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LEAGUE 2020**

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Roll of Honour

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the content in this publication, for up-to-date information on the 2020 AFC Champions League and the participating clubs, please visit www.the-afc.com.



HEROES **Be brave**

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And greater the accomplishment.
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For heroes can see beyond victory.

AFC MESSAGE



**Shaikh Salman Bin
Ebrahim Al Khalifa**

AFC President

Dear friends,

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the toughest health and economic crisis of our time, but I am now delighted that we can look forward to the return of our premier club competition – the AFC Champions League.

More than six months ago, the AFC made the extremely difficult but necessary decision to suspend our club competitions. The AFC's quick decision was to protect the health and safety of our players, teams and officials.

This will always be our top priority at the AFC. And now, after those long, hard months, Asian football is finally ready to return to the field.

The AFC Champions League is now one of the best Continental club competitions in world football and although the format will differ this season – with centralised venues – the competition will just be as intense and exciting as it ever has been.

And despite all the challenges, the AFC continues to set new benchmarks with the implementation of the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system from the Quarter-final stage of the 2020 AFC Champions League – the first time that VAR will be introduced in the AFC's Club Competitions.

Asian football history was made in 2019 when VAR made its debut from the Quarter-final stage of the AFC Asian Cup in the United Arab Emirates before the system was successfully implemented across all 32 matches at the AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 in January.

Having organised numerous VAR courses and seminars since March 2017, the AFC has a proven track record in the implementation of the VAR system which has been endorsed by both FIFA and the IFAB.

I want to thank all our Member Associations, leagues and clubs for their solidarity during these challenging times. I must also thank all our host Member Associations for providing the safe environment for these games.

To all the fans, thank you for your patience. I wish all the competing teams the very best of luck as they battle towards a place in the final in the West on December 19, 2020.

It has been a tough, and at times an uncertain journey, but through unity, I am confident that we will rise together and emerge stronger than ever. Now we can again enjoy the action together.

Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President

HISTORY



2019  Al Hilal



2018  Kashima Antlers



2017  Urawa Red Diamonds



2016  Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors

Al Hilal got their hands on the prize they craved most when the Riyadh giants were crowned AFC Champions League winners in November following a deserved 3-0 aggregate victory over Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds as they in turn avenged defeat to the same opposition in the 2017 final and claimed a historic seventh continental title.

The victory ensured Asia's most prestigious club trophy was won by a Saudi Arabian side for the first time since 2005, when Al Ittihad retained the title they won a year earlier, while it also saw the trophy return to West Asia for the first time since Al Sadd were crowned champions in 2011.

After dominating the opening 45 minutes of the first leg at Riyadh's King Saud University Stadium, Peruvian Andre Carrillo headed home the only goal of the game on the hour to ensure, unlike in 2017, Al Hilal travelled to Japan with a lead to defend and, crucially, having not conceded.

Two weeks later at Saitama Stadium, Al Hilal produced a composed and confident display and, with the game still on a knife edge as the second leg entered its final 20 minutes, Salem Al Dawsari all but wrapped up the title when he

tapped in after a flowing move. The tournament's top scorer Bafetimbi Gomis then put the icing on the cake in stoppage time with his 11th goal of the campaign.

"With all respect to our opponents, we were fully confident that we would win this trophy," said Al Hilal's Romanian coach Razvan Lucescu, who guided the side to their first continental title since the 2002 Asian Cup Winners' Cup.

"The first game gave us huge confidence and, at the same time, the will and determination from each player allowed us to win this title after such a long period.

"I can't describe the last 15 minutes. I had such strong belief, but the moment when we scored the second goal I felt nothing could change the situation and I was very happy.

"I have to thank my players because they are the heroes and they are the people who have worked so hard to achieve this huge performance and they accepted me always pushing them."

Frenchman Gomis added the Most Valuable Player award to the Top Scorer accolade in what was a prolific first AFC Champions League campaign for the charismatic striker.

"I want to say that I'm happy to win this individual prize, but the collective prize was our main target ahead of the game," said Gomis.

"This team was born from day one when we started to work in our camp in Austria. We have a lot of individual talents, but the collective part of the work is very important to bring this all together."

Al Hilal's victory saw them add to the 1991 and 2000 Asian Club Championships, the 1997 and 2002 Asian Cup Winners' Cups and the 1997 and 2000 Asian Super Cups as they underlined their status as the most successful side in Asian club football.

The win also brought an end to four successive defeats for Saudi sides in the continental showpiece after Al Hilal had lost the 2017 and 2014 finals to Urawa and Australia's Western Sydney Wanderers, while Jeddah sides Al Ahli and Al Ittihad had lost out to Korean clubs Ulsan Hyundai and Pohang Steelers in 2012 and 2009 respectively.

While Al Hilal are out in front as the most decorated side in Asian football, it was Israel's Hapoel Tel Aviv who were crowned the continent's first club champions when they defeated Malaysia's Selangor FA to lift the Asian Club Championship in 1967, before city rivals Maccabi Tel Aviv saw off Korea Republic's Yangzee to win the trophy in 1969.

Al Sadd became the first modern-day powerhouse to lift the title when they defeated Iraq's Al Rasheed in the 1989 final after Saudi sides Al Ahli and Al Hilal had previously

finished as runners-up. Nissan Yokohama FC, who return this year as Yokohama F. Marinos, meanwhile, finished as runners-up to China PR's Liaoning FC in 1990.

Al Hilal won the trophy for the first time in 1991 and then claimed a second success in 2000, while the Islamic Republic of Iran's Esteghlal (also 1991) and Korea Republic's Suwon Samsung Bluewings (2001 and 2002) are other sides who will be present in the 2020 AFC Champions League having also won the Asian Club Championship.

Asian football entered a new era in 2003 as the Asian Club Championship and the Asian Cup Winners' Cup merged to form the all new AFC Champions League.

Sixteen teams from across Asia took part in the inaugural AFC Champions League and it was Emirati giants Al Ain who have the prestigious honour of winning the first title after they defeated Thailand's BEC Tero Sasana 2-1 on aggregate in the final to lift the trophy at Bangkok's Rajamangala Stadium.

The defending champions were eliminated in the last eight a year later before Al Ittihad were crowned champions after producing what remains arguably the most remarkable comeback in the competition's history as they reversed a 3-1 first-leg deficit against Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma to win 5-0 in Korea Republic and claim a 6-3 aggregate win.



2015 🏆 Guangzhou Evergrande

HISTORY



2014 🏆 Western Sydney Wanderers



2013 🏆 Guangzhou Evergrande



2012 🏆 Ulsan Hyundai



2011 🏆 Al Sadd SC



2010 🏆 Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma

The Jeddah side went back-to-back a year later by overcoming Al Ain 5-3 in the battle of the first two winners and they remain the only side to have successfully defended the AFC Champions League.

Korea Republic's Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors became the first team from East Asia to win the trophy after they overcame Syria's Al Karamah 3-2 in the 2006 final after scoring late in the second leg in Homs to break Syrian hearts and begin a first period of dominance for the East.

It was Japan's turn a year later as Urawa prevented Iran from winning a first title when a 2-0 second-leg victory over Sepahan at Saitama Stadium saw them run out 3-1 winners, before fellow J.League side Gamba Osaka claimed a comprehensive 5-0 win over two legs against Adelaide United, who were the first Australian side to appear in the showpiece event.

A pair of two-time continental champions faced off in the one-legged 2009 final in Tokyo as Al Ittihad squared off against Korea Republic's Pohang Steelers, who had twice won the Asian Club Championship, in 1997 and 1998.

But Al Ittihad were denied a third AFC Champions League title after Pohang ran out 2-1 winners in a game that saw Mohammed Noor become the first and, to date, only player to score in three finals.

The trophy remained in Korea as Seongnam overcame Iran's Zobahan 3-1 in 2010 before Al Sadd defeated Jeonbuk on penalties in the 2011 showpiece event. Ulsan then brought the one-legged finals to a close by easing past Al Ahli Saudi 3-0 in 2012 with what was their ninth successive victory.

A new force arrived in 2013 as Guangzhou Evergrande became the first team from China to win the title following an away goals win over FC Seoul and, after debutants Western Sydney defeated Al Hilal 1-0 in the 2014 final to become Australia's first champion, Guangzhou claimed their second title by beating the UAE's Al Ahli by the same scoreline in 2015.

Ten years after their first title, Jeonbuk denied Al Ain a second continental crown following a 3-2 aggregate victory in 2016 before Urawa added to their 2007 win by beating Al Hilal 2-1 in 2017 to become the fourth two-time champion.

The trophy remained in Japan a year later as Kashima Antlers defeated Iran's Persepolis 2-0 at home then held on in front of 100,000 fans at Azadi Stadium to claim a first title, before Al Hilal finally ended East Asia's dominance by denying Urawa an unprecedented third crown to win the 2019 competition.

As the 2020 edition resumes following the COVID-19

HISTORY



2009  Pohang Steelers



2008  Gamba Osaka



2005  Al Ittihad



2007  Urawa Red Diamonds



2004  Al Ittihad



2006  Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors



2003  Al Ain

enforced hiatus, Saudi Arabia feature a strong trio that includes Al Nassr, Al Ahli Saudi and Al Taawoun.

Al Hilal were deemed to have withdrawn midway through the group stage after naming only 11 players for their final Group B tie against Shabab Al Ahli Dubai due to several members of their squad having tested positive for COVID-19.

From Iran, Persepolis return after winning their fourth successive Iranian Pro League title as their dominance in their homeland continued, while Sepahan's 2020 campaign is their first appearance since 2016. Both Esteghlal and debutants Shahr Khodro, meanwhile, progressed via the play-off route.

Qatari duo Al Sadd and Al Duhail will have high aspirations for the title having gone deep into the competition in recent years and they boast a large majority of the players who won the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 with Qatar.

Champions of the United Arab Emirates in 2019, Sharjah FC are making just their third appearance in the tournament and they are joined by Shabab Al Ahli Dubai and the inaugural winners Al Ain.

Tournament regulars Pakhtakor from Uzbekistan will hope to improve on their group stage exit last year, while Iraq's Al Shorta complete the line-up in West Asia and are appearing for the first time since 2005.

In the East, J1 League champions Yokohama F. Marinos are

joined by FC Tokyo and tournament debutants Vissel Kobe, who feature Spanish legend Andres Iniesta, in what is an exciting looking Japanese contingent.

Former continental champions Jeonbuk, Suwon and Ulsan represent Korea Republic as do the 2013 runners-up FC Seoul after they came through the play-offs to secure a first appearance since 2017.

A strong representation from China sees two-time winners Guangzhou, Shanghai duo SIPG and Shenhua and Beijing FC all present in the group stage.

Elsewhere, Sydney FC, debutants Perth Glory and play-off winners Melbourne Victory feature for Australia in what is the first year the country has had three participants since 2017.

Thailand's Chiangrai United are another team who are making their first appearance after being crowned champions in their homeland last year.

Malaysia powerhouse Johor Darul Ta'zim, however, had to withdraw due to the Malaysian government's restrictions on travelling outside the country during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With five former AFC Champions League winners and some of Asia's finest talent on display – as well as a host of renowned names worldwide – the 18th edition of the continental competition promises, belatedly, to deliver non-stop drama and excitement as 32 teams fight for the right to become kings of Asia.

GROUP A



Al Shorta



Esteghlal



Al Ahli Saudi



Al Shorta



Esteghlal



Al Ahli Saudi



AL SHORTA



Qualified as: Iraqi Premier League – Winners

Founded: 1932

Stadium: Franso Hariri Stadium, Erbil (20,000) / Karbala Sports City, Karbala (30,000)

Iraqi Premier League (5): 2019, 2014, 2013, 1998, 1980

AFC Champions League: Group Stage 2005, 2004



Iraq

Overview

After a 15-year absence, Al Shorta are once again participating in Asia's showpiece tournament having last played in the AFC Champions League back in 2005. In 2019, the Baghdad side won their first league title since 2014 after finishing five points clear of Air Force Club. The Iraqi champions participated in two of the first three editions of the tournament, in 2004 and 2005, but on neither occasion were able to progress past the group stage. More recently on the continent, Al Shorta advanced to the Round of 16 in the 2015 AFC Cup.

Key Players

Iraq international right-back Alaa Mhawir is both an attacking threat going forward and a reliable presence at the back, and he was a key part of the side that helped the Baghdad team claim their first league title since 2014. In midfield, Saad Abdulamir is a calm influence, showing all the experience he has gained from over 70 appearances for the national team, while Mohammed Qasim is another who has impressed for his country since debuting in 2019 and the midfielder also tasted continental success when winning the 2018 AFC Cup with Air Force Club.

Coach: Abdulghani Shahad

Having previously achieved Iraqi Premier League success with Naft Al Wasat, Abdulghani Shahad stepped into the Al Shorta hot seat following the departure of Serbian Aleksandar Ilcic earlier in the year. The former defender spent his entire playing career with hometown club Al Najaf, where he has also enjoyed two stints as head coach. Shahad's finest moment as a head coach came in guiding a talented Iraq team to third place at the 2016 AFC U23 Championship and qualification to the Olympic Games where, despite exiting at the group stage, they remained unbeaten and secured a famous goalless draw against hosts Brazil.



ESTEGHLAL



Qualified as: Iranian Pro League – Third Place via Play-offs

Founded: 1945

Stadium: Azadi Stadium, Tehran (100,000)

Iranian Pro League (8): 2013, 2009, 2006, 2001, 1998, 1990, 1975, 1971

Hazfi Cup (7): 2018, 2012, 2008, 2002, 2000, 1996, 1977

AFC Champions League: Semi-Finals 2013; Quarter-Finals 2018; Round of 16 2017, 2012, 2010; Group Stage 2019, 2014, 2011, 2009, 2003

Asian Club Championship (2): 1990-91, 1970



IR Iran

Overview

One of the most storied sides in Asian football, Esteghlal have twice been crowned kings of the continent, winning the 1970 and 1990-91 Asian Club Championships. In the AFC Champions League, their best performance to date was reaching the semi-finals in 2013, while they also advanced to the last eight two years ago. An eight-time Iranian Pro League winner and seven-time Hazfi Cup champion, they are the second most decorated side in the Islamic Republic of Iran and boast one of the most passionate support bases in Asia.

Key Players

Malian striker Cheick Diabate has been in fine form since joining Esteghlal prior to their 2019-20 campaign. The 32-year-old boasts an excellent goals-to-game ratio and found the back of the net in the 2020 AFC Champions League preliminary and play-off rounds. Talented 21-year-old Mehdi Ghayedi is among the most highly thought of players in Iran and the diminutive forward began the year in superb form, appearing at the AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 for his country and scoring in the play-off round win over Al Rayyan for his club. A regular fixture in the Iranian national team, who he represented at the 2018 FIFA World Cup, the ever-dependable Roozbeh Cheshmi boasts invaluable experience and knowhow in the centre of defence.

Coach: Majid Namjoo-Motlagh

After Esteghlal legend Farhad Majidi stepped down at the end of the 2019-20 Iranian Pro League season, his assistant Majid Namjoo-Motlagh assumed the head coach role on an interim basis. A former player and Asian champion with the Tehran giants, Namjoo-Motlagh also worked on the coaching staff of the Azadi Stadium club between 2009 and 2012. During a distinguished playing career, he made more than 40 appearances for Iran.



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GROUP A

Al Shorta

Esteghlal

Al Ahli Saudi



**AL AHLI
SAUDI**



Qualified as: Saudi Pro League – Fourth Place via Play-offs

Founded: 1937

Stadium: King Abdullah Sports City, Jeddah (62,241)

Saudi Pro League (3): 2016, 1984, 1978

King's Cup (13): 2016, 2012, 2011, 1983, 1979, 1978, 1977, 1973, 1971, 1970, 1969, 1965, 1962

AFC Champions League: Runners-up 2012; Quarter-Finals 2017, 2013, 2005; Round of 16 2019, 2018, 2015; Group Stage 2016, 2010, 2008

Saudi Arabia

Overview

Having finished in the top two positions in the previous four seasons, Al Ahli suffered a disappointing 2018–19 domestic campaign, finishing in fourth place. Nevertheless, due to a victory in the play-offs over Tajikistan's FC Istiklol, they are appearing in their sixth successive AFC Champions League campaign. The Jeddah-based side have reached the knockout rounds in each of the past three years, advancing to the quarter-finals in 2017 and then the Round of 16 in 2018 and 2019. Al Ahli's best performance on the continent came in 2012, when they reached the final before defeat to Korea Republic's Ulsan Hyundai.

Key Players

Syria forward Omar Al Soma will once again spearhead the Al Ahli attack. A physical presence who is a genuine triple threat, the 31-year-old is adept in the air, deadly with the ball at his feet and a danger from set pieces. Providing the service to the Syrian will be German schemer Marko Marin with the former Chelsea and Werder Bremen player joining from Red Star Belgrade in January. Young starlet Abdulrahman Ghareeb helped Saudi Arabia to a runners-up finish at the AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 and the 23-year-old will be one to keep an eye on.

Coach: Vladan Milojevic

Vladan Milojevic took over the Al Ahli reins after Christian Gross' third spell in charge of the Jeddah club ended in February. The move to Saudi Arabia marks the Serbian's first foray into Asian football having previously managed Red Star Belgrade in his homeland as well as in Greece and Cyprus. The 50-year-old boasts pedigree as not only did he guide the Belgrade giants to the league championship in 2018 and 2019, he twice led them to the UEFA Champions League group stage, as well as the Europa League knockout rounds.





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GROUP B



Shabab Al Ahli



Pakhtakor



Shahr Khodro



SHABAB AL AHLI



Qualified as: UAE President's Cup – Winners

Founded: 1958

Stadium: Rashid Stadium, Dubai (10,000)

UAE Pro League (7): 2016, 2014, 2009, 2006, 1980, 1976, 1975

UAE President's Cup (9): 2019, 2013, 2008, 2004, 2002, 1996, 1978, 1977, 1975

AFC Champions League: Runners-up 2015; Round of 16 2017; Group Stage 2014, 2010, 2009, 2005



United Arab Emirates

Overview

Shabab Al Ahli Dubai officially came into being in May 2017 when the Dubai-based clubs Al Shabab and Dubai Club merged with Al Ahli to become one entity. While this is their first appearance as Shabab Al Ahli Dubai, under their previous guise of Al Ahli they defeated both domestic rivals Al Ain and Saudi powerhouse Al Hilal to reach the 2015 final, before falling to Chinese giants Guangzhou Evergrande. While their last league triumph came in 2016, the club claimed the President's Cup–League Cup double in 2019.

Key Players

Emirati international Ahmed Khalil, who was so dangerous and prolific when they made the final in 2015, looms as their most dangerous player in attack. The 29-year-old had brief stints with rivals Al Ain and Al Jazira before returning to Shabab Al Ahli Dubai in 2018. Like Khalil, goalkeeper Majed Naser remains from the side that made the final in 2015 and forms part of a defence that was in fine form prior to the 2019–20 UAE Pro League season's cancellation. Brazilian striker Leonardo, who scored nine goals for Al Wahda in the 2019 AFC Champions League, will also provide an attacking threat.

Coach: Gerard Zaragoza

Former coach Rodolfo Arruabarrena guided Shabab Al Ahli Dubai into the 2020 AFC Champions League but was dismissed earlier in the year, with Gerard Zaragoza stepping into the position vacated by the Argentine. Previously with the Dubai club's U-21 side, the Spaniard spent two years in Qatar as Al Rayyan's assistant and has also had spells in various capacities in his homeland, Georgia and India. Zaragoza's current position, however, marks the most high-profile job of his career and he will be aiming to steer the team at least into the last 16.



GROUP B



Shabab Al Ahli



Pakhtakor



Shahr Khodro



Shabab Al Ahli



Pakhtakor



Shahr Khodro



PAKHTAKOR



Qualified as: Uzbekistan Super League – Winners

Founded: 1956

Stadium: Pakhtakor Stadium, Tashkent (35,000)

Uzbekistan Super League (12): 2019, 2015, 2014, 2012, 2007, 2006, 2005, 2004, 2003, 2002, 1998, 1992

Uzbekistan Cup (12): 2019, 2011, 2009, 2007, 2006, 2005, 2004, 2003, 2002, 2001, 1997, 1993

AFC Champions League: Semi-Finals 2004, 2003; Quarter-Finals 2009; Round of 16 2010; Group Stage 2019, 2016, 2015, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2008, 2007, 2006, 2005



Uzbekistan

Overview

Few clubs have appeared in the AFC Champions League as many times as Pakhtakor, the Uzbek giants who are showing signs of returning to their glory days. Having not won a league title since 2015, they were runaway winners of the Uzbekistan Super League in 2019, while they also added the Uzbekistan Cup for good measure. The finest years for the Tashkent club came between 2002 and 2007 when they won an incredible six successive league-cup doubles. On the continent, meanwhile, Pakhtakor reached the AFC Champions League semi-finals in 2003 and 2004, although they have not gone beyond the group stage since 2010.

Key Players

Pakhtakor pulled off a major coup in signing Swiss international striker Eren Derdiyok, who boasts strong scoring records at both Bayer Leverkusen and Galatasaray. Capped 60 times for his country, the 32-year-old is an impressive acquisition in an exciting new era for Pakhtakor fans. Despite the side's group stage exit, forward Jaloliddin Masharipov still managed to complete more dribbles than any other player in the 2019 competition, while he also created the highest number of chances among his teammates. Part of the Uzbekistan U23 side that has achieved considerable success, Khojiakbar Alijonov is a force in defence and going forward, and the full-back's stunning strike against Al Sadd last year was one of the goals of the tournament.

Coach: Shota Arveladze

Former Georgia international Shota Arveladze scored goals for fun in Turkey, the Netherlands and Scotland during his playing days, with Dutch side Ajax his most notable club. After coaching in both Turkey and Israel, the Tbilisi native took over Pakhtakor in mid-2017 and won the league-cup double in 2019.



SHAHR KHODRO



Qualified as: Iranian Pro League – Fourth Place via Play-offs

Founded: 2013

Stadium: Imam Reza Stadium, Mashhad (27,700)

AFC Champions League: Tournament Debut



IR Iran

Overview

A fourth-place finish in the Iranian Pro League helped Shahr Khodro book their maiden AFC Champions League appearance with qualification to the 2020 play-offs. There the Mashad side defeated first Bahrain's Riffa before edging past Qatar's Al Sailiya on penalties to confirm their place in the group stage. Founded in 2013 as Padideh Mashhad Football Club, they were promoted to the top flight a year later after winning the Azadegan League. Shahr Khodro are the 13th club from the Islamic Republic of Iran to appear in the AFC Champions League group stage.

Key Players

Former Islamic Republic of Iran international Mohammad Reza Khalatbari joined Shahr Khodro at the beginning of the year and netted in the preliminary round on his side's march towards the tournament proper. A runner-up with Zobahan in 2010, when he also scored in the final, the forward provides valuable experience. Striker Amin Ghaseminejad top-scored for Shahr Khodro last season and the 33-year-old also bagged the winner against Riffa in qualifying to secure their place in the play-off round. A near ever-present this campaign, as he was the previous season, 25-year-old centre-back Ali Nemati is an important part of the team's rearguard.

Coach: Mehdi Rahmati

Mehdi Rahmati will be doubling up as Shahr Khodro's head coach and first-choice goalkeeper in the 2020 AFC Champions League after the custodian took charge of the side in August. The 37-year-old former Iran international has enjoyed a long and successful career in which he has won two Iranian Pro League titles apiece with Esteghlal and Sepahan. After joining Shahr Khodro in mid-2019 as a player, the move into the hot seat marks his first managerial role.





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GROUP C



Al Duhail SC



Al Taawoun



Sharjah FC



Persepolis



AL DUHAIL SC



Qualified as: Emir Cup – Winners

Founded: 2009

Stadium: Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium, Doha (12,000)

Qatar Stars League (7): 2020, 2018, 2017, 2015, 2014, 2012, 2011

Emir Cup (3): 2019, 2018, 2016

AFC Champions League: Quarter-Finals 2018, 2015, 2013; Round of 16 2019, 2017, 2016; Group Stage 2014, 2012



Qatar

Overview

After exiting at the hands of domestic rivals Al Sadd in the last 16 in 2019, Al Duhail will look to return to the form that saw them win a record-equaling nine successive games in the 2018 AFC Champions League before falling at the quarter-finals to Iranian side Persepolis. After Al Sadd temporarily knocked their Doha rivals off their perch in 2019, Al Duhail recently returned to the summit by claiming their fifth league title in six years in August and their seventh since 2011. Once more, they bring one of the most star-studded squads to the AFC Champions League group stage.

Key Players

Belgian Edmilson Junior is now in his third year at Al Duhail having joined from Standard Liege in his homeland in mid-2018. Having backed up Emir Cup success in 2019 with the 2020 Qatar Stars League title, the pacey winger will now look to build on previous showings in the AFC Champions League and help the Qatari giants go deep into the tournament. A product of Qatar's Aspire Academy, Almoez Ali enjoyed a 2019 to remember, firing his country to the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 title with a record-breaking nine goals as the Maroons stunned the continent to claim glory. Another beneficiary of Qatar's youth system, Bassam Al Rawi plays with composure beyond his years. A great reader of the game and a dead-ball specialist, the defender continues to improve with age.

Coach: Walid Regragui

Former Morocco international Walid Regragui stepped into the role vacated by Rui Faria at the beginning of the year and, with a host of talented players, his remit will be to achieve AFC Champions League glory. The 44-year-old spent the majority of his playing career in France, while as a coach he helmed FUS Rabat in his homeland for six years before joining Al Duhail.



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GROUP C



Al Duhail SC



Al Taawoun



Sharjah FC



Persepolis



AL TAAWOUN



Qualified as: King's Cup – Winners

Founded: 1956

Stadium: King Abdullah Sports City Stadium, Buraidah (30,000)

King's Cup (1): 2019

AFC Champions League: Group Stage 2017



Saudi Arabia

Overview

This is Al Taawoun's second appearance in the AFC Champions League, after they defeated two-time continental champions Al Ittihad to claim their first major piece of silverware last year, with a dramatic 2-1 win in the final of the King's Cup. In what was a memorable season, the Buraidah side also finished third in the Saudi Pro League. In 2017, Al Taawoun made a perfect start to their debut AFC Champions League campaign by defeating Uzbekistan's Lokomotiv in their opening game, but only managed to pick up two more points as they exited at the group stage.

Key Players

Burundi international midfielder Cedric Amissi has been at the club since 2017 and is an energetic presence in the centre of the park while also a threat in front of goal. Striker Mohammad Al Sahlawi signed from Al Shabab ahead of the 2020 AFC Champions League campaign and will hope he can rediscover the scoring form that saw him become a legend during a decade with Al Nassr. Australia international Mitchell Duke, meanwhile, is a new arrival after joining from Western Sydney Wanderers in August and the Al Taawoun faithful will have high hopes for the former Shimizu S-Pulse forward.

Coach: Patrice Carteron

Al Taawoun have a new man at the helm since winning their opening two 2020 AFC Champions League games. With Vitor Campelos departed, the Buraidah club appointed the much-travelled Patrice Carteron ahead of the tournament's resumption. Now in his second spell in Saudi Arabia after managing Al Nassr in 2017, the Frenchman has led clubs in his homeland, Egypt, Morocco, the United States and DR Congo, where he won the CAF Champions League with TP Mazembe, as well as the Mali national team.



GROUP C



SHARJAH FC



Qualified as: UAE Pro League – Winners

Founded: 1966

Stadium: Sharjah Stadium, Sharjah (20,000)

UAE Pro League (6): 2019, 1996, 1994, 1989, 1987, 1974

UAE President's Cup (8): 2003, 1998, 1995, 1991, 1983, 1982, 1980, 1979

AFC Champions League: Quarter-Finals 2004



United Arab Emirates

Overview

Sharjah's historic triumph in the 2018-19 UAE Pro League ended a 23-year title drought and they did it in style by holding off their more fancied opponents. Their qualification for the 2020 AFC Champions League marks just their third appearance in the tournament, with a quarter-final showing in 2004 their best performance. That campaign came to an abrupt end, however, as they lost 11-2 on aggregate to eventual runners-up Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma of Korea Republic. Sharjah's most successful period, meanwhile, came between the mid-80s and mid-90s, when they claimed four league titles in 10 years.

Key Players

The loan acquisition of forward Caio Lucas from Portuguese giants Benfica added star quality to the side and the Brazilian, who has previously won league titles with Kashima Antlers and Al Ain, also appeared in the 2016 AFC Champions League final for the latter. Sharjah's impressive defensive record last season had a lot to do with Adel Al Hosani in goal, with his performances seeing him named Goalkeeper of the Year. In midfield, emerging Uzbek star Otabek Shukurov, who won the 2018 AFC U23 Championship with his country, continues to show his class.

Coach: Abdulaziz Al Anbari

Abdulaziz Al Anbari made history last season by becoming the first Emirati coach to win the UAE Pro League. A former midfielder for Sharjah, where he won the title back in 1995-96, he is also the first person to win the league as both a player and a coach. Taking over in 2017, after Sharjah went winless in their first four games, Al Anbari was able to galvanise the squad to finish an impressive sixth in the 2017-18 campaign, their best finish since 2009-10, before going on to claim the title last year.



PERSEPOLIS



Qualified as: Iranian Pro League – Winners

Founded: 1963

Stadium: Azadi Stadium, Tehran (100,000)

Iranian Pro League (13): 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2008, 2002, 2000, 1999, 1997, 1996, 1976, 1974, 1972

Hazfi Cup (6): 2019, 2011, 2010, 1999, 1992, 1988

AFC Champions League: Runners-up 2018; Semi-Finals 2017; Round of 16 2015, 2012, 2009; Group Stage 2019, 2011, 2003

Asian Cup Winners' Cup (1): 1991



IR Iran

Overview

After two excellent campaigns in the AFC Champions League in which they reached the 2017 semi-finals and the final a year later before defeat to Japan's Kashima Antlers, Persepolis disappointed in 2019 as they fell at the group stage. But, having won the league title yet again in their homeland, the Islamic Republic of Iran's most successful side return for another tilt at Asia's biggest club competition. The Tehran giants now boast four successive Iranian Pro League titles in what has been one of the most trophy-laden periods in their history.

Key Players

Since joining Persepolis in mid-2017, Bashar Resan has developed into a key cog in the starting line-up with his cultured displays in the centre of the park. The Iraqi international previously tasted AFC Cup glory with Air Force Club in his homeland and has continued to collect trophies in Tehran. A star of the 2018 FIFA World Cup, Vahid Amiri returned to Persepolis following a year in Turkey and the midfielder adds guile and creativity going forward. At 38, club legend Seyed Jalal Hosseini may be in the twilight of his career but his excellent reading of the game and vocal presence remain vital for the Azadi Stadium team.

Coach: Yahya Golmohammadi

Former Persepolis player Yahya Golmohammadi took charge of the Tehran side for the second time at the beginning of the year after the departure of Argentine Gabriel Calderon. A former Iran international, the 49-year-old led Shahr Khodro to a fourth-place finish in the Iranian Pro League in 2019, while he has also enjoyed Hazfi Cup success with Zobahan. As a player, he was part of the Persepolis side that won three league titles in the late-90s and was on the scoresheet in the 2006 FIFA World Cup.



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GROUP D

Sepahan
 Al Sadd SC
 Al Nassr
 Al Ain

SEPAHAN

Qualified as: Iranian Pro League – Runners-up

Founded: 1953

Stadium: Naghsh-e-Jahan Stadium, Isfahan (75,000)

Iranian Pro League (5): 2015, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2003

Hazfi Cup (4): 2013, 2007, 2006, 2004

AFC Champions League: Runners-up 2007; Quarter-Finals 2012, 2011; Group Stage 2016, 2014, 2013, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2005, 2004

IR Iran

“Satan’s Palace”
Miyakojima, Japan

Coiling darkly through the coral reef, a narrow shaft ends in an illuminated cavern unlike any place on earth. It’s known as Satan’s Palace.
For those with the passion to challenge and explore the unknown.

SEIKO
SINCE 1881

Overview

Back in the AFC Champions League for the first time since 2016, Sepahan have been regulars in the competition over the years yet have only gone beyond the group stage on three occasions. The Isfahan side produced their best performance in 2007 when they progressed to the final before defeat to Japan’s Urawa Red Diamonds, while they reached the last eight in 2011 and 2012. A runners-up finish in the 2018–19 Iranian Pro League and a strong showing in the season just finished is evidence Sepahan are eager to return to the glory days when they were crowned Iranian champions four times between 2010 and 2015.

Key Players

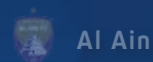
Omid Noorafkan is one of Iranian football’s bright young hopes and the midfielder’s impressive form is among the main reasons why Sepahan were challenging at the top end of the table in the 2019–20 campaign before falling short in the final few games. Kiros Stanley is the side’s biggest goal threat, with the Brazilian finishing as the 2018–19 Iranian Pro League’s joint top scorer and producing the goods once more this season. Midfielder Mohammad Mohebi enjoyed a breakthrough 2019 in which he joined Sepahan, made his international debut and scored his first goal for his country.

Coach: Moharram Navidkia

Moharram Navidkia achieved legendary status with Sepahan as a player, winning five Iranian Pro League titles and four Hazfi Cups as well as captaining the Isfahan side in the 2007 AFC Champions League final. A former Iranian international who also spent two seasons in Germany with VfL Bochum, Navidkia is assuming his first head coach role after Amir Ghalenoei stepped down in August.



GROUP D



السدد
ALSADD

AL SADD SC



Qualified as: Qatar Stars League – Winners

Founded: 1969

Stadium: Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, Doha (15,000)

Qatar Stars League (14): 2019, 2013, 2007, 2006, 2004, 2000, 1989, 1988, 1987, 1981, 1980, 1979, 1974, 1972

Emir Cup (16): 2017, 2015, 2014, 2007, 2005, 2003, 2001, 2000, 1994, 1991, 1988, 1986, 1985, 1982, 1978, 1975

AFC Champions League (1): 2011; Semi-Finals 2019, 2018; Quarter-Finals 2014, 2005; Round of 16 2015; Group Stage 2010, 2008, 2007, 2006, 2004, 2003

Asian Club Championship (1): 1989

Qatar

Overview

Al Sadd's semi-final finish in last year's AFC Champions League was as close as any Qatari side have come to Asian club glory since the Wolves won the competition in 2011. The narrow defeat to Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal in the final four was their second semi-final exit in succession having lost to the Islamic Republic of Iran's Persepolis at the same stage in 2018. Until Al Hilal's victory last year, Al Sadd were the last West Asian side to win the AFC Champions League, memorably defeating Korea Republic's Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors nine years ago.

Key Players

Akram Afif had a 2019 to remember after playing a pivotal role in Qatar's AFC Asian Cup victory at the beginning of the year, before signing it off as the AFC Player of the Year. Algeria striker Baghdad Bounedjah was top scorer in the 2018 AFC Champions League with 13 goals and, despite being unable to replicate that form last year, he remains the focal point of the attack. Captain Hassan Al Haydos has been at the club since he was eight years old and is one of the few remaining of the side who lifted the title in 2011.

Coach: Xavi

Spanish legend Xavi made more than 500 appearances for Barcelona and is among the most decorated players of all time. The former midfielder boasts the 2010 FIFA World Cup, two UEFA European Championships, four UEFA Champions Leagues and eight La Liga titles among his many accolades. After four seasons as an Al Sadd player, Xavi stepped into the dugout following his retirement midway through last year. As coach, the 40-year-old led Al Sadd to the semi-finals of the AFC Champions League and helmed them to the 2019 Qatari Super Cup and 2020 Qatar Cup.



AL NASSR



Qualified as: Saudi Pro League – Winners

Founded: 1955

Stadium: King Fahd International Stadium, Riyadh (68,752)

Saudi Pro League (9): 2019, 2015, 2014, 1995, 1994, 1989, 1981, 1980, 1976

King's Cup (6): 1990, 1987, 1986, 1981, 1976, 1974

AFC Champions League: Quarter-Finals 2019; Round of 16 2011; Group Stage 2016, 2015

Saudi Arabia

Overview

One of Saudi Arabia's most successful clubs, with nine Saudi Pro League titles, this is Al Nassr's fifth participation in the AFC Champions League. Their record in the continental showpiece is mixed, twice failing to make it past the group stage and twice making the knockout rounds. Al Nassr's performance last year was their best to date, making it to the quarter-finals before a 4-3 defeat to Qatar's Al Sadd. Earlier in 2019, the Riyadh giants won their first Saudi Pro League title since 2015.

Key Players

Saudi Arabia international Yahya Al Shehri has been a key component of the Al Nassr midfield since signing in 2013. The 30-year-old is a creative force and loves to take players on with his speed and agility. Moroccan Abderrazak Hamdallah is one of the most prolific marksmen in Saudi Arabia, scoring at a rate of well over a goal a game since joining the club in 2018 and finishing the past two campaigns as the Saudi Pro League's top scorer. Australian goalkeeper Brad Jones is an ever-dependable last line of defence. The experienced custodian arrived in Riyadh in 2018 and won the league in his first season.

Coach: Rui Vitoria

After a trophy-laden four years with Benfica in his native Portugal, Rui Vitoria joined Al Nassr in January 2019 and brought instant success by pipping city rivals Al Hilal to the Saudi Pro League title, as well as reaching the AFC Champions League quarter-finals. The former midfielder won the 2013 Taça de Portugal with Vitoria de Guimaraes before joining Lisbon giants Benfica and adding successive league titles in 2015-16 and 2016-17 and another Taça de Portugal in 2017.





GROUP D



Sepahan



Al Sadd SC



Al Nassr



Al Ain



AL AIN



Qualified as: UAE Pro League – Fourth Place via Play-offs

Founded: 1968

Stadium: Hazza bin Zayed Stadium, Al Ain (25,053)

UAE Pro League (13): 2018, 2015, 2013, 2012, 2004, 2003, 2002, 2000, 1998, 1993, 1984, 1981, 1977

UAE President's Cup (7): 2018, 2014, 2009, 2006, 2005, 2001, 1999

AFC Champions League (1): 2003; Runners-up 2016, 2005; Semi-Finals 2014; Quarter-Finals 2017, 2006, 2004; Round of 16 2018, 2015; Group Stage 2019, 2013, 2011, 2010, 2007

FIFA Club World Cup: Runners-up 2018



United Arab Emirates

Overview

Al Ain have the claim to fame of being the first AFC Champions League winners after they defeated Thailand's BEC Tero Sasana to lift the inaugural title back in 2003. Since then, they have twice finished as runners-up, in 2005 to Al Ittihad and in 2016 to Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors as their bid for a second title has fallen just short. With 13 UAE Pro League titles and a further seven UAE President's Cups to their name, they are the most successful team in the United Arab Emirates, while they also finished as runners-up to Real Madrid in the 2018 FIFA Club World Cup.

Key Players

Captain Ismail Ahmed has been with the Garden City club his entire professional career, winning a host of titles and earning a reputation as one of the best defenders to play in the UAE Pro League. Now 37, he is in the twilight of his career and offers invaluable experience at the back. Another AFC Champions League veteran, goalkeeper Khalid Eisa is a dependable last line of defence and last year he helped his country reach the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 semi-finals. Japanese international Tsukasa Shiotani won three J.League titles with Sanfrecce Hiroshima before moving to the UAE, where the defensive midfielder has become one of Al Ain's most consistent performers.

Coach: Pedro Emanuel

Pedro Emanuel was part of Jose Mourinho's FC Porto side that won the UEFA Champions League in 2004 while he also claimed numerous other titles with the Portuguese giants. As a coach, the 45-year-old tactician has enjoyed cup success with Academica in his homeland, Apollon in Cyprus and, most recently, the 2019 King's Cup in Saudi Arabia with Al Taawoun. After a short stint in Spain, he moved to Al Ain in early 2020.



FINAL

19/12/2020

SEMI-FINAL (WEST)

03/10/2020

SEMI-FINAL (EAST)

13/12/20

QUARTER-FINAL (WEST)

30/09/2020

QUARTER-FINAL (EAST)

10/12/20

ROUND OF 16 (WEST)

Winner Group A vs Runner-up Group B
Winner Group B vs Runner-up Group A
26/09/2020

Winner Group C vs Runner-up Group D
Winner Group D vs Runner-up Group C
27/09/2020

ROUND OF 16 (EAST)

Winner Group E vs Runner-up Group F
Winner Group F vs Runner-up Group E
06/12/20

Winner Group G vs Runner-up Group H
Winner Group H vs Runner-up Group G
07/12/20

GROUP STAGE (WEST)

GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C	GROUP D
 Al Ahli Saudi (KSA)  Esteghlal (IRN)  Al Shorta (IRQ)	 Pakhtakor (UZB)  Shabab Al Ahli (UAE)  Shahr Khodro (IRN)	 Al Taawoun (KSA)  Al Duhail (QAT)  Persepolis (IRN)  Sharjah (UAE)	 Al Sadd (QAT)  Al Nassr (KSA)  Sepahan (IRN)  Al Ain (UAE)

GROUP STAGE (EAST)

GROUP E	GROUP F	GROUP G	GROUP H
 FC Seoul (KOR)  Beijing FC (CHN)  Melbourne Victory (AUS)  Chiangrai United (THA)	 FC Tokyo (JPN)  Ulsan Hyundai (KOR)  Shanghai Shenhua (CHN)  Perth Glory (AUS)	 Vissel Kobe (JPN)  Guangzhou Evergrande (CHN)  Suwon Samsung Bluewings (KOR)	 Yokohama F. Marinos (JPN)  Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors (KOR)  Sydney FC (AUS)  Shanghai SIPG (CHN)

FIXTURES (WEST)

14/09/2020 Al Ahli Saudi vs Al Shorta 17/09/2020 Al Shorta vs Al Ahli Saudi 20/09/2020 Esteghlal vs Al Shorta 23/09/2020 Esteghlal vs Al Ahli Saudi	14/09/2020 Shabab Al Ahli vs Shahr Khodro 17/09/2020 Shahr Khodro vs Shabab Al Ahli 20/09/2020 Shabab Al Ahli vs Pakhtakor 23/09/2020 Shahr Khodro vs Pakhtakor	15/09/20 Al Duhail vs Sharjah Persepolis vs Al Taawoun 18/09/20 Sharjah vs Al Duhail Al Taawoun vs Persepolis 21/09/20 Persepolis vs Al Duhail Al Taawoun vs Sharjah 24/09/20 Al Duhail vs Al Taawoun Persepolis vs Sharjah	15/09/2020 Al Ain vs Al Sadd Sepahan vs Al Nassr 18/09/2020 Al Sadd vs Al Ain Al Nassr vs Sepahan 21/09/2020 Al Sadd vs Al Nassr Sepahan vs Al Ain 24/09/2020 Sepahan vs Al Sadd Al Nassr vs Al Ain
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FIXTURES (EAST)

21/11/20 FC Seoul vs Beijing FC 24/11/20 FC Seoul vs Chiangrai Beijing FC vs Melbourne 27/11/20 Chiangrai vs FC Seoul Melbourne vs Beijing FC 30/11/20 Beijing FC vs FC Seoul Chiangrai vs Melbourne 03/12/20 Beijing FC vs Chiangrai Melbourne vs FC Seoul	18/11/20 Perth Glory vs Shanghai Shenhua 21/11/20 Ulsan Hyundai vs Shanghai Shenhua 24/11/20 Perth Glory vs Ulsan Hyundai FC Tokyo vs Shanghai Shenhua 27/11/20 Shanghai Shenhua vs FC Tokyo Ulsan Hyundai vs Perth Glory 30/11/20 FC Tokyo vs Ulsan Hyundai Shanghai Shenhua vs Perth Glory 03/12/20 Shanghai Shenhua vs Ulsan Hyundai Perth Glory vs FC Tokyo	22/11/20 Suwon vs Guangzhou 25/11/20 Guangzhou vs Vissel Kobe 28/11/20 Vissel Kobe vs Guangzhou 01/12/20 Guangzhou vs Suwon 04/12/20 Vissel Kobe vs Suwon	19/11/20 Sydney FC vs Shanghai SIPG 22/11/20 Jeonbuk vs Shanghai SIPG 25/11/20 Shanghai SIPG vs Yokohama Jeonbuk vs Sydney FC 28/11/20 Yokohama vs Shanghai SIPG 01/12/20 Shanghai SIPG vs Sydney FC Yokohama vs Jeonbuk 04/12/20 Sydney FC vs Yokohama Shanghai SIPG vs Jeonbuk
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GROUP E

Beijing FC Chiangrai United Melbourne Victory FC Seoul

Beijing FC Chiangrai United Melbourne Victory FC Seoul



BEIJING FC



Qualified as: Chinese Super League – Runners-up

Founded: 1951

Stadium: Workers' Stadium, Beijing (66,161)

Chinese Super League (1): 2009

Chinese FA Cup (5): 2018, 2003, 1997, 1996, 1985

AFC Champions League: Round of 16 2015, 2013, 2010; Group Stage 2019, 2014, 2012, 2009, 2008

 **China PR**

Overview

The capital city club are one of China's most historic football sides, yet remarkably have only won the Chinese Super League on one occasion (in 2009) and boast a modest record in the AFC Champions League. This is their eighth appearance in the continental competition, with their best performances coming in 2010, 2013 and 2015 when they made it to the Round of 16. Last year they struggled to recover from a loss and a draw in their opening two games as they exited at the group stage for the fifth time.

Key Players

Brazilian international Renato Augusto is the undoubted star of this Beijing FC side, adding some international flair to the competition. Capped almost 40 times for the Seleção, including appearances at the 2016 Olympic Games and 2018 FIFA World Cup, he was Beijing's leading goalscorer last season with 15 goals from 30 matches. Former Arsenal player Li Ke made history in 2019 as the first naturalised player to play for China PR, and it came on the back of an impressive debut season for Beijing. With the Chinese Super League's top scorer Cedric Bakambu not included in the squad, Zhang Yuning will be key up front and will look to take his good recent scoring run into the competition.

Coach: Bruno Genesio

The 53-year-old Frenchman took over Beijing FC in July 2019 and finished the season strongly with seven wins from the final 10 games to ensure a second-place finish in the Chinese Super League, their highest league position since 2014. Prior to joining Beijing, Genesio had a four-year spell in charge of French Ligue 1 side Olympique Lyon, with whom he also had a 10-year playing career between 1985 and 1995. He led the club to the semi-finals of the 2016-17 UEFA Europa League and the Round of 16 in the 2018-19 UEFA Champions League.



CHIANGRAI UNITED



Qualified as: Thai League 1 – Winners

Founded: 2009

Stadium: Power of Chiangrai Stadium, Chiangrai (11,354)

Thai League 1 (1): 2019

Thai FA Cup (2): 2018, 2017

AFC Champions League: Tournament Debut

 **Thailand**

Overview

One of the success stories in Thai football, Chiangrai United have developed into a major force in the Southeast Asian country in recent years. They won back-to-back Thai FA Cups in 2017 and 2018, and a League Cup in the latter, less than a decade after they were founded. The Beetles' rise continued last year when they finished ahead of perennial champions Buriram United by virtue of a better head-to-head record after a dramatic final day of the season. The northern Thai side have also twice come close to qualifying for the AFC Champions League, narrowly losing 1-0 in the play-offs to Shanghai SIPG in 2018 and then on penalties against Sanfrecce Hiroshima last year.

Key Players

Scorer of a hat-trick in the 2018 Thai FA Cup final and top scorer in their title-winning campaign, Brazilian striker Bill is undoubtedly Chiangrai's main marksman. A physical presence who leads the line well, the 36-year-old continues to trouble opposition defences in what is the twilight of his career. Phitiwat Sukjittamakul's arrival in 2017 coincided with their rise to prominence, with the 25-year-old midfielder part of all their recent successes and earning his first Thailand caps in 2019. Another player who made his maiden appearance for the national team last year is youngster Ekanit Panya, who finished as Chiangrai's top creator of goals in 2019 and has an exciting future ahead of him.

Coach: Alongkorn Thongaum

After parting ways with Japanese tactician Masami Taki just weeks before the resumption of their AFC Champions League campaign, Chiangrai United promoted from within as first-team coach Alongkorn Thongaum stepped into the role. The 36-year-old will work alongside Brazilian Emerson Da Silva in the Thai side's dugout.



GROUP E



MELBOURNE VICTORY



Qualified as: A-League – Third Place via Play-offs

Founded: 2004

Stadium: Melbourne Rectangular Stadium, Melbourne (30,050)

A-League Grand Final (4): 2018, 2015, 2009, 2007

A-League Premiership (3): 2015, 2009, 2007

AFC Champions League: Round of 16 2016; Group Stage 2019, 2018, 2014, 2011, 2010, 2008



Australia

Overview

Boasting an impressive four A-League Grand Final triumphs and three A-League Premierships, Melbourne Victory have one of the most glittering trophy cabinets in Australia. Arguably the most popular side in their homeland, the club have been less impressive on the continent, meanwhile, with Round of 16 qualification in 2016 – when they lost to eventual winners Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors – the best they have managed. A stunning upset of 2018 champions Kashima Antlers in the play-offs, however, could point to bigger things to come in 2020.

Key Players

Having enjoyed spells in both the Netherlands and Denmark, Marcos Rojas returned for a third still with the Victoria club earlier in 2020. The New Zealand international midfielder remains in the prime of his career and will hope to help Melbourne make up for a disappointing league campaign. Socceroos winger Robbie Kruse has the ability to supply quality from wide and the 31-year-old boasts plenty of experience from several stints in Germany. Exciting Burundi speedster Elvis Kamsoba is a human highlight reel with his pacy play and dribbling guaranteed to thrill as much as his trademark acrobatics upon scoring.

Coach: Steve Kean

The head coach role has been somewhat of a merry-go-round since the departure of long-serving coach and club legend Kevin Muscat in mid-2019. Steve Kean, who boasts Premier League experience with Blackburn Rovers and has also managed in the Singapore league with Brunei Darussalam side DPMM, will embark on his latest mission when the AFC Champions League resumes. The Scotsman will work alongside compatriot Grant Brebner, a former Melbourne player who made more than 100 appearances for the club and won two A-League titles.



FC SEOUL



Qualified as: K League 1 – Third Place via Play-offs

Founded: 1983

Stadium: Seoul World Cup Stadium, Seoul (66,704)

K league (6): 2016, 2012, 2010, 2000, 1990, 1985

Korean FA Cup (2): 2015, 1998

AFC Champions League: Runners-up 2013; Semi-Finals 2016, 2014, Quarter-Finals 2011, 2009; Round of 16 2015; Group Stage 2017



Korea Republic

Overview

FC Seoul overcame Malaysia's Kedah in the play-off round to return to the AFC Champions League group stage for the first time since 2017. The side from Korea Republic's capital have a strong record in the competition, despite having never won it, finishing as runners-up to Guangzhou Evergrande in 2013 and twice reaching the semi-finals (2014 and 2016). Domestically, they last lifted the K League 1 title in 2016 – their fourth since the turn of the Millennium – but in recent years have found times tougher and only avoided relegation via the play-offs in 2018. In the 2020 K League they suffered another disappointing campaign, finishing in the bottom half.

Key Players

At 35, former AS Monaco and Arsenal man Park Chu-young continues to be key for FC Seoul, with the forward finishing as their joint top scorer and leading creator of goals in the 2019 K League 1 season. Spanish defender Osmar Barba was part of the Buriram United side that reached the 2013 quarter-finals and he represented Cerezo Osaka during a loan stint in the 2018 edition, but it is at FC Seoul where he has made his biggest mark, making nearly 200 appearances since initially arriving in 2014. On loan from Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors, Han Seung-gyu offers a scoring threat and creativity from midfield, with the talented midfielder among the goals and assists in this year's K League.

Coach: Lee Won-jun

In what has been a difficult 2020 for the capital city giants, FC Seoul parted ways with Choi Yong-soo after his second spell in the hot seat was unable to reach the heights of his previous one. Kim Ho-young stepped into the role but departed in September after the side's fortunes failed to pick up meaning, ahead of the AFC Champions League's resumption, Lee Won-jun – who has been part of the backroom staff for a number of years – will lead the team alongside Park Hyuk-soon.



GROUP F



Ulsan Hyundai



Shanghai Shenhua



Perth Glory



FC Tokyo



Ulsan Hyundai



Shanghai Shenhua



Perth Glory



FC Tokyo



**ULSAN
HYUNDAI**



Qualified as: K League 1 – Runners-up

Founded: 1983

Stadium: Ulsan Munsu Football Stadium, Ulsan (43,554)

K-League 1 (2): 2005, 1996

Korean FA Cup (1): 2017

AFC Champions League (1): 2012; Semi-Finals 2006; Round of 16 2019, 2018; Group Stage 2017, 2014, 2009



Korea Republic

Overview

Ulsan Hyundai narrowly missed out on their third K League 1 title at the end of 2020 after once more being pipped at the post by Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors, but they return to the AFC Champions League for the fourth successive year. The club are one of four Korean sides to have lifted the trophy, with their crowning glory coming in 2012 when they defeated Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli 3-0 in the final. Since then, Ulsan haven't been able to match that performance, with back-to-back Round of 16 appearances in 2018 and 2019 the furthest they have been able to advance.

Key Players

Brazilian striker Junior Negrao has been on red-hot form throughout 2020 and leads the domestic scoring charts by some distance. Should he carry his form into the AFC Champions League then Ulsan could have a real chance of going deep into the tournament. After more than decade in England and Germany, Ulsan tempted Lee Chung-yong back to his homeland. The Korea Republic international midfielder adds experience and genuine quality in the midfield. Voted in the K League's Best XI last year, left-back Hong Chul was acquired from Suwon Samsung Bluewings earlier in the year and has been in outstanding form both at the back and going forward.

Coach: Kim Do-hoon

The former striker has history with the AFC Champions League as both a player and manager. As a player, his nine goals in 2004 helped Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma to the final, where they lost to Al Ittihad, and also earned him the top scorer award. As a manager he has led Ulsan Hyundai in each of their last three campaigns, reaching the knockout rounds in both 2018 and 2019. A member of the Korea Republic team for the 1998 FIFA World Cup, he is also one of the K League's all-time leading goal scorers.



**SHANGHAI
SHENHUA**



Qualified as: Chinese FA Cup - Winners

Founded: 1951

Stadium: Hongkou Football Stadium, Shanghai (33,060)

Chinese Super League (3): 1995, 1962, 1961

Chinese FA Cup (5): 2019, 2017, 1998, 1991, 1956

AFC Champions League: Quarter-Finals 2006; Group Stage 2018, 2011, 2009, 2007, 2004, 2003



China PR

Overview

Shanghai Shenhua are no strangers to the AFC Champions League, having participated eight times since 2002, although their best result to date was a quarter-final appearance in 2006. That run was ended by eventual winners Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors, who were managed by the current Shenhua coach Choi Kang-hee. Since then, they have not made it beyond the group stage but, while they have also found success hard to come by in the Chinese Super League, they tasted glory in the Chinese FA Cup in both 2017 and 2019 after defeating city rivals Shanghai SIPG and Shandong Luneng respectively in the finals.

Key Players

Kim Shin-wook won the AFC Champions League in 2016 under Choi Kang-hee and followed his coach to Shanghai Shenhua last year, making an instant impact with nine goals in just 12 games. Having now established himself at the club, the 32-year-old will be looking to add to his 20 AFC Champions League goals. An AFC Champions League winner with Guangzhou Evergrande in 2015, Yu Hanchao joined Shenhua earlier in 2020 and adds valuable experience to the side. The heartbeat of the side, however, is captain Giovanni Moreno. The Colombian international has been at Shenhua since 2012, amassing over 200 games and becoming a fan favourite.

Coach: Choi Kang-hee

The experienced Korea Republic tactician is one of the most recognised and distinguished coaches in Asia. Having won the AFC Champions League twice with Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors, in 2006 and 2016, Choi knows what it takes to achieve glory on the continent. The 2016 AFC Coach of the Year has also won the K League 1 title six times, while in his first season at Shanghai Shenhua, he guided the team to the Chinese FA Cup.



GROUP F

Ulsan Hyundai

Shanghai Shenhua

Perth Glory

FC Tokyo

Ulsan Hyundai

Shanghai Shenhua

Perth Glory

FC Tokyo



Qualified as: A-League Premiership – Winners

Founded: 1995

Stadium: Perth Rectangular Stadium, Perth (20,500)

A-League Premiership (1): 2019

AFC Champions League: Tournament Debut



Australia

Overview

Towards the tail end of the National Soccer League, the predecessor to the A-League competition we now see in Australia, Perth Glory were arguably the biggest and best club in the country. But since the A-League started in 2005, the three-time NSL champions have struggled to recapture that form. Twice they've made the end-of-season Grand Final, but twice they have fallen short, as they did in 2019. But by finishing top of the table at the end of the regular season, they qualified for their maiden appearance in the AFC Champions League.

Key Players

The heart of the side is their inspirational captain, Spaniard Diego Castro. Since moving to Western Australia in 2015, the midfielder has become one of the A-League's top performers, winning the Johnny Warren Medal as the league's best player in 2015-16. Joining him in Perth this season is prolific Uruguayan Bruno Fornaroli, the former Melbourne City striker who won the A-League's golden boot in 2015-16 and has quickly developed a rapport with Castro. Elsewhere, Nicholas D'Agostino impressed earlier in the year by helping Australia finish third at the AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020.

Coach: Cristian Ola

After Tony Popovic, who guided Perth Glory into the AFC Champions League for the first time in their history, stepped down from his role following the conclusion of the 2019-20 A-League season, it will be Cristian Ola who takes charge for the AFC Champions League's resumption. He will work in conjunction with former Perth player and assistant manager Richard Garcia.



FC TOKYO



Qualified as: J.League – Runners-up via Play-offs

Founded: 1999

Stadium: Tokyo Stadium, Tokyo (49,970)

Emperor's Cup (1): 2011

AFC Champions League: Round of 16 2016, 2012



Japan

Overview

FC Tokyo came agonisingly close to winning their first J.League title in 2019 but a poor run in their final three games saw them lose out at the last. But the capital city side still enjoyed an excellent season and are back in the AFC Champions League for the first time since 2016. On their previous appearance they progressed to the Round of 16 before an away goals defeat to Shanghai SIPG, while they also reached the last 16 in 2012, when they lost to Guangzhou Evergrande.

Key Players

Leandro joined from Kashima Antlers earlier in the year and has fitted seamlessly into an FC Tokyo side that will be looking to at least challenge for a top-three position domestically. With goals and assists, the Brazilian has the armoury to fire the capital city side into the knockout rounds for the third time. An ever-reliable presence in defence Masato Morishige has been at the club since 2010 and last year was named in the J.League Team of the Year. Midfielder Yojiro Takahagi, meanwhile, was a J.League winner with Sanfrecce Hiroshima, while he also boasts experience on the continent with Western Sydney Wanderers and FC Seoul.

Coach: Kenta Hasegawa

Having spent most of his playing career with Shimizu S-Pulse, former Japan international Kenta Hasegawa went on to manage the side between 2005 and 2010. But it was at Gamba Osaka where he has enjoyed the most success, leading the side to promotion from the second tier in 2013 and then the J.League title, Emperor's Cup and J.League Cup treble in 2014. A semi-final appearance with Gamba marks his best showing in the AFC Champions League, where he returns after leading FC Tokyo to a second-place finish in the 2019 J.League.





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GROUP G

Vissel Kobe Suwon Samsung Bluewings Guangzhou Evergrande



VISSEL KOBE



Qualified as: Emperor's Cup – Winners
Founded: 1966
Stadium: Misaki Park Stadium, Kobe (30,132)
Emperors' Cup (1): 2019
AFC Champions League: Tournament Debut

Japan

Overview
AFC Champions League debutants Vissel Kobe have captured global headlines in recent times with the signings of FIFA World Cup winners Andres Iniesta, David Villa (now retired) and Lukas Podolski (now departed). Their signing spree wasn't limited to foreign players, though, with Japanese internationals Hotaru Yamaguchi and Gotoku Sakai also joining the ambitious club. While the addition of such quality players has yet to pay dividends in the league, in 2019 Kobe ended their long trophy drought by beating Kashima Antlers in the Emperor's Cup final.

Key Players
Andres Iniesta is one of the most accomplished players to have ever graced the game. A Barcelona legend with over 400 appearances, Iniesta adds experience, leadership and skill to the Vissel Kobe midfield. Alongside him will be Hotaru Yamaguchi, who played for Japan at both the 2014 and 2018 FIFA World Cups and has previously appeared in the AFC Champions League with Cerezo Osaka. Thomas Vermaelen has brought some much-needed defensive steel and his experience at the highest level will prove invaluable as Kobe attempt to advance from a tricky looking group.

Coach: Atsuhiro Miura
After leading Vissel to their first major piece of silverware with Emperor's Cup success, ex-Bayern Munich midfielder Torsten Fink vacated the head coach role in September to be replaced by Atsuhiro Miura. A former player with the Kobe club, the Oita native represented Japan on a number of occasions and was part of the squads that won both the 2000 and 2004 AFC Asian Cups. The 46-year-old, who also turned out for Yokohama F. Marinos and Tokyo Verdy in his playing days, had previously been in the sports director role at Vissel.





GROUP G



Vissel Kobe



Suwon Samsung Bluewings



Guangzhou Evergrande



SUWON SAMSUNG BLUEWINGS



Qualified as: Korean FA Cup Winners

Founded: 1995

Stadium: Suwon World Cup Stadium, Suwon (43,288)

K League 1 (4): 2008, 2004, 1999, 1998

Korean FA Cup (5): 2019, 2016, 2010, 2009, 2002

AFC Champions League: Semi-Finals 2018, 2011; Quarter-Finals 2010; Round of 16 2015, 2009; Group Stage 2017, 2016, 2013, 2005

Asian Club Championship (2): 2002, 2001

Asian Super Cup (2): 2002, 2001



Korea Republic

Overview

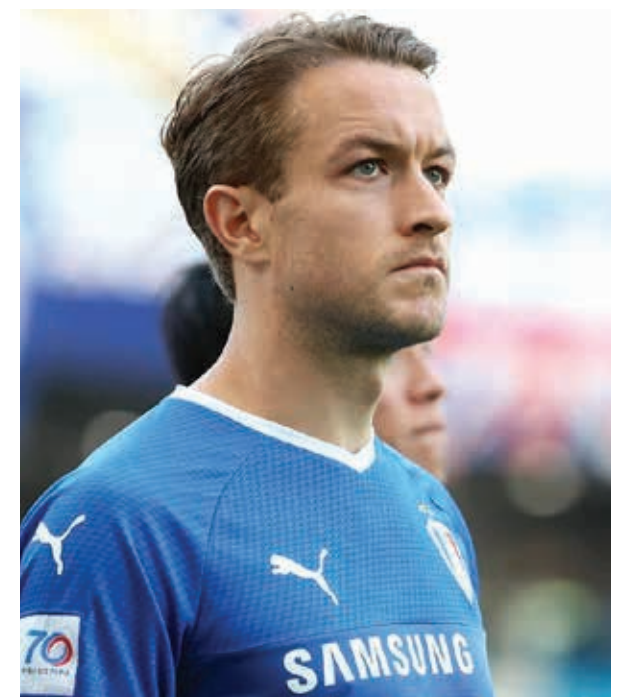
Back-to-back continental champions in the two years directly preceding the inception of the AFC Champions League, Suwon Samsung Bluewings are making their tenth appearance at the tournament. The club's fifth Korean FA Cup title, after defeating Daejeon Korail FC in the final, saw them qualify directly to the group stage. Suwon will be looking to match or even better their last appearance at the AFC Champions League where they reached the semi-finals in 2018 before defeat to Japan's Kashima Antlers, matching their previous best at the 2011 tournament.

Key Players

Australian striker Adam Taggart proved to be an inspired addition at the beginning of 2019, with the former Brisbane Roar man finishing the year as the top scorer in K League 1. Kim Min-woo is one of the first names on the team sheet and the 30-year-old, who represented his country at the 2018 FIFA World Cup, weighs in with both goals and assists for the Suwon World Cup Stadium side. He may now be 37, but time has not hampered midfielder Yeom Ki-hun's effectiveness nor importance to the team. The 2006 AFC Champions League winner was second to Taggart in goals scored for Suwon in 2019 and third in assists.

Coach: Park Kun-ha

Suwon legend Park Kun-ha assumed the role of head coach in September, taking over from interim Ju Seung-jin who stepped in following the resignation of Lee Lim-saeng in July. With the K League 1 side struggling domestically they turned to Park, who spent almost his entire playing career with the club, winning multiple domestic titles and two Asian Club Championships. The 49-year-old's task will be to get Suwon moving in an upwards direction as they look to challenge for major honours once more.





GROUP G



Vissel Kobe



Suwon Samsung Bluewings



Guangzhou Evergrande



GUANGZHOU EVERGRANDE



Qualified as: Chinese Super League – Winners

Founded: 1954

Stadium: Tianhe Stadium, Guangzhou (60,000)

Chinese Super League (8): 2019, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011

Chinese FA Cup (2): 2016, 2012

AFC Champions League (2): 2015, 2013; Semi-Finals 2019; Quarter-Finals 2017, 2014, 2012; Round of 16 2018; Group Stage 2016



China PR

Overview

Guangzhou Evergrande are an Asian powerhouse, having won the AFC Champions League on two occasions, in 2013 when they defeated FC Seoul on away goals and then again by overcoming the United Arab Emirates' Al Ahli 1-0 in 2015. The Tianhe Stadium side won seven straight Chinese Super League titles between 2011 and 2017 before Shanghai SIPG ended their dominance in 2018. However, Guangzhou returned to their pedestal at the end of 2019 as they finished two points clear of Beijing FC at the top.

Key Players

After spending much of the past two years on loan, Ricardo Goulart has returned to his parent club and the 2015 AFC Champions League MVP and top scorer will have a crucial role to play, particularly in the absence of Brazil star Paulinho. Talisca's 2019 season was curtailed by injury, yet he still managed five goals on the continent. Powerful, pacey and good in the air, the 26-year-old has the armoury to cause defences considerable problems. Korea Republic defender Park Ji-soo was superb for Guangzhou last year and, having stepped into the role vacated by compatriot Kim Young-gwon, the 26-year-old has proved a composed presence in defence.

Coach: Fabio Cannavaro

Prior to 2019, Fabio Cannavaro's best spell as a head coach came in leading Tianjin Quanjian first to promotion to the Chinese Super League and then into the AFC Champions League the following year. However, last year the Italian FIFA World Cup winner guided Guangzhou back to the summit of Chinese football, while he also led them to the semi-finals on the continent. A legend as a player with teams including Juventus and Real Madrid, Cannavaro appears to be coming of age as a manager.



GROUP H

 Sydney FC
  Yokohama F. Marinos
  Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors
  Shanghai SIPG

 Sydney FC
  Yokohama F. Marinos
  Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors
  Shanghai SIPG



SYDNEY FC



Qualified as: A-League Grand Final – Winners

Founded: 2004

Stadium: Jubilee Stadium, Sydney (20,505)

A-League Grand Final (5): 2020, 2019, 2017, 2010, 2006

A-League Premiership (4): 2020, 2018, 2017, 2010

AFC Champions League: Round of 16 2016; Group Stage 2019, 2018, 2011, 2007



Australia

Overview

With a record five A-League Championships, including three of the past four, most recently in August, Sydney FC are Australia's most successful football club. Once the home of Italian legend Alessandro del Piero, the Sky Blues' success domestically has not been replicated on the continent. This is their sixth appearance in the AFC Champions League, but only once have they made it past the group stage. That came back in 2016 when they were unlucky to lose in the Round of 16 to China PR's Shandong Luneng on away goals.

Key Players

Approaching his 36th birthday, former Serbia international Milos Ninkovic remains one of the first names on the Sydney FC team sheet and the attacking midfielder helped the New South Wales side claim back-to-back A-League Grand Final victories earlier in 2020. That marked his third title since joining the Sky Blues in 2015 and added to league championship medals won in his homeland and Ukraine. At the back, Rhyan Grant has emerged over the last 18 months as Australia's number one right-back with his consistent performances for club and country, while Ryan McGowan and Alex Wilkinson form a formidable central defensive partnership.

Coach: Steve Corica

Former Sydney FC captain Steve Corica faced the unenviable task of taking over from Graham Arnold when he departed to assume the role of Australian national team head coach, but he has already enjoyed considerable success. The former Socceroos midfielder, who also played for Sanfrecce Hiroshima in Japan, made more than 100 appearances for Sydney between 2005 and 2010 and scored the club's first-ever AFC Champions League goal in a 2-1 win over Shanghai Shenhua in China back in 2007.



YOKOHAMA F. MARINOS



Qualified as: J.League – Winners

Founded: 1972

Stadium: Yokohama International Stadium, Yokohama (72,327)

J.League (4): 2019, 2004, 2003, 1995

Emperors' Cup (2): 2013, 1992

AFC Champions League: Group Stage 2014, 2005, 2004

Asian Cup Winners' Cup (2): 1993, 1992



Japan

Overview

As one of the founding members of the J.League back in the early 1990s, Yokohama F. Marinos are steeped in history and tradition, winning the J.League title in 1995 and again in 2003 and 2004. A long title drought was broken in 2019 when they stormed home to win the league by six points. On the continent, however, success has been harder to come by. As Nissan Yokohama FC they won the Asian Cup Winners' Cup in 1992 and then again in 1993 as Yokohama F. Marinos, but in the AFC Champions League they've been unable to make it past the group stage in three attempts.

Key Players

Captain Takuya Kida is the spiritual heart of this Yokohama F. Marinos side. A product of the club's youth academy, the 26-year-old has amassed over 100 appearances for Yokohama and his experience and control in the middle of the park is key to their success. As is the attacking play of full-back Theerathon Bunmathan, the Thai international who has taken his game to another level since joining the club ahead of the 2019 season. Going forward, meanwhile, Teruhito Nakagawa scored goals for fun in the title-winning campaign, with his all-round performances earning him the J.League's Most Valuable Player award.

Coach: Ange Postecoglou

The former Socceroos coach faced a tough challenge in his first season in Japan, just avoiding relegation, but as he has done wherever he has coached, he managed to turn things around and clinch the J.League title in just his second season as he became the first Australian coach to do so. Having won back-to-back titles with Brisbane Roar in Australia, and claimed the 2015 AFC Asian Cup on home soil with the Socceroos, Postecoglou will be desperate to add another trophy to his growing resume in 2020.



GROUP H

Sydney FC Yokohama F. Marinos Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors Shanghai SIPG



SHANGHAI
SIPG



Qualified as: Chinese Super League – Third Place via Play-offs

Founded: 2005

Stadium: Yuanshen Stadium, Shanghai (16,000)

Chinese Super League (1): 2018

AFC Champions League: Semi-Finals 2017; Quarter-Finals 2019, 2016; Round of 16 2018



China PR

Overview

Shanghai SIPG were unable to defend their Chinese Super League title in 2019, falling behind eventual winners Guangzhou Evergrande and runners-up Beijing FC. They also fell short in the AFC Champions League, bettering their Round of 16 elimination in 2018 but unable to match their tournament-best of a semi-final finish in 2017, exiting in the quarter-finals to Urawa Red Diamonds. Nevertheless, Vitor Pereira's side are back in the AFC Champions League group stage for a fifth consecutive appearance after they defeated Thailand's Buriram United in the 2020 play-offs.

Key Players

Since 2017, Shanghai SIPG's attack has been led by a pair of world-renowned Brazilians who continue to shine in the AFC Champions League. Aptly named, dynamic striker Hulk boasts raw power and pace and is among the most feared forwards in Asia. Meanwhile, former Chelsea playmaker Oscar is the silk to Hulk's steel and is routinely at the top end of assists and chances created in the tournament. Australian international Aaron Mooy joined Shanghai in August and the Sydney-born Socceroo is a smooth-passing midfielder with impressive vision and range to match, capable of playing the deep-lying quarterback-esque role or further forward in more advanced areas.

Coach: Vitor Pereira

Having guided Shanghai SIPG to their maiden Chinese Super League title in his first season at the club, Vitor Pereira and his team suffered a more challenging 2019 and the Portuguese tactician, who has also won titles in his homeland and Greece, will need to show the side's ability to return to their 2018 form. Pereira boasts Olympiacos, FC Porto, Fenerbahce and 1860 Munich on his resume, but going all the way in the AFC Champions League would undoubtedly be his greatest achievement.



GROUP H

Sydney FC Yokohama F. Marinos Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors Shanghai SIPG



JEONBUK
HYUNDAI
MOTORS



Qualified as: K League 1 – Winners

Founded: 1994

Stadium: Jeonju World Cup Stadium, Jeonju (42,477)

K League 1 (8): 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2015, 2014, 2011, 2009

Korean FA Cup (4): 2020, 2005, 2003, 2000

AFC Champions League (2): 2016, 2006; Runner-up 2011; Semi-Finals 2004; Quarter-Finals 2018, 2015, 2010, 2007; Round of 16 2019, 2014, 2013; Group Stage 2012



Korea Republic

Overview

There are few sides in Asia that can match the continental pedigree of Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors. The eight-time K League 1 champions have twice won the AFC Champions League, first in 2006 when they defeated Syria's Al Karamah 3-2, and then a decade later with another 3-2 aggregate win, this time over the United Arab Emirates' Al Ain. The champions for six of the last seven seasons in their homeland, they've only once failed to make it past the group stage. However, the Jeonju side will want to improve on recent showings when they were eliminated at the quarter-finals in 2018 and the last 16 in 2019.

Key Players

Back as a mainstay of the Jeonbuk line-up is Kim Bo-kyung, who played in the 2016 side that won the AFC Champions League after spending the earlier years of his career in Japan and England. The midfielder was named the 2019 K League's Most Valuable Player with Ulsan Hyundai and adds undoubted quality to the line-up. However, it was fellow midfielder Son Jun-ho who was the star of the 2020 campaign as this time it was he who picked up the MVP award after his excellent form was key in Jeonbuk overhauling Ulsan to claim another title. Gambia international Mo Barrow, meanwhile, arrived midway through the season and the pacy winger adds both creativity and goals to the starting line-up.

Coach: Jose Morais

Portuguese coach Jose Morais faced the unenviable task of replacing club legend Choi Kang-hee. But the former assistant to Jose Mourinho at FC Porto, Inter Milan, Real Madrid and Chelsea proved to be up to the job and made it three K League 1 titles in a row in 2019. Morais has recruited strongly ahead of the 2020 season and will next be targeting a return to the summit of Asian football for Jeonbuk.



ROLL OF HONOUR

AFC Champions League

Year	Winners	Score	Runners-up
2019	Al Hilal	3-0 agg	Urawa Red Diamonds
2018	Kashima Antlers	2-0 agg	Persepolis
2017	Urawa Red Diamonds	2-1 agg	Al Hilal
2016	Jeonbuk Motors	3-2 agg	Al Ain
2015	Guangzhou Evergrande	1-0 agg	Al Ahli
2014	Western Sydney Wanderers	1-0 agg	Al Hilal
2013	Guangzhou Evergrande	3-3 agg	FC Seoul
2012	Ulsan Hyundai	3-0	Al Ahli
2011	Al Sadd	2-2*	Jeonbuk Motors
2010	Seongnam Ilhwa	3-1	Zobahan
2009	Pohang Steelers	2-1	Al Ittihad
2008	Gamba Osaka	5-0 agg	Adelaide United
2007	Urawa Reds	3-1 agg	Sepahan
2006	Jeonbuk Motors	3-2 agg	Al Karama
2005	Al Ittihad	5-3 agg	Al Ain
2004	Al Ittihad	6-3 agg	Seongnam Ilhwa
2002-03	Al Ain	2-1 agg	BEC Tero Sasana

Asian Club Championship

Year	Winners	Score	Runners-up
2001-02	Suwon Bluewings	0-0*	Anyang Cheetahs
2000-01	Suwon Bluewings	1-0	Jubilo Iwata
1999-00	Al Hilal	3-2	Jubilo Iwata
1998-99	Jubilo Iwata	2-1	Esteghlal
1997-98	Pohang Steelers	0-0*	Dalian Wanda
1996-97	Pohang Steelers	2-1	Ilhwa Chunma
1995	Ilhwa Chunma	1-0	Al Nassr
1994-95	Thai Farmers Bank	1-0	Al Arabi
1993-94	Thai Farmers Bank	2-1	Oman Club
1992-93	Pas	1-0	Al Shabab
1991	Al Hilal	1-1*	Esteghlal
1990-91	Esteghlal	2-1	Liaoning
1989-90	Liaoning	3-2 agg	Nissan
1988-89	Al Saad	3-3 agg	Al Rasheed
1987	Yomiuri	w-o	Al Hilal
1986	Furukawa	g-s	Al Hilal
1985-86	Daewoo Royals	3-1	Al Ahli
1972-84	No competition		
1971	Maccabi Tel Aviv	w-o	Al Shorta
1970	Taj	2-1	Hapoel Tel Aviv
1969	Maccabi Tel Aviv	1-0	Yangzee
1967	Hapoel Tel Aviv	2-1	Selangor

* won on penalties; agg – aggregate (away goals win if level);
g-s – group-stage format; w-o – walkover



• 2019 Winners - Al Hilal



• 2018 Winners - Kashima Antlers

Early years

Inaugurated in 1967, the early years of the Asian Club Championship were dominated by clubs from Israel with Hapoel Tel Aviv claiming the maiden title after beating Malaysia's Selangor in the final in Bangkok. Maccabi Tel Aviv then won twice in three years either side of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Taj – now known as Esteghlal – who beat Hapoel. The competition then disappeared from the calendar after the 1971 edition.

Competition reborn

The tournament returned in 1985 and Daewoo Royals of the newly formed Korean K-League – inaugurated in 1983 – became the first winners from East Asia after beating Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli. The region dominated the competition in the late 1980s with pre-J.League sides Furukawa and Yomiuri prevailing before Qatar's Al Sadd broke the run in 1989.

West returns, Farmers rise

Clubs from Iran and Saudi Arabia came to the fore in the early 1990s as Tehran's Esteghlal beat defending champions Liaoning of China in July 1991, before losing their crown to Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal. Pas of Iran beat Saudi side Al Shabab in 1993, before Thai Farmers Bank claimed successive titles.

Professionalism brings success

The K-League dominated the mid-1990s as Ilhwa Chunma lifted the trophy in 1995 before Pohang Steelers won back-to-back titles in 1997 and 1998. Boosted by the foundation of professional leagues in Japan and China, the East won six of the last seven editions of the Asian Club Championship as Japan's Jubilo Iwata reached three straight finals, while Al Hilal flew the flag for the West in 2000 after Jubilo's 1999 success. Korea Republic's Suwon Bluewings won the last two editions of the Asian Club Championship in 2001 and 2002 after beating Jubilo and Anyang Cheetahs.

AFC Champions League era

The Asian Club Championship was discontinued in 2002 and merged with the Asian Cup Winners' Cup to form the AFC Champions League. Al Ain from the United Arab Emirates were victorious in the first final, which was delayed until October 2003 due to SARS and the Iraq War. The event followed a single-year format from 2004, with Saudi Arabia's Al Ittihad winning in 2004 and 2005 before Korea's Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors and Japanese duo Urawa Red Diamonds and Gamba Osaka lifted the prestigious trophy.

New format

A new dynamic format was launched in 2009 with only clubs and leagues professionally run as commercial entities eligible. Prize money was also increased, while a one-leg round of 16 and one-leg final were introduced. The showpiece final was held in Tokyo in 2009 and 2010, with K-League clubs Pohang Steelers and then Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma victorious. Qatar's Al Sadd became the first qualifiers to win the continental title when they defeated Jeonbuk, in Jeonju, in the 2011 final, before Korea's Ulsan Hyundai completed an unbeaten campaign with a 3-0 win over Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli on home soil a year later.

Two-legged finals return

Guangzhou Evergrande became the first Chinese side in 23 years to lift the title in 2013 after defeating Korea's FC Seoul on away goals, before Western Sydney Wanderers became the first Australian side to be crowned champions after overcoming Al Hilal. Guangzhou were again victorious in 2015 after edging the UAE's Al Ahli by a solitary goal and Jeonbuk added their second title by beating Al Ain 3-2 in 2016. Ten years after their first success, Urawa became two-time champions following their win over Al Hilal but, after Japan's Kashima Antlers defeated Iran's Persepolis in the 2018 final, Al Hilal gained revenge on Urawa by defeating the J.League side 3-0 on aggregate in 2019.

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