3.2. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.
- 16.4. Participating Clubs must strictly follow the official training schedule decided by the AFC at its sole discretion. Should both Participating Clubs wish to train at the same time, the Away Club shall be given priority.

Finals

- 16.5. The Host Association shall ensure that Official Training Sites are available at least ten (10) days prior to the first Match of the Finals in the Venue until one (1) day after the last Match in the Venue. They shall not be used for any other purpose during this period, unless written permission has been obtained from the AFC.
- 16.5.1. A Host Association that fails to comply with Article 16.5 shall be fined at least USD10,000.
- 16.5.2. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions in addition to Article 16.5.1.
- 16.6. Participating Clubs must solely utilise Official Training Sites for training (excluding any official training that may be held at a Stadium) from four (4) days prior to their first Match or from their arrival, whichever is latest.

SECTION 4: TECHNICAL REGULATIONS

17. LAWS OF THE GAME

- 17.1. All Matches shall be played in accordance with the Laws of the Game. In the case of any discrepancy in the interpretation of the Laws of the Game, the English version shall prevail.
- 17.2. Each Match shall last ninety (90) minutes, comprising two (2) periods of forty-five (45) minutes, with a half-time interval of fifteen (15) minutes and wherever required in accordance with Article 10, Extra Time shall be played.
- 17.3. Five (5) of the substitutes listed on the match start list may take part in the Match. Any Participating Player who has been substituted may take no further part in that Match.
- 17.4. One (1) additional substitute and one (1) additional substitution opportunity may be used when a Match goes into Extra Time (regardless of whether the Participating Club has already utilised the full number of permitted substitutes and opportunities).
- 17.5. In accordance with Law 3 of the Laws of the Game, a maximum of one (1) additional permanent concussion substitution may be used by each team in a Match. A concussion substitution may be made regardless of the number of substitutes and opportunities already used. The opposing Participating Club then has the option to use an additional substitute for any reason.
- 17.6. The AFC General Secretariat may, at its discretion, decide to use football technologies in any Match(es) in the Competition or in the Competition as a whole (including goal-line technology [GLT], a video assistant referee [VAR] system or electronic performance and tracking systems [EPTS]) in accordance with the Laws of the Game.

18. REFEREEING

- 18.1. If the referee is prevented from carrying out his/her duties, such referee shall be replaced by the fourth official. The same applies for either of the assistant referees if a reserve assistant referee is not appointed.
- 18.2. A video assistant referee (VAR) may assist the referee to make a decision using replay footage in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Laws of the Game in force at the time of the Competition.

19. TEAM BENCH AND TECHNICAL AREA

- 19.1. A maximum of twelve (12) Participating Players and a maximum of eleven (11) Participating Officials are permitted to sit on the team bench during a Match, provided they are in possession of the appropriate Accreditation Devices.

- 19.2. The Host Club or Host Association (as appropriate) shall reserve a minimum of thirty-one (31) Team Technical Seats for each Participating Club's additional Participating Players and Participating Officials who will not be seated on the team bench.
- 19.3. Only Participating Players or Participating Officials who are registered in accordance with Article 22.3 are permitted to sit on the Team Technical Seats, provided they are in possession of the appropriate Accreditation Devices.

20. FOOTBALLS

Preliminary Stage

- 20.1. The footballs used in the Preliminary Stage shall be selected and supplied by each Host Club. The Host Club shall supply the Away Club with twenty (20) of the same footballs for its training throughout the period of its stay.
- 20.2. Participating Clubs shall solely utilise the training footballs provided by the Host Club for official training and warming-up purposes.
- 20.3. Only footballs that bear one (1) of the FIFA quality marks shall be utilised for the Preliminary Stage.

League Stage and Knockout Stage

- 20.4. The footballs used in the League Stage and Knockout Stage shall be selected and supplied by the AFC General Secretariat.
- 20.5. Each Participating Club entering the League Stage shall receive twenty (20) footballs for training prior to the League Stage. Participating Clubs shall solely utilise the twenty (20) training footballs provided by the AFC for training and warming-up purposes both during home and away Matches.
- 20.6. The Host Club and/or Host Association (as appropriate) shall receive footballs for each Match it hosts, and these Match balls must only be used for the Match(es).
- 20.7. Each Member Association and/or its Participating Club(s) are responsible for any taxes and/or fees pertaining to the customs clearance of footballs delivered to the Member Association and when travelling for their away Matches.

21. EQUIPMENT

- 21.1. The AFC General Secretariat has the sole authority to approve the equipment (including kit) in accordance with the AFC Equipment Regulations.
- 21.2. Each Participating Club shall indemnify the AFC and hold the AFC harmless from any and all damages in the event that a conflict arises as a result of any endorsement deal existing between itself and its sponsor(s) which contravenes the AFC Equipment Regulations.

SECTION 5: TEAM OFFICIAL DELEGATION

22. OFFICIAL TEAM DELEGATION

- 22.1. All Participating Players and Participating Officials of an Official Team Delegation will be issued with Accreditation Devices (as applicable) authorised by the AFC General Secretariat. Each Participating Club shall produce the Accreditation Cards for its Participating Players and Participating Officials using the materials provided by the AFC General Secretariat.
- 22.2. Each Participating Club shall ensure that no person in its Official Team Delegation or otherwise affiliated to it, enters or is present on its team bus, in its team dressing room, on the Field of Play, or in any other Controlled Access Area without being in physical possession of the necessary Accreditation Devices which has been validly issued to such person.
- 22.3. Subject to the conditions set out below, for each Match in the Competition, Participating Clubs shall register an Official Team Delegation comprising a minimum of eighteen (18) and a maximum of twenty-three (23) Participating Players and a minimum of four (4) and a maximum of eleven (11) Participating Officials.
 - 22.3.1. Each Participating Club may nominate an additional nineteen (19) Participating Officials as part of its Official Team Delegation, who shall receive the same Accreditation Card as the eleven (11) Participating Officials referred to above.
 - 22.3.2. All costs related to the additional nineteen (19) Participating Officials shall be borne by the relevant Participating Club.
- 22.4. No individual shall be simultaneously registered as both a Participating Player and a Participating Official.

23. REGISTRATION OF PLAYERS

- 23.1. There are three (3) registration windows for the Competition. During each registration window, each Participating Club shall submit a list of a minimum of eighteen (18) and a maximum of thirty-five (35) Participating Players.
- 23.2. During each registration window, each Participating Club must submit two (2) lists of players as follows:
 - 23.2.1. List A: each Participating Club must register a minimum of eighteen (18) and a maximum of twenty-five (25) players. As a minimum, four (4) places are reserved exclusively for Homegrown Players and no club may have more than two (2) Association-Trained Players listed in these four (4) places on List A. If a Participating Club has fewer than four (4) Homegrown Players in List A, then the maximum number of players on List A is reduced as follows:

Club-Trained	Association-Trained (excl. Club-Trained)	Max. for List A
4	0	25
3	1	25
3	0	24
2	2	25
2	1	24
2	0	23
1	2	24
1	1	23
1	0	22
0	2	23
0	1	22
0	0	21

- 23.2.2. List B: each Participating Club may register up to ten (10) players. Only players who are born on or after January 1, 2004 may be registered on List B.
- 23.3. Each Participating Club is responsible for submitting to the AFC General Secretariat its List A and List B, duly signed by the Participating Club and verified, validated and additionally signed by its Member Association. List A must specify each and every player who qualifies as a Homegrown Player, as well as stating whether they are an Association-Trained Player or a Club-Trained Player.
- 23.4. Each Participating Club must register a minimum of three (3) goalkeepers in its registration. A minimum of two (2) goalkeepers must be registered on List A.
- 23.5. Participating Players must be assigned a number between 1 and 99. Number 1 shall be reserved for a goalkeeper if the number is used. Each Participating Player shall wear the same number allocated in his first registration during all Matches in the Competition. Participating Players additionally registered in accordance with Articles 24.2 to 24.4 may only be allocated a new number.
- 23.6. If a Participating Club fails to submit its list of Participating Players in accordance with these Regulations by the stipulated deadline, it shall be considered to have withdrawn from the Competition and be subject to Article 5. Proof of submission by email and/or any other communication channel will not be accepted.

- 23.7. Should the AFC General Secretariat not receive all required documents by the stipulated deadline for a registration window, the individual concerned shall be considered not eligible to be registered and participate in the relevant stage of the Competition.

24. REGISTRATION WINDOWS

- 24.1. Each Participating Club shall submit via AFCAS its registration of Participating Players and supporting documents in accordance with deadlines set for the registration windows stipulated in this Article 24. In principle, the applicability of each registration window is as follows:

Registration Window 1

- 24.2. This registration window applies to all Participating Clubs in the Preliminary Stage. It shall close fifteen (15) days prior to the relevant Participating Club's first Match in the Competition. Once the registration of Participating Players has been received by the AFC General Secretariat and after the stipulated deadline has passed, each Participating Club may:

24.2.1. no later than five (5) days prior to their first Match in the Preliminary Stage, replace or add up to five (5) Participating Players for any reason, provided that the maximum number of registered players is not exceeded; and

24.2.2. no later than five (5) days prior to their last Match in the Preliminary Stage, replace or add up to three (3) Participating Players for any reason, provided that the maximum number of registered players is not exceeded and the newly registered Participating Player(s) have only been registered with the Participating Club (as per Article 25.1.2) after the deadline stipulated in Article 24.2.1 (i.e. five [5] days prior to the relevant Participating Club's first Match in the Preliminary Stage).

Registration Window 2

- 24.3. This registration window applies to all Participating Clubs in the League Stage for Match days one to six (MD1 to MD6). It shall close thirty (30) days prior to the first Match of the relevant region (i.e. West Region or East Region, as appropriate) in the League Stage. Once the registration of Participating Players has been received by the AFC General Secretariat and after the stipulated deadline has passed, each Participating Club may:

24.3.1. no later than five (5) days prior to their first Match in the League Stage, replace or add up to five (5) Participating Players for any reason provided that the maximum number of registered players is not exceeded; and

24.3.2. no later than October 31, 2025, replace or add up to three (3) Participating Players for any reason provided that the maximum number of registered players is not exceeded and the newly registered Participating Player(s) have only been registered with the Participating Club (as per Article 25.1.2) after the deadline stipulated in Article 24.3.1 (i.e. five [5] days prior to the relevant Participating Club's first Match in the League Stage).

Registration Window 3

- 24.4. This registration window applies to all Participating Clubs in the League Stage for Match day seven (MD7) onwards. It shall close fifteen (15) days prior to the first Match of the relevant region (i.e. West Region or East Region, as appropriate) in Match day seven (MD7) of the League Stage. Once the registration of Participating Players has been received by the AFC General Secretariat and after the stipulated deadline has passed, each Participating Club may:
- 24.4.1. no later than five (5) days prior to the respective Match in the Match day seven (MD7) of the League Stage, replace or add up to five (5) Participating Players for any reason provided that the maximum number of registered players is not exceeded; and
 - 24.4.2. no later than March 31, 2026, replace or add up to three (3) Participating Players for any reason provided that the maximum number of registered players is not exceeded and the newly registered Participating Player(s) have only been registered with the Participating Club (as per Article 25.1.2) after the deadline stipulated in Article 24.4.1 (i.e. five [5] days prior to the respective Match in Match day seven [MD7] of the League Stage).
- 24.5. For the avoidance of doubt, no further replacement or addition of Participating Players shall be permitted after the deadline stipulated in Article 24.4.2.
- 24.6. Participating Players and Participating Officials registered pursuant to the additional registration provisions contained in Articles 24.2.1, 24.2.2, 24.3.1, 24.3.2, 24.4.1 and 24.4.2 shall be considered to have been registered during the same registration window covered by those relevant provisions.
- 24.7. Notwithstanding the foregoing provisions for additional registration (*cf.* Articles 24.2.1, 24.2.2, 24.3.1, 24.3.2, 24.4.1 and 24.4.2, if at any stage during the Competition, two (2) or more Participating Players who are registered as goalkeepers suffer long-term injuries or illness, the relevant Participating Club may request to replace one (1) or more of these goalkeeper(s) by registering one (1) or more new Participating Players as goalkeepers (as appropriate).
- 24.7.1. An injury or illness shall be considered long-term for the purposes of this Article 24.7 if it will or can reasonably be expected to last for thirty (30) days or longer (as from the date of the request).
 - 24.7.2. A medical report, in English, must be submitted to the AFC General Secretariat detailing the extent of the injury or illness to the relevant Participating Player(s) before any replacement(s) can be approved by the AFC General Secretariat.
 - 24.7.3. Any replacement must be requested no later than twenty-four (24) hours before the kick-off time of the Participating Club's next Match.
 - 24.7.4. The AFC General Secretariat shall decide on any replacement(s) at its sole discretion, and any such decisions shall be final and binding and not appealable.

- 24.7.5. Incidents involving the provision of false or misleading evidence or information to the AFC in connection with any replacement under this Article (as regards the provision of medical reports or otherwise) may be referred to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee.
- 24.7.6. For the avoidance of doubt, once a Participating Player has been replaced, such player cannot be re-registered in the Competition (including as a replacement) during the same registration window.
- 24.8. Participating Players registered pursuant to the provisions for additional registration set out in this Article 24 shall only be eligible to participate in the Competition after receiving their Accreditation Cards.

25. ELIGIBILITY OF PLAYERS

- 25.1. Each Participating Club shall ensure that all players:
 - 25.1.1. are duly registered with the AFC pursuant to these Regulations; and
 - 25.1.2. are duly registered with the Participating Club in accordance with its Member Association's transfer rules and registration periods, as well as the FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players.
- 25.2. Individuals who meet the criteria set out in Article 25.1 are eligible to participate in the Competition, subject to the provisions of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.
- 25.3. The approval of the registration of a Participating Player by the AFC General Secretariat does not mean that the Participating Player is eligible to participate in the Competition. Each Participating Club is responsible for fielding only eligible Participating Players in a Match. Failure to do so shall lead to the consequences stipulated in the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.
- 25.4. A Participating Player shall be deemed ineligible, without limitation, if:
 - 25.4.1. there is a violation of Article 25.1; or
 - 25.4.2. he participates in a Match contrary to a decision of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee, these Regulations, or the operation of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code; or
 - 25.4.3. the AFC determines that any document submitted during registration is falsified, forged or otherwise invalid.

26. DOCUMENTS FOR REGISTRATION OF PLAYERS

- 26.1. Participating Players must be registered via AFCAS with the supporting documents set out in the Manual, together with any additional information and/or documents requested by the AFC General Secretariat.
- 26.2. Each Participating Club shall ensure to submit valid and authentic documents for the registration of its Participating Players.

27. PLAYER STATUS

- 27.1. A Participating Player shall only be registered with one (1) Participating Club per registration window. A Participating Player can only change his homegrown registration status (i.e. either to an Association-Trained Player or a Club-Trained Player) during the registration windows, including the additional registration period as per Articles 24.2, 24.3 and 24.4 stipulated in these Regulations.
- 27.2. A Participating Player shall not be eligible to play a Match for more than one (1) Participating Club per stage of the Competition (*cf.* Article 6.1). A Participating Player that has been fielded by a Participating Club in a stage of the Competition cannot be registered for another Participating Club in that same stage. For the avoidance of doubt, a player who has not been fielded by a Participating Club shall be entitled to play for another Participating Club in the same stage of a Competition, provided that he is registered in accordance with these Regulations.
- 27.3. If a violation of Articles 27.1 or 27.2 occurs:
 - 27.3.1. the Participating Player may be sanctioned with a ban on participating in a minimum of one (1) future season of AFC club competitions, unless he can demonstrate that extenuating circumstances existed;
 - 27.3.2. the Participating Club shall forfeit any Match in which the Participating Player has been fielded in accordance with the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code; and
 - 27.3.3. the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.
- 27.4. For the purposes of the employment contract of a Participating Player, his date of registration with a Participating Club shall be:
 - 27.4.1. for Participating Players who transferred internationally to the Participating Club: the date of confirmation of receipt of the International Transfer Certificate ("ITC") or the date of provisional registration with the Participating Club's Member Association pursuant to the FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players, submitted in accordance with Article 26; and

- 27.4.2. for Participating Players who transferred domestically to the Participating Club or are 'homegrown' players: the official date of the contract submitted in accordance with Article 26.

28. PLAYER SELECTION LIST

- 28.1. Each Participating Club must submit a player selection list prior to each Match which identifies the starting eleven (11), including the team captain and up to twelve (12) substitutes comprising individuals registered in the relevant registration window. For the avoidance of doubt, Participating Players can be selected from both List A and List B.
- 28.1.1. Each Participating Player who is selected on the player selection list must promptly be available at the player and equipment check undertaken by the AFC Match Commissioner on Match day.
- 28.2. Each Participating Club shall submit its player selection list signed by the Head Coach or the Team Manager to the AFC Match Commissioner at least ninety (90) minutes prior to the commencement of each Match.

29. REGISTRATION OF OFFICIALS

- 29.1. Each Participating Club may nominate a minimum of four (4) and a maximum of eleven (11) Participating Officials. Each Participating Club may also nominate an additional nineteen (19) Participating Officials in accordance with Article 22.3.
- 29.2. Each Participating Club shall submit the supporting documents in accordance with Article 30 via AFCAS by the deadlines set for the relevant registration window stipulated in Article 24.
- 29.3. Each Participating Club must include the following four (4) Participating Officials in the registration list:
- 29.3.1. Head Coach;
- 29.3.2. Team Manager;
- 29.3.3. Team Media Officer; and
- 29.3.4. an appropriately qualified person responsible for medical matters (e.g. team doctor or physiotherapist).
- 29.4. Up to eleven (11) Participating Officials may sit on the team bench for each Match. The following three (3) Participating Officials must be registered on the officials on the substitution bench list:
- 29.4.1. Head Coach;

- 29.4.2. Team Manager; and
 - 29.4.3. an appropriately qualified person responsible for medical matters (e.g. team doctor or physiotherapist).
- 29.5. Each Participating Club may register video analysts, however, for each Match, only one (1) of them shall be entitled to receive the necessary Accreditation Device and shall be the only member of an Official Team Delegation entitled to record Matches using only one (1) lightweight amateur camera. This recording shall be strictly for technical purposes and should not interfere with Match operations or be utilised by any Broadcast Partner or otherwise distributed. For the avoidance of doubt, video analysts are only allowed to film Matches involving their Participating Club, unless otherwise agreed by the two (2) Participating Clubs of the relevant Match.
- 29.6. Should the AFC General Secretariat not receive all required documents by the stipulated deadline for a registration window, the individual concerned shall be considered not eligible to be registered and participate in the relevant stage of the Competition.
- 29.7. Once the registration of Participating Officials has been received by the AFC General Secretariat and after the stipulated deadline has passed, Participating Clubs may replace or add Participating Officials for any reason at any stage with twenty-four (24) hours' notice to the AFC General Secretariat by submitting the documents set out in Article 30 via AFCAS, provided that:
- 29.7.1. the maximum number of registered officials is not exceeded;
 - 29.7.2. to replace the Participating Official, a Participating Club must provide their Accreditation Card to the AFC and shall receive the Accreditation Card of the replacement Participating Official in exchange; and
 - 29.7.3. the replacement Participating Officials shall only be eligible to participate in the Competition after receiving their Accreditation Card.
- 29.8. Each Participating Club shall submit the officials on the substitution bench list ninety (90) minutes prior to the commencement of each Match, at the latest.

30. DOCUMENTS FOR REGISTRATION OF OFFICIALS

- 30.1. Participating Officials must be registered via AFCAS with the supporting documents set out in the Manual, together with any additional information and/or documents requested by the AFC General Secretariat.
- 30.2. Each Participating Club shall ensure to submit valid and authentic documents for registration of its Participating Officials.

SECTION 6 : MEDIA

31. MEDIA ACCESS

Preliminary Stage, League Stage and Round of 16

- 31.1. The Host Club and its Member Association shall ensure that the AFC, AFC Commercial Rights Partners, Commercial Affiliates, the Host Broadcaster, and all Broadcast Partners have free access to the Stadium from two (2) days prior to each Match in the Stadium until one (1) day after the Match in the Stadium to allow for the resolution of any technical issues and for the assembly and/or disassembly of the relevant infrastructure required to execute the Media Rights.

Finals

- 31.2. The Host Association shall ensure that the AFC, AFC Commercial Rights Partners, Commercial Affiliates, the Host Broadcaster, and all Broadcast Partners have free access to the Stadium from ten (10) days prior to each Match in the Stadium until two (2) days after the Match in the Stadium to allow for the resolution of any technical issues and for the assembly and/or disassembly of the relevant infrastructure required to execute the Media Rights.

32. PRESS CONFERENCES

- 32.1. The Host Club is responsible for the organisation of a pre-Match press conference to be conducted under the supervision of the local media officer at least one (1) day prior to each Match it hosts in the Competition, except for Finals, where the Host Association shall be responsible.
- 32.2. The Head Coach and a minimum of one (1) of the key Participating Players of each Participating Club must attend a pre-Match press conference for each Match in which they participate. The AFC General Secretariat shall decide the final timing of the pre-Match press conference in the absence of an agreement on timing by the Participating Clubs.
- 32.3. The Head Coach of each Participating Club and Player of the Match must attend a post-Match press conference for each Match in which they participate, commencing no later than fifteen (15) minutes after the Match. Subject to compliance with the AFC Anti-Doping Regulations, where additional awards (e.g. Player of the Match, etc.) are granted, the winner of such awards must also attend the post-Match press conference if requested by the AFC General Secretariat.
- 32.4. Each Participating Club is responsible for the interpretation and translation of any communication made by its Participating Players and Participating Officials into English. Interpretation into the local language (if applicable) shall be the responsibility of the Host Club, except for Finals, where the Host Association shall be responsible.
- 32.5. Any individual who fails to attend an obligatory press conference shall be fined at least USD10,000. The relevant Participating Club shall also be held liable for any failure to attend a press conference in accordance with Article 3.3.9. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

33. INTERVIEWS

- 33.1. If requested by the AFC, Participating Clubs shall make their Head Coach and up to three (3) selected Participating Players available for an interview of up to ten (10) minutes, to be recorded by the Host Broadcaster or any other Broadcast Partner, any Commercial Affiliate and/or the AFC. All interview locations shall be designated by the local media officer or AFC Match Commissioner.
 - 33.1.1. For the League Stage, any such interview shall be conducted one (1) day prior to the Match.
 - 33.1.2. For the Knockout Stage, any such interview shall be conducted one (1) or two (2) days prior to the Match.
- 33.2. If requested by the AFC, Participating Clubs shall make a key Participating Player (as determined by the AFC at its sole discretion) available on Match day for an interview of not more than ninety (90) seconds at their point of arrival at the Stadium for the Match.
- 33.3. If requested by the AFC, Participating Clubs shall make their Head Coach available on Match day for an interview of not more than ninety (90) seconds before the start of their respective team's warm-up for the Match.
- 33.4. Any individual who fails to conduct an interview when requested shall be fined at least USD10,000. The relevant Participating Club may also be held liable for any failure to conduct an interview when requested in accordance with Article 3.3.9. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

34. FLASH INTERVIEWS

- 34.1. Participating Players and Participating Officials are not permitted to give interviews at the Stadium without the express permission of the AFC.
- 34.2. The local media officer may designate an area for multilateral and unilateral flash interviews to be conducted by the Host Broadcaster and the Broadcast Partners (as applicable) following the conclusion of each Match.
- 34.3. If requested by the AFC, the Head Coach and up to five (5) Participating Players from each Participating Club shall participate in flash interviews carried out by the Host Broadcaster and other Broadcast Partners following each Match.
- 34.4. Any individual who fails to conduct a flash interview when requested shall be fined at least USD10,000. The relevant Participating Club may also be held liable for any failure to conduct a flash interview when requested in accordance with Article 3.3.9. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

35. MIXED ZONE

- 35.1. The Head Coach and all Participating Players of each Participating Club shall pass through the mixed zone on their way from their team dressing room to their bus after each Match.
- 35.2. Any individual who fails to pass through the mixed zone shall be fined at least USD10,000. The relevant Participating Club may also be held liable for any failure to pass through the mixed zone in accordance with Article 3.3.9. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

36. ACCESS TO MATCH FOOTAGE

Preliminary Stage

- 36.1. The relevant Host Club shall provide the AFC with the match footage in an acceptable broadcast quality and format within forty-eight (48) hours of the conclusion of the relevant Match.

League Stage & Knockout Stage

- 36.2. The AFC General Secretariat shall provide each Participating Club with access to download the relevant Match footage in accordance with the applicable AFC guidelines.

SECTION 7: TICKETING

37. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

- 37.1. Tickets, electronic or hard copy, shall include seat numbering and serial numbering, and only include AFC Marks, Competition Marks, and/or marks of Commercial Affiliates approved by the AFC.
- 37.2. The AFC General Secretariat reserves the right at its sole discretion to substitute the seating area or the gate entrance identified on a Ticket with another, if deemed appropriate for security or technical reasons.
- 37.3. Except for the Finals, where the Host Association shall be responsible, the Host Club must ensure that access to the Stadium is granted to the AFC Delegation, Away Club Official Team Delegation, AFC Commercial Rights Partner, Commercial Affiliates, Media and travelling supporters without any discrimination.
- 37.4. The AFC General Secretariat shall determine the Ticketing policy for the Finals.

38. TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- 38.1. Unless otherwise advised by the AFC General Secretariat in writing, except for the Finals, where the Host Association shall be responsible, each Host Club shall be responsible at its own cost for the production, distribution, and sales of all Tickets. Such matters are subject to the approval of the AFC. The AFC General Secretariat shall provide a Ticket template design to the Host Clubs or Host Association (as appropriate).
- 38.2. The AFC General Secretariat may, in collaboration with each Host Club or Host Association (as appropriate), issue special Ticketing terms and conditions which are applicable to all Ticket holders.
- 38.3. The AFC General Secretariat may change the terms and conditions and shall advise the Host Club or Host Association (as appropriate) on any requirements relating to Ticket production, distribution and/or sales.

39. COMPLIMENTARY TICKETS

- 39.1. Except for the Finals, where the Host Association shall be responsible, each Host Club shall provide Complimentary Tickets to the AFC and/or AFC Commercial Rights Partner for each Match in the quantities and categories as instructed by the AFC General Secretariat, in accordance with the following deadlines:
 - 39.1.1. Preliminary Stage: latest by seven (7) days before the Match;
 - 39.1.2. League Stage: latest by fourteen (14) days before the Match;

39.1.3. Round of 16: latest by seven (7) days before the Match;

39.1.1. Finals: latest by fourteen (14) days before the first Match of the Finals.

39.2. In the event that a Participating Club qualifies for any stage of the Competition and the time period between the confirmation of such qualification and the scheduled home Match in the relevant stage is less than the deadlines set out in Article 39.1, such Participating Club must provide the AFC, AFC Commercial Rights Partner and/or Commercial Affiliates with the relevant Complimentary Tickets for the home Match no later than two (2) days after the confirmation of its qualification.

39.3. All Complimentary Tickets shall be provided in a continuous block.

39.4. In certain circumstances (including, without limitation, where the relevant Away Club has not been determined by the deadline set out in Article 39.1), the Host Club or Host Association (as appropriate) shall provide Complimentary Tickets to the AFC, AFC Commercial Rights Partner and/or Commercial Affiliates which contain generic information (e.g. referring to the Away Club as "Winner of Preliminary Stage 2").

Preliminary Stage, League Stage and Round of 16

39.5. Each Host Club shall provide the following Complimentary Tickets to the Away Club no later than at the match coordination meeting (which shall take place no later than one [1] day prior to the Match):

39.5.1. two (2) VVIP Tickets;

39.5.2. five (5) VIP Tickets; and

39.5.3. twenty (20) Tickets of the next-best category (as determined by the AFC General Secretariat).

39.6. Notwithstanding Article 39.5, the AFC General Secretariat reserves the right to request any additional complimentary Tickets for a Match, the number of which shall be communicated to the Host Club at the appropriate time.

Finals

39.7. The AFC reserves all Ticketing rights relating to the Finals.

39.8. The Host Association shall provide the following Complimentary Tickets to each Participating Club:

39.8.1. two (2) VVIP Tickets;

39.8.2. five (5) VIP Tickets;

39.8.3. twenty (20) Tickets of the next-best category (as determined by the AFC General Secretariat) for each Match the relevant Participating Club participates in; and

39.8.4. two (2) Tickets of the next-best category (as determined by the AFC General Secretariat) for all other Matches in the Finals not involving the relevant Participating Club.

39.9. Notwithstanding Article 39.8, the AFC General Secretariat reserves the right to request any additional complimentary Tickets for a Match, the number of which shall be communicated to the Host Association at the appropriate time.

40. PURCHASABLE TICKETS

Preliminary Stage, League Stage and Round of 16

- 40.1. Each Host Club must make available at least five per cent (5%) of the net saleable capacity of the Stadium available exclusively to the supporters of the Away Club in a segregated and safe area to be determined by the Host Club and the AFC General Secretariat.
- 40.2. The number of Tickets to be purchased must be declared to the Host Club by the deadline set in Article 39.1 with full payment by the Away Club to the Host Club. The Away Club is responsible for all Tickets purchased, even if the Tickets are not utilised. The price of the Tickets shall not exceed the price of comparable Tickets that are sold to the supporters of the Host Club.
- 40.3. Each Host Club shall provide the AFC Commercial Rights Partner with the opportunity to buy Tickets at face value for each Match as instructed by the AFC General Secretariat. The number of Tickets to be purchased must be declared at a time to be mutually agreed between the AFC Commercial Rights Partner and the Host Club.
- 40.4. The AFC shall be able to purchase Tickets at face value and on an individual Match basis from each Host Club for itself and its Commercial Affiliates.

Finals

- 40.5. The Host Association must make available for each Match at least eight percent (8%) of the net saleable capacity of each Stadium available exclusively to the supporters of each Participating Club playing in a Match, in a segregated and safe area to be determined by the AFC General Secretariat and the Host Association.
- 40.6. The number of Tickets to be purchased must be declared by each Participating Club in accordance with the Ticketing timeline and guidelines issued by the AFC General Secretariat. Each Participating Club is responsible for all Tickets purchased, even if the Tickets are not utilised. The price of the Tickets shall not exceed the price of comparable Tickets that are sold to the general public in the relevant Host Association.
- 40.7. The Host Association shall provide the AFC Commercial Rights Partner with the opportunity to buy Tickets at face value for each Match. The number of Tickets to be purchased must be declared at a time to be mutually agreed between the AFC Commercial Rights Partner and the Host Association.
- 40.8. The AFC is entitled to request any additional purchasable Tickets for a Match, the number of which shall be communicated to the Host Association at the appropriate time.

SECTION 8: COMMERCIAL

41. COMMERCIAL RIGHTS

- 41.1. The AFC is the owner of all the Commercial Rights emanating from the Competition as well as from any other related events under its jurisdiction, without any restrictions as to content, time, place and law. The AFC may grant the Host Clubs the Commercial Rights to the Preliminary Stage, in whole or in part, in accordance with the Manual which governs the rights, duties, and responsibilities of all parties regarding the Commercial Rights. All other Commercial Rights not granted under these Regulations and/or the Manual shall be retained by the AFC for use and exploitation.
- 41.2. Each Host Club and its Member Association or the Host Association (as appropriate) shall use its best endeavours in seeking political and administrative support from all local, regional and national governmental authorities to ensure the effective exploitation and protection of the Commercial Rights (including through the implementation of government guarantees and tabling of supplementary legislation).
- 41.3. Each Host Club and its Member Association or the Host Association (as appropriate) shall appoint a reasonable number of personnel to assist the AFC in the implementation and enforcement of its rights protection programme.

42. CLEAN STADIUM

Preliminary Stage, League Stage and Round of 16

- 42.1. Except where otherwise instructed or notified by the AFC General Secretariat, the Host Club and its Member Association shall deliver the Stadium and Official Training Site as a Clean Stadium two (2) days before each Match or official training at the Official Training Site until the completion of the Match.

Finals

- 42.2. Except where otherwise instructed or notified by the AFC General Secretariat, the Host Association shall deliver each Stadium and Official Training Site as a Clean Stadium ten (10) days before the first Match in the Finals, until one (1) day after the last Match at each Stadium or the last training at each Official Training Site.

43. ADVERTISING AND BRANDING

Preliminary Stage, League Stage and Round of 16

- 43.1. Except where otherwise stipulated or notified by the AFC General Secretariat, each Host Club and its Member Association shall ensure that all relevant approvals are secured and unrestricted access for the placement and publishing of advertising or branding of the Competition shall be available to the AFC General Secretariat two (2) days before each Match at the Stadium or training at the Official Training Site.

Finals

- 43.2. Except where otherwise stipulated or notified by the AFC General Secretariat, the Host Association shall ensure that all relevant approvals are secured and unrestricted access for the placement and publishing of advertising and/or branding of the Competition shall be available to the AFC ten (10) days before the first Match at each Stadium or training at each Official Training Site.

SECTION 9 : SAFETY AND SECURITY

44. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 44.1. All matters relating to safety and security shall be undertaken in compliance with the AFC Stadium Regulations and AFC Safety and Security Regulations.
- 44.2. Except for the Finals, where the Host Association shall be responsible, each Host Club and its Member Association shall, in cooperation with the relevant government authorities and/or Stadium owners, devise, plan, and implement adequate security and safety measures for the Competition at all Controlled Access Areas within the Venue and other relevant locations to protect all relevant persons, including without limitation the AFC Delegation, Official Team Delegations, AFC Commercial Rights Partner, Commercial Affiliates, Media, spectators, all goods brought in by the AFC, Official Team Delegations, AFC Commercial Rights Partner and Commercial Affiliates.
- 44.3. Except for the Finals, where the Host Association shall be responsible, each Host Club and its Member Association shall issue a detailed security plan in the form of a binding agreement with, without limitation, the management of the Stadium, Official Training Site(s) and the Accommodation of the AFC Delegation and Official Team Delegations. This security plan shall be based upon the principles set out in the AFC Stadium Regulations and AFC Safety and Security Regulations, and shall include, without limitation, a stadium evacuation plan and a stadium safety certificate.
- 44.4. Except for the Finals, where the Host Association shall be responsible, each Host Club and its Member Association shall discharge the AFC and hold it harmless from all responsibility and relinquish any claim against the AFC and the members of its delegation for any damages resulting from any act or omission relating to the organisation of the Competition to the exclusion of damages caused by the AFC or the members of its delegation acting with intent or gross negligence.

SECTION 10 : MEDICAL AND ANTI-DOPING

45. PRE-COMPETITION MEDICAL ASSESSMENT

- 45.1. Each Participating Club and its Member Association shall ensure that each Participating Player undergoes a Pre-Competition Medical Assessment (PCMA) at least thirty (30) days prior to its first Match of the Competition.
 - 45.1.1. Participating Players who have undertaken a PCMA for a FIFA or other AFC competition may provide the AFC General Secretariat with the physician and player's declaration form originally provided to FIFA or the AFC, provided that the PCMA was conducted within one (1) year of the start of the Competition.
 - 45.1.2. The AFC shall provide all Participating Clubs and their Member Association with the PCMA form setting out the necessary matters to be tested, which shall include testing to prevent players from experiencing sudden cardiac death during any Match.
 - 45.1.3. Each Participating Club and its Member Association must submit to the AFC by latest ten (10) days prior to the first Match of the Competition the following signed documents:
 - 45.1.3.1. Member Association Declaration of Agreement to the PCMA; and
 - 45.1.3.2. for each Participating Player, the Player and Examining Physician Declaration for PCMA.
 - 45.1.4. Any player for whom the required documents are not provided is not eligible to be registered for the Competition.
- 45.2. The AFC Medical Committee may, at its sole discretion, order any further medical evaluation of a Participating Player that it deems necessary. The cost of such further testing shall be borne by the AFC.

46. FACILITIES AND PERSONNEL

- 46.1. Except for the Finals, where the Host Association shall be responsible, each Host Club shall provide a medical room and doping control room fully equipped with all items stipulated in the Manual.
- 46.2. A Host Club or Host Association (as appropriate) shall be fined:
 - 46.2.1. at least USD20,000 for failing to fully equip the medical room; or
 - 46.2.2. at least USD10,000 for failing to fully equip the doping control room; or

- 46.2.3. at least USD40,000 for failing to fully equip both rooms.
- 46.2.4. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.
- 46.3. Except for the Finals, where the Host Association shall be responsible, each Host Club shall provide all medical personnel and doping control personnel stipulated in the Manual.
- 46.4. A Host Club or Host Association (as appropriate) shall be fined:
 - 46.4.1. at least USD10,000 for failing to provide all required doping control personnel; or
 - 46.4.2. at least USD20,000 for failing to provide all required medical personnel.
 - 46.4.3. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

47. ANTI-DOPING

- 47.1. Doping is strictly prohibited. The AFC Anti-Doping Regulations, the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code, and all relevant AFC directives in relation to anti-doping are applicable to the Competition.
- 47.2. The AFC General Secretariat shall inform each Participating Club and its Member Association by means of a circular of the doping control procedure for the Competition.
- 47.3. The AFC Anti-Doping Unit (mandated by the AFC Medical Committee to handle the organisation and administration of anti-doping activities) shall be responsible for the approval of the WADA-accredited laboratory which shall carry out the analysis of all doping samples.

SECTION 11: FINANCIAL PROVISIONS

48. GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- 48.1. Any financial payments to be made by the AFC in accordance with these Regulations shall be subject to all applicable laws, regulations, orders, by-laws and international sanctions.

49. LOGISTICAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR PARTICIPATING CLUBS

Preliminary Stage, League Stage and Round of 16

- 49.1. Participating Clubs shall settle all logistical costs among themselves. The following conditions shall apply during the official period of two (2) days prior to each Match until one (1) day after the Match:
 - 49.1.1. the Away Club shall cover its international and domestic travel costs to the Venue or the nearest airport, as well as board, lodging costs and incidental expenses;
 - 49.1.2. the Host Club shall cover the following domestic transport costs at the Venue for the entire Official Team Delegation of the Away Club, subject to flight connections:
 - 49.1.2.1. one (1) bus with a minimum of forty-five (45) seats;
 - 49.1.2.2. one (1) multipurpose vehicle with a minimum of seven (7) seats; and
 - 49.1.2.3. one (1) luggage truck for airport transfers, hotel transfers (if applicable) and Match day;
 - 49.1.3. the Host Club shall provide the Away Club with a liaison officer for the Away Club's entire stay at the Venue;
 - 49.1.4. subject to the relevant national laws and policies, where requested by the AFC General Secretariat or the AFC Match Commissioner, a police escort shall be provided by the Host Club to the Official Team Delegation of the Away Club for its travel to and from training, Matches, Official Functions, and airport transfers;
 - 49.1.5. the Participating Clubs are not permitted to stay at the same hotel as each other or at the hotel chosen for the AFC Delegation;
 - 49.1.6. details of the logistical arrangements relating to a Match (including the matters set out above) shall be notified to the AFC General Secretariat by the relevant Participating Clubs in advance of the Match; and
 - 49.1.7. any disputes arising regarding the financial provisions under this Article 49 shall be resolved amongst the relevant Participating Clubs and/or their Member Associations but may be submitted to the AFC Competitions Committee for a final decision.

Finals

- 49.2. The Participating Clubs shall cover their international and domestic travel costs to the Venue or the nearest airport, as well as all incidental expenses.
- 49.3. The AFC General Secretariat and Host Association shall cover the cost of all other logistical arrangements for the Official Team Delegation in accordance with the OAA. Such arrangements shall be communicated to the relevant Participating Clubs by circular prior to the Finals.

50. LOGISTICAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR AFC DELEGATION

Preliminary Stage, League Stage and Round of 16

- 50.1. From their arrival at the Venue until their departure, each Host Club must provide at its own cost, for the AFC Delegation:
 - 50.1.1. Accommodation in an international five-star hotel different from the Official Team Delegations unless otherwise approved by the AFC General Secretariat (or an international four-star hotel if there are no international five-star hotels at the Venue);
 - 50.1.2. three (3) meals per day (international buffet style) and one (1) additional light meal on Match day;
 - 50.1.3. minimum six (6) litres of water per person per day, as well as ice and refreshments, at the Accommodation, referee training, and the Stadium;
 - 50.1.4. daily laundry services (but no dry cleaning or pressing) of eight (8) pieces per person per day for the Match Officials (except for the referee assessor who shall be subject to Article 50.1.5);
 - 50.1.5. daily laundry services of six (6) pieces per person per day and dry cleaning of two (2) pieces per person on alternate days for the other members of the AFC Delegation;
 - 50.1.6. activated mobile telecommunication cards (e.g. SIM cards) with sufficient credit and data;
 - 50.1.7. a Club official or representative of the Host Club should be assigned to coordinate airport reception, immigration and customs, airport transfers, domestic transportation and Accommodation for all Match Officials and the members of the AFC Delegation;
 - 50.1.8. liaison officers proficient in English;
 - 50.1.9. one (1) sedan for the AFC Match Commissioner;
 - 50.1.10. one (1) multipurpose vehicle with a minimum of seven (7) seats for the Match Officials; and

50.1.11. additional vehicles upon request of the AFC General Secretariat for other officials appointed by the AFC.

Finals

50.2. The AFC General Secretariat and Host Association shall cover the cost of logistical arrangements for the AFC Delegation in accordance with the OAA.

51. FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION

51.1. The Financial Contribution for Participating Clubs shall be made up of one (1) or more of the following payments:

51.1.1. travel subsidy;

51.1.2. performance bonus; and/or

51.1.3. participation fee.

51.2. Financial Contributions shall be sent directly to the Member Association of the Participating Club(s), unless otherwise directed by the Member Association or decided by the AFC General Secretariat at its sole discretion.

51.3. All Financial Contributions shall be withheld should a Participating Club have any outstanding payment to be made to the AFC or another Participating Club (and/or its Member Association) and/or any unfulfilled financial obligations under the relevant Articles of these Regulations until such time as the payment is made in full.

Travel Subsidy

51.4. For each Match in the Preliminary Stage of the Competition, the Away Club(s) shall receive a travel subsidy of USD50,000.

51.5. Notwithstanding any other provisions in these Regulations, no travel subsidy shall be provided to any Host Club which is required to play in a Neutral Venue in accordance with these Regulations.

Performance Bonus

51.6. For each Match in the League Stage, a performance bonus of USD100,000 shall be paid to the winner based on the result of the Match at the end of normal playing time.

Participation Fee

51.7. Each Participating Club in the League Stage shall receive a participation fee of USD800,000 for taking part in the Competition. In addition, each Participating Club shall subsequently receive the following participation fees for their qualification to the later stages of the Competition, as below:

- 51.7.1. Round of 16 : USD200,000;
- 51.7.2. Quarter finals : USD400,000; and
- 51.7.3. Semi finals : USD600,000.

52. PRIZE MONEY

- 52.1. The AFC will pay the following prize monies to the Participating Clubs in the final Match of the Competition:

- 52.1.1. Champion : USD10,000,000; and
- 52.1.2. Runner-up : USD4,000,000.

For the avoidance of doubt, the above-mentioned prize monies shall be paid in addition to the Financial Contributions.

- 52.2. All prize money shall be withheld should a Participating Club have any outstanding payment to be made to the AFC or another Participating Club (and/or its Member Association) and/or any unfulfilled financial obligations under the relevant Articles of these Regulations until such time as the payment is made in full.
- 52.3. Five per cent (5%) of the prize monies from the Champion and runner-up (as stated in Article 52.1) shall be retained and allocated to the AFC Dream Asia Foundation to fund social responsibility activities.

53. DISCIPLINARY ACTION

- 53.1. Where a Host Club fails to comply with any of its obligations under Articles 48 to 50 with regard to a Match, the case shall be referred to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee. In all such instances, the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee shall order the relevant Participating Club to return to the AFC any Financial Contribution that has been paid to it in respect of the relevant Match (or, if not yet paid, to forfeit its right to any Financial Contribution due to it in respect of the relevant Match) and to pay compensation for any and all damages or losses suffered by, where applicable, the other Participating Club, the AFC, the AFC Commercial Rights Partner, Commercial Affiliates and the Host Association. The amount of compensation shall be determined by the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee, which may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

SECTION 12 : AWARDS

54. TROPHY, AWARDS AND MEDALS

- 54.1. The original trophy of the Competition shall be presented as a formality to the Champion during the award ceremony after the final Match of the Competition. Following the conclusion of the ceremony, the original trophy shall immediately be returned to the AFC and remain in the possession of the AFC at all times. The Champion shall subsequently be awarded a replica by the AFC for its permanent possession.
- 54.2. The replica trophy awarded to the Champion must remain within its control at all times and must not leave its region or territory of its Member Association without the prior written consent of the AFC General Secretariat. The Champion must not permit the replica trophy to be used in any context where a third-party (including without limitation, their sponsors and other commercial partners) is granted visibility or in any other way which could lead to an association between any third-party and the trophy and/or the Competition. The AFC General Secretariat may issue additional trophy guidelines which the Champion must comply with.
- 54.3. The following awards of the Competition shall be presented in accordance with the Manual:
 - 54.3.1. Most Valuable Player;
 - 54.3.2. Top Goal Scorer;
 - 54.3.3. Best Goalkeeper; and
 - 54.3.4. AFC Fair Play Award.
- 54.4. Goals scored in the Preliminary Stage are not taken into account for determining the Top Goal Scorer.
- 54.5. The AFC shall award the following medals:
 - 54.5.1. Sixty-five (65) medals to the Champion; and
 - 54.5.2. Sixty-five (65) medals to the runner-up.
- 54.6. Additional medals may be produced upon request and at the cost of the requesting Participating Club.
- 54.7. The AFC Competitions Committee may decide to introduce additional awards.

55. AWARD CEREMONY

- 55.1. An award ceremony, managed and controlled by the AFC General Secretariat and coordinated with the Host Association and the AFC Commercial Rights Partner, shall be held immediately after the final Match of the Competition to present the trophy, awards and medals listed in Article 54.
- 55.2. The Participating Players and Participating Clubs that qualify to receive the trophy, awards and medals are required to attend the relevant award ceremony. Relevant Participating Clubs shall be represented by the twenty-three (23) Participating Players and eleven (11) Participating Officials registered in the Official Team Delegation for the final Match of the Competition. No other officials, players, or staff of the Participating Clubs may participate in the award ceremony.

SECTION 13: DISCIPLINARY

56. DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

- 56.1. All disciplinary measures in relation to the Competition shall be undertaken in accordance with the current AFC Statutes, AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code, and all relevant AFC regulations and circulars.
- 56.2. The AFC may introduce new disciplinary rules and sanctions for the duration of the Competition. Such rules shall be communicated to the Participating Clubs and their Member Associations thirty (30) days before the first Match of the Competition at the latest.
- 56.3. Only Participating Players and Participating Officials may serve Match suspensions in the Competition. For the avoidance of doubt, this requires the registration of the relevant individual within a registration window in accordance with the deadlines set out in these Regulations.
- 56.4. All Participating Players and Participating Officials agree to:
 - 56.4.1. comply with the provisions of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code, in particular by respecting the spirit and principles of fair play, not engaging in violent behaviour, respecting the authority of the Match Officials, not making bets in connection with any Match and not engaging in any activities linked to the manipulation of Matches; and
 - 56.4.2. refrain from doping and doping-related activities, and comply with the provisions of the AFC Anti-Doping Regulations.

57. GOOD CONDUCT

- 57.1. Each Participating Club is liable for the improper conduct of:
 - 57.1.1. any member of its Official Team Delegation; and/or
 - 57.1.2. any person affiliated with it and/or carrying out duties on its behalf throughout the Competition.
- 57.2. For any violation of Article 57.1, the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may issue any sanction listed in the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.

58. ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

- 58.1. Subject to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code, for any offence set out in these Regulations with a listed minimum fine, where it is the first such offence committed by a party:
 - 58.1.1. the AFC, after completing its investigation but prior to opening disciplinary proceedings, may write to the party and make an offer to compound the offence and reduce the listed fine by twenty per cent (20%) should the party admit to the offence;
 - 58.1.2. if the offence is admitted, the AFC shall submit the compounded offence to the Chairperson of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee for approval;
 - 58.1.2.1. should the party deny the offence, the AFC shall open disciplinary proceedings;
 - 58.1.3. upon approval of the Chairperson of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee, the sanction shall be notified and applied administratively by the AFC;
 - 58.1.3.1. should the Chairperson of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee not approve the compounded offence, the AFC shall open disciplinary proceedings;
 - 58.1.4. by agreeing to compound the offence, the party waives its right to request a motivated decision or appeal the sanction issued; and
 - 58.1.5. any sanction issued administratively comes into force immediately upon notification in accordance with the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.

59. CAUTIONS AND EXPULSIONS

- 59.1. All matters relating to cautions and/or expulsions, including the carrying forward of cautions between stages of the Competition, shall be undertaken in accordance with the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code except where expressly set out below.
 - 59.1.1. Subject to Articles 59.1.2 to 59.1.4, if a Participating Player or a Participating Official receives a caution in three (3) separate Matches in the Competition, the relevant individual is automatically suspended from the next Match in the Competition.
 - 59.1.2. Any Participating Player or Participating Official who completes the Preliminary Stage having received one (1) or two (2) caution(s) in separate matches shall not carry over the caution(s) to the League Stage.

- 59.1.3. Any Participating Player or Participating Official who completes the League Stage having received one (1) or two (2) caution(s) in separate matches shall not carry over the caution(s) to the Knockout Stage.
- 59.1.4. Any Participating Player or Participating Official who completes the round of 16 and quarter finals having received one (1) or two (2) caution(s) in separate matches shall not carry over the caution(s) to the semi finals.

60. PROTEST

- 60.1. For the purpose of these Regulations, a protest is an objection of any kind related to any event and/or matter that has a direct effect on a Match.
- 60.2. Unless otherwise stipulated in these Regulations, to be considered valid, a protest must be:
 - 60.2.1. submitted in writing (using the appropriate Protest Form issued by the AFC General Secretariat) to the AFC Match Commissioner for the relevant Match within two (2) hours of the final whistle, or, if the relevant Match was cancelled or abandoned, within two (2) hours of the decision to cancel or abandon the Match (the **"Protest Deadline"**);
 - 60.2.2. followed up with a full written report (including a copy of the original Protest Form) which must be sent to the AFC General Secretariat within twenty-four (24) hours of the Protest Deadline; and
 - 60.2.3. accompanied by a non-refundable fee of USD1,000 (non-inclusive of any bank charges) which must be transmitted to the bank account nominated by the AFC General Secretariat within twenty-four (24) hours of the Protest Deadline.
- 60.3. No protest shall be lodged relating to the referee's decisions regarding facts connected with play. Such decisions are final and binding and not subject to appeal, unless otherwise stipulated in the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code. The same applies to any potential issue concerning the use and/or operation of any goal-line technology (GLT) and/or video assistant referee (VAR) system.
- 60.4. If any of the formal requirements set out in Article 60.2 are not met, the relevant protest shall be disregarded. The AFC General Secretariat decides whether such formal requirements have been met. Such decisions are final and binding and not appealable.
- 60.5. Subject to Article 60.4 and any other exceptions set out in these Regulations, the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code, the AFC Statutes and/or any other applicable AFC regulation, the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee shall make decisions on protests. Should the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee determine that a protest is unfounded or irresponsible, it may impose a fine. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may transfer a protest to the AFC Competitions Committee for its decision if it is deemed to be purely operational in nature.

61. ARBITRATION

- 61.1. Any dispute in connection with the Competition shall be promptly settled by negotiation.
- 61.2. In compliance with the AFC Statutes, Participating Clubs, Member Associations, Participating Players and Participating Officials are prohibited from initiating disputes in an ordinary court of law and must submit to the exclusive jurisdiction of the AFC.
- 61.3. Participating Clubs, Member Associations, Participating Players and Participating Officials acknowledge and accept that, once all internal channels have been exhausted at the AFC, their sole recourse shall be the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). The Code of Sports-related Arbitration shall be applicable. The language of arbitration shall be English. Any hearing, if required, shall (if conducted in person) take place at the CAS Alternative Hearing Centre in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia or (if online) be carried out during business hours in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

SECTION 14 : CLOSING PROVISIONS

62. FINALS

- 62.1. The Finals shall be organised and managed by the AFC in collaboration with the AFC Commercial Rights Partner, the Host Association, including without limitation:
 - 62.1.1. Tickets and Ticketing in accordance with Articles 37.4 and 39.6;
 - 62.1.2. protocol;
 - 62.1.3. Match organisation;
 - 62.1.4. commercial operations; and
 - 62.1.5. media operations.
- 62.2. Any additional events planned before, during and after the Finals by a Participating Club shall be communicated at least seven (7) days prior to the relevant Match and be approved by the AFC.

63. SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

- 63.1. The AFC General Secretariat and/or AFC Competitions Committee (as appropriate) shall, in conjunction with the Host Association, issue any instructions necessitated by special circumstances which might arise in the organisation of Matches.
- 63.2. These instructions shall form an integral part of these Regulations.

64. DECISIONS

- 64.1. All decisions made in accordance with these Regulations, except where expressly identified otherwise, are final and binding and not appealable in accordance with the AFC Statutes.

65. AMENDMENTS

- 65.1. The AFC reserves the right to make amendments to any part of these Regulations for any reason whatsoever. Such amendments shall be duly communicated in due course.

66. FORCE MAJEURE

- 66.1. The AFC Competitions Committee is the only body capable of declaring a Force Majeure event for the purposes of these Regulations.

67. MATTERS NOT PROVIDED FOR

- 67.1. Matters not provided for in these Regulations shall be decided by the AFC Competitions Committee. Such decisions are final and binding and not appealable.

68. IMPLEMENTING PROVISIONS

- 68.1. The AFC General Secretariat is entrusted with the operational management of the Competition and is therefore entitled to make decisions and adopt the detailed provisions necessary for implementing these Regulations.

69. ENFORCEMENT

- 69.1. These Regulations were ratified by the AFC Executive Committee on 4 March 2025 and came into force immediately.
- 69.2. These Regulations were amended by the AFC Executive Committee on 14 May 2025 and such amendments came into force immediately. The relevant amendments are highlighted in these Regulations.

For the AFC Executive Committee

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