



AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2019

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START YOUR IMPOSSIBLE 

5

AFC MESSAGE

6

TOURNAMENT REVIEW

8



AL NASSR

12



AL SADD

16



AL ITTIHAD

20



AL HILAL

26

SHANGHAI
SIPG



30

URAWA RED DIAMONDS



34

GUANGZHOU EVERGRANDE



38

KASHIMA
ANTLERS



42

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 2019 AFC Champions League and the participating clubs, please visit www.the-afc.com.



Share the excitement and thrills



AFC MESSAGE



Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President

Dear friends,

It is my great pleasure to welcome everyone to the AFC Champions League quarter-finals for 2019 – the defining stage of the competition.

We have two teams from China PR and two from Japan in the East Zone and three from Saudi Arabia and one from Qatar in the West.

Congratulations to them on reaching this stage where the ultimate prize – the AFC Champions League trophy – is within touching distance for them all.

The AFC Champions League is our premier club competition and it continues to enthuse and excite fans in Asia and beyond.

We can all take great pride in the fact that the competition is now one of the best Continental club competitions in the world.

It is already one of the richest Continental tournaments, and this year, the AFC has also doubled the travel contribution for our clubs – and already we are seeing the benefits with some incredible performances.

Al Hilal, Al Nassr and Shanghai SIPG are in contention to capture their first-ever AFC Champions League title. Al Ittihad, Al Sadd, Guangzhou Evergrande, Kashima Antlers and Urawa Red Diamonds, meanwhile, are also in the running to clinch the ultimate prize for the second or even third time.

Also, at stake is a place at the FIFA Club World Cup in December, which moves to Qatar for the first time and, of course, the fact that Asian teams have finished runners-up twice in the last three seasons, reinforces the quality of our teams and competitions.

Our success is a tribute to everyone – the clubs, the Member Associations, our commercial partners, members of the media and, of course, you the fans – who witness an improvement in the competition year on year.

I have no doubts we will witness another exciting finish to the season with another classic final.

Good luck to everyone.

Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President



THE QUEST FOR GLORY

ASIA'S BIGGEST CLUB COMPETITION RETURNS WITH A STAR-STUDED CAST THAT IS SURE TO OFFER UP EXHILARATING ACTION AS EIGHT SIDES BATTLE IT OUT FOR THE RIGHT TO BE CROWNED KINGS OF ASIA.



No fewer than six of remaining sides in the 2019 AFC Champions League have appeared in the final over the years, with five of the teams having won the Continental competition in what is a hugely competitive line-up for the quarter-finals.

Three sides have a chance to be crowned the first-ever three-time AFC Champions League winners, with Urawa Red Diamonds, Guangzhou Evergrande and Al Ittihad all aiming to create history come November 24.

Defending champions Kashima Antlers, meanwhile, will look to become the first side to successfully retain the trophy since Al Ittihad won back-to-back AFC Champions Leagues in 2004 and 2005, while Shanghai SIPG are targeting a maiden Continental final.

Twice runners-up, Al Hilal have won numerous Asian titles but continue to chase that elusive first AFC Champions League crown, while they are joined in the last eight by city rivals Al Nassr, who are making their first appearance at this stage.

Qatari representation comes in the form of Al Sadd, who were the last team from West Asia to lift the coveted trophy – in 2011 – as they aim to go one better than a semi-final appearance last year.

After two preliminary rounds and a play-off round, the 2019 AFC Champions League Group Stage kicked off in early March, with eight former winners in contention for the Continent's biggest club prize.

Holders Kashima got off to a winning start in Group E by seeing off Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) of Malaysia, before claiming four points from two away games at China PR's Shandong Luneng and Gyeongnam FC of Korea Republic.

Successive defeats to the Koreans and JDT threatened to derail

their bid to retain the title, but a come-from-behind win over Shandong ensured they finished second in the standings behind the Chinese side.

The 2007 and 2017 champions Urawa returned to the competition after missing last year's edition and eased past Thailand's Buriram United 3-0 in their opening Group G game, while fellow two-time winners Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors of Korea Republic saw off Beijing FC.

Urawa then picked up just one point from their next three games but recovered to defeat Buriram 2-1 and then post a convincing 3-0 win over Beijing in a winner-takes-all clash to finish behind the Korean group winners.

Brazilians Talisca and Paulinho each scored as Guangzhou got off to a winning start against Japan's Sanfrecce Hiroshima in Group F, before they suffered a 3-1 defeat to Korean debutants Daegu FC.

The Chinese side, Sanfrecce and Daegu were all level pegging at the midway stage, with Melbourne Victory still to record a point. But the Japanese team went on to claim five successive wins and take top spot, while Guangzhou clinched second place after edging past Daegu 1-0 on Matchday Six.

Shanghai opened with a victory over Japan's Kawasaki Frontale in Group H, but then went on a four-match winless run as 2012 champions Ulsan Hyundai secured top spot with a game to spare.

The Chinese side went into their Matchday Six encounter against Ulsan needing to equal Kawasaki's scoreline in order to advance and they had few problems as Oscar netted a hat-trick in a 5-0 win.

In the West, Al Sadd recovered from defeat to Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli to claim 10 points from 12 in Group D and progress with a game to spare. Xavi then bowed out as a professional footballer

after a 2-0 Matchday Six defeat to Iranian side Persepolis, but was promptly installed as the club's head coach.

Al Ahli finished in second place after Abdulrahman Ghareeb's last-gasp winner in a 2-1 victory against Pakhtakor eliminated the Uzbeks in cruel fashion.

Two-time finalists Al Hilal, meanwhile, were impressive in Group C, winning four of their first five games to seal a return to the Round of 16 after missing out last year.

Qatar's Al Duhail claimed the runners-up spot ahead of Esteghlal and Al Ain although they were unable to replicate their stunning 100 percent record from a year earlier.

Al Ittihad lined up in Group B alongside the United Arab Emirates' Al Wahda, Lokomotiv of Uzbekistan and Qatar's Al Rayyan, and the Jeddah side eased to a 5-1 Matchday One win over Al Rayyan, only to suffer a 4-1 loss to Al Wahda in their next game.

But Al Ittihad and Al Wahda would run away with the group with the Emiratis finishing top and the Saudis in second.

Finally, Group A saw Iraq's return to the competition for the first time since 2008 and Al Zawraa's 5-0 win over the UAE's Al Wasl in Karbala on Matchday Two was the perfect way to mark the first-ever AFC Champions League match in Iraq.

But it was Iran's Zobahan and Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr who proved the best two teams, with the sides securing progression with a game to spare and then Zobahan finishing top of the standings after a scoreless draw against Al Nassr on Matchday Six.

Kashima came out on top of the all-Japan clash with Sanfrecce in the last 16, edging through on away goals after Shoma Doi scored twice in the second leg in Hiroshima as the contest finished 3-3 on aggregate.

A 2-1 home defeat to Ulsan in the first leg left Urawa with an uphill task, but Shinzo Koroki bagged a brace in a 3-0 win in Korea Republic that stunned the 2012 winners and saw the 2017 champions advance.

The first leg between Guangzhou and Shandong ended 2-1 in the former's favour but Shandong won the return meeting 3-2 after extra-time in Jinan and the game was ultimately decided from the spot. With the score at 5-5, Cui Peng missed allowing Zhong Yihao to step forward and seal a place in the last eight.

Shanghai also needed penalties to progress after both games against Jeonbuk ended 1-1. Hulk's late equaliser in Jeonju had taken the second leg to extra-time and his fellow Brazilian Oscar later scored the decisive spot kick.

In the West, Al Sadd proved too strong for their domestic rivals Al Duhail as they advanced to the quarter-finals for the second successive year. Akram Afif scored home and away as Xavi's team won 4-2 on aggregate.

Another same-country clash saw Saudi Arabian giants Al Hilal and Al Ahli square off and it was the former who returned to the last eight for the seventh time. Bafetimbi Gomis' first-leg hat-trick helped Al Hilal win 4-2 in Jeddah before a 1-0 defeat on home soil saw the two-time runners-up progress 4-3 on aggregate.

Two-time winners Al Ittihad overcame the 2010 runners-up Zobahan to book their place in the quarter-finals for the first time since 2014 as 2-1 and 4-3 wins ensured the Jeddah side advanced 6-4 on aggregate.

And finally, Al Nassr made it three Saudi teams in the latter stages by overcoming Al Wahda 4-3 over two legs after Moroccan Abderrazak Hamdallah netted in both games to seal a maiden last-eight appearance.



AL NASSR

Saudi Arabia

Qualified as: Saudi Pro League – Third Place via Play-offs
Founded: 1955
Stadium: King Fahd International Stadium, Riyadh (68,752)
Saudi Pro League (8): 2019, 2015, 2014, 1995, 1994, 1989, 1981, 1980

King's Cup (6): 1990, 1987, 1986, 1981, 1976, 1974
Asian Cup Winners' Cup (1): 1998
Asian Super Cup (1): 1998

AFC Champions League:
Round of 16 2011; Group Stage 2016, 2015

Coach Rui Vitoria

Having made his name with some of the lesser known clubs of Portuguese club football, including guiding Vitoria de Guimaraes to their maiden Portuguese Cup title, Rui Vitoria was lured to Benfica in 2015. He went on to win two league titles and a handful of cup competitions during three years with the Lisbon giants, while also reaching the quarter-finals of the 2015-16 UEFA Champions League. The 49-year-old departed Benfica in early 2019 and promptly joined Al Nassr in what was his first-ever coaching role outside his native Portugal. The move has so far proved a huge success as Vitoria fended off the challenge of Al Hilal to secure the Saudi Pro League title in May as well as guided Al Nassr into a maiden AFC Champions League quarter-final.



A third-place finish in the 2017-18 Saudi Pro League saw Al Nassr return to the AFC Champions League, via the play-offs, for the first time since 2016.

The Riyadh side went on to enjoy a superb start to 2019, advancing to the knockout rounds on the Continent for only the second time and winning the league title in their homeland after finishing just a point ahead of city rivals Al Hilal in a nail-biting end to the season.

In recent years, Al Nassr's domestic record is excellent, with the Riyadh giants having won three of the past six Saudi Pro Leagues, but their next task will be to show that form in the AFC Champions League, a competition they have struggled to make inroads in over the years.

Al Nassr made their competition debut back in 2011, advancing to the Round of 16 before being eliminated by the Islamic Republic of Iran's Zobahan.

They returned in 2015 but were unable to make it beyond the Group Stage and a similar scenario unfolded a year later as back-to-back defeats to Zobahan on Matchdays Five and Six ended any hopes of reaching the last 16.

While Al Nassr have tended to struggle on the Continent since the inception of the AFC Champions League, they

have achieved success in Asia in years gone by.

The Riyadh side won the now defunct Asian Cup Winners' Cup in 1997-98 after Bulgarian legend Hristo Stoichkov scored the only goal of the game in a 1-0 victory over Korea Republic's Suwon Samsung Bluewings, before they claimed the Asian Super Cup later that year after defeating another Korean team, Pohang Steelers, on away goals.

In 1995, meanwhile, Al Nassr finished as runners-up in the Asian Club Championship – then the biggest club tournament on the Continent – after losing to Korea's Ilhwa Chunma in the final.

The current campaign began in the play-offs with Al Nassr easing past Uzbekistan's AGMK in the Saudi capital to confirm their place in the Group Stage.

But Rui Vitoria's side got off to the worst possible start in Group A, going down 1-0 against the United Arab Emirates' Al Wasl in Dubai, before conceding in stoppage time on Matchday Two in a 3-2 defeat to Zobahan.

Al Nassr had left themselves a mountain to climb, but hope was restored when Abdulla Al Salem, Yahya Al Shehri, Omar Hawsawi and Giuliano all scored in a 4-1 victory over Iraq's Al Zawraa in Riyadh.

Back-to-back wins over the Iraqi side were secured in the most dramatic of fashion when Nawaf Al Farshan scored in the 98th minute to seal a come-from-behind 2-1 victory that moved them into second place in the standings.

Qualification to the last 16 was then secured on Matchday Five as Giuliano, Fahad Al Jumeiah and Al Salem all scored in a 3-1 home win over Al Wasl, before a scoreless draw with Zobahan saw Al Nassr finish in second place.

Having matched their best-ever performance in the AFC Champions League, Al Nassr were then paired with the United Arab Emirates' Al Wahda, who were appearing in the knockout rounds for the first time since 2007.

Al Nassr got off to the perfect start in the first leg in Riyadh, with Abderrazak Hamdallah opening the scoring inside 20 minutes, although the visitors secured a 1-1 draw after Leonardo equalised early in the second half to leave the game in the balance ahead of the second leg in Abu Dhabi.

The Saudi side fell behind as the half hour approached but Hamdallah levelled the contest and Giuliano added a second in first-half stoppage time. The Brazilian then all

but sealed passage to the last eight with just under 30 minutes remaining and, despite the hosts pulling one back, Vitoria's team advanced to their first quarter-final after a 4-3 aggregate win.

Qatar's Al Sadd await in the last eight with the 2011 champions aiming to progress to the semi-finals for the second successive year.

If Al Nassr are to advance even deeper into the competition, Al Shehri will likely be crucial, with the Saudi Arabia international having created more chances and made more assists than any other player in his side.

Giuliano is currently the top scorer with five goals to his name, but – having only returned to the starting line-up for the Round of 16 after missing Matchdays Three to Six – the 2018-19 Saudi Pro League's leading marksman Hamdallah will have a huge role to play in the latter rounds.

Experienced Saudi Arabia international Hawsawi is a regular and dependable presence in the backline, while Australian goalkeeper Brad Jones – formerly of Liverpool and Feyenoord – is a safe pair of hands as the last line of defence.



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	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
Zobahan	6	3	3	0	10	5	+5	12
Al Nassr	6	3	1	2	11	7	+4	10
Al Zawraa	6	2	2	2	14	9	+5	8
Al Wasl	6	1	0	5	4	18	-14	3

Group Stage

04/03/19
Al Wasl 1-0 Al Nassr
Fabio Lima 62

11/03/19
Al Nassr 2-3 Zobahan
Giuliano 5, Abderrazak Hamdallah 58;
Mohammad Nejadmehdi 30, Vahid Mohammadzadeh 39, Amir Motahari 90+1

08/04/19
Al Nassr 4-1 Al Zawraa
Abdulla Al Salem 24, Yahya Al Shehri 29, Omar Hawsawi 59, Giuliano 90+4; Ahmad Fadhel 12

23/04/19
Al Zawraa 1-2 Al Nassr
Alaa Abbas 30; Yahya Al Shehri 56; Nawaf Al Farshan 90+8

07/05/19
Al Nassr 3-1 Al Wasl
Giuliano 30, Fahad Al Jumeiah 34, Abdulla Al Salem 56; Khalil Khamis 90

29/05/19
Zobahan 0-0 Al Nassr

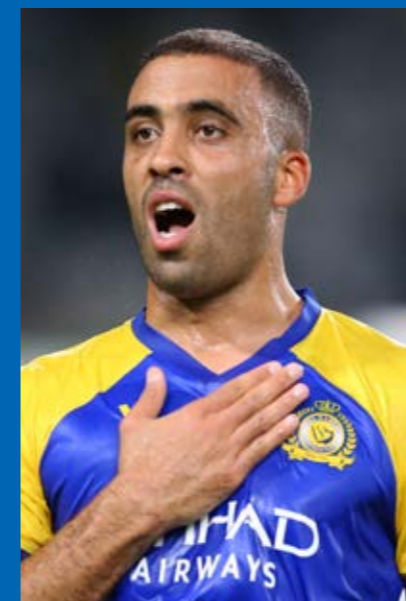
Round of 16

05/08/19
Al Nassr 1-1 Al Wahda
Abderrazak Hamdallah 17; Leonardo 53

12/08/19
Al Wahda 2-3 Al Nassr
Mohammed Al Menhali 27, Sebastian Tagliabue 79;
Abderrazak Hamdallah 41, Giuliano 45+1, 62

Key Player

Abderrazak Hamdallah



Moroccan striker Abderrazak Hamdallah has scored goals for fun since joining Al Nassr from Qatar's Al Rayyan in mid-2018. The 28-year-old, who has posted impressive scoring records in Norway, China PR and Qatar over the years, proved more than a shrewd acquisition as he netted 34 league goals to finish the Saudi Pro League's top scorer. After only featuring a couple of times in the Group Stage, Hamdallah was key in the Round of 16, scoring in both legs against Al Wahda as Al Nassr progressed to the last eight. Having fired Al Nassr to domestic glory, his next task will be to help the Riyadh side upset the odds on the Continent.



AL SADD

Qatar

Qualified as: Qatar Stars League – Runners-up

Founded: 1969

Stadium: Jassim bin Hamad Stadium, Doha (12,946)

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

Emir Cup of Qatar (16): 2017, 2015, 2014, 2007, 2005, 2003, 2001, 2000, 1994, 1991, 1988, 1986, 1985, 1982, 1977, 1975

Asian Club Championship (1): 1989

AFC Champions League (1): 2011

Semi-Finals 2018; Quarter-Finals 2014, 2005; Round of 16 2015; Group Stage 2010, 2008, 2007, 2006, 2004, 2003



Coach Xavi

Arguably one of the finest midfielders to ever play the game, Xavi followed in the footsteps of countryman Raul Gonzalez in representing Qatar's most successful club team. After a successful stint as a player, the Catalan maestro has now taken over the helm in his first coaching role. Best known for his exploits with Barcelona, Xavi bagged four UEFA Champions League winner medals, in addition to 17 domestic titles, and two FIFA Club World Cups. On the international scene, he was a key member of the Spain side that won two UEFA European Championship titles and the 2010 FIFA World Cup.



Al Sadd's semi-final finish in last year's AFC Champions League competition was the closest any Qatari club side have come to Asian glory since the White Wolves lifted the Continental title in 2011. The narrow defeat to Islamic Republic of Iran's Persepolis in the final four, while disappointing, was a significant return to form on recent editions where Al Sadd suffered the agony of back-to-back play-off stage exits

The Doha club returned to the 2019 competition determined to better their efforts from the previous edition and were rewarded with back-to-back quarter-final appearances in the AFC Champions League for the first time. Al Sadd emerged triumphant from their encounter with domestic rivals Al Duhail in the last 16 after finishing as Group D winners ahead of Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli.

Al Sadd remain the last West Asian side to lift the AFC Champions League title, memorably defeating Korea Republic's Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors, with 2018 being just their second appearance in the semi-finals. This is, however, their fifth time in the quarter-finals.

On the domestic front, Al Sadd reclaimed their mantle as the dominant force in the nation adding a long awaited record 14th title, their first since the 2012-13 season and just second since

2007.

Their AFC Champions League campaign began in disappointing fashion, however, with Omar Al Soma's brace condemning them to a 2-0 defeat away at Al Ahli. A late Baghdad Bounedjah goal got the Qataris back on track on Matchday Two with a 1-0 win against 2018 conquerors Persepolis.

Spanish legend Xavi scored a brace away at Pakhtakor but Al Sadd were pegged back each time by their determined Uzbek hosts in an action-packed 2-2 draw in Tashkent. Xavi continued his fine form on Matchday Four when he netted a third goal against Pakhtakor in the home tie and, once more, Bounedjah scored late on to ensure a second victory.

Al Sadd got their third win at the best possible time, in Matchday Five's clash against Al Ahli, which saw them head into the final Group Stage tie in top spot and with a place in the knockout stage assured.

A defeat away at Persepolis was not the ideal end to the first phase of the tournament but Al Ahli's late winner against Pakhtakor did ensure they would enter the Round of 16 as group winners.

The Matchday Six defeat in Tehran was also notable as it was the curtain call to Xavi's playing career, with the legendary

midfielder hanging up his boots after the match at Azadi Stadium.

The 39-year-old has now begun his coaching career, switching the pitch for the dugout, and among his first matches at the helm were the Round of 16 games against Al Duhail.

Akram Afif opened the scoring on the half hour in the first leg at Al Janoub Stadium, but Youssef Msakni equalised shortly before the interval and, with no further goals in the second 45 minutes, the tie was left firmly in the balance ahead of the return meeting.

First-half goals from Afif and Abdelkarim Hassan put the hosts in a strong position at Jassim bin Hamad Stadium but Edmilson pulled one back after the restart to ensure a nervy finale, before an Ahmed Yasser own goal in stoppage time sealed Al Sadd's passage following a 4-2 aggregate win.

Al Sadd now face a quarter-final against Al Nassr after the Saudi champions defeated the United Arab Emirates' Al Wahda. The Qatari team will be boosted by their form on home soil as they have a perfect record at Jassim bin Hamad Stadium in the 2019 edition.

Ahead of the 2019-2020 season, Al Sadd simultaneously strengthened their ranks and weakened their archrivals Al Duhail

with the capture of Korea Republic's Nam Tae-hee from the Red Knights. The talented Korean midfielder is capable of scoring goals from all angles and will be a big boost to the White Wolves.

Arguably the most exciting Qatari talent of a golden generation is Afif, who netted home and away in the Round of 16 and will now be looking to make it double Continental glory in 2019 after also being crowned an Asian champion with his nation.

Goalkeeper Saad Al Sheeb was named the best custodian at the AFC Asian Cup in January, while the defence in front of him contains reigning AFC Player of the Year Abdelkarim Hassan, Ro-Ro and Hamid Ismail.

In midfield, captain Hassan Al Haydos and Boualem Khoukhi were key parts of Felix Sanchez's Continental champions, while Ali Asad is another important cog in the Al Sadd line-up.

Up front, Bounedjah remains the main focus of their attack. The Algerian had already scored nine times by this stage of the tournament last year, on his way to picking up the top scorer award for 2018 with 13 goals, but this season he has found the going tough.

Just two goals so far is a disappointing return and Al Sadd will be looking for more from the 27-year-old if they are to go deep in the competition once again.



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ケルヒャー 検索



	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
Al Sadd	6	3	1	2	7	8	-1	10
Al Ahli	6	3	0	3	7	7	0	9
Pakhtakor	6	2	2	2	7	7	0	8
Persepolis	6	2	1	3	6	5	+1	7

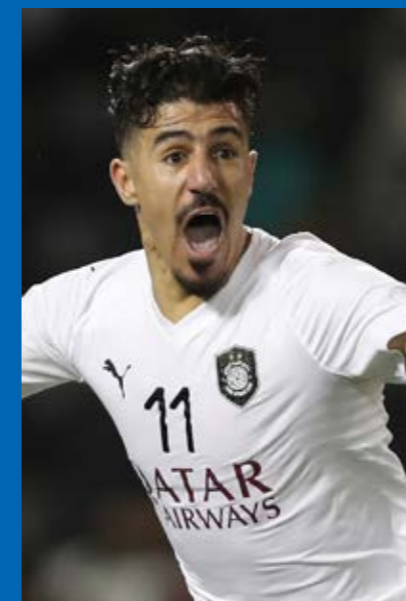
Group Stage

- 05/03/19
Al Ahli 2-0 Al Sadd
Omar Al Soma 32, 76
- 12/03/19
Al Sadd 1-0 Persepolis
Baghdad Bounedjah 90+5
- 09/04/19
Pakhtakor 2-2 Al Sadd
Khojiakbar Alijonov 9, Dragan Ceran 41; Xavi 6, 16
- 22/04/19
Al Sadd 2-1 Pakhtakor
Xavi 9, Baghdad Bounedjah 87; Egor Krimets 30
- 06/05/19
Al Sadd 2-1 Al Ahli
Ali Asad 9, Akram Afif 12; Omar Al Soma 51
- 20/05/19
Persepolis 2-0 Al Sadd
Mehdi Torabi 16, Ali Alipour 67

Round of 16

- 06/08/19
Al Duhail 1-1 Al Sadd
Akram Afif 30; Youssef Msakni 44
- 13/08/19
Al Sadd 3-1 Al Duhail
Akram Afif 20, Abdelkarim Hassan 34, Ahmed Yasser 90+1 OG; Edmilson Junior 56

Key Player Baghdad Bounedjah



With a scarcely believable goals-to-game ratio, Baghdad Bounedjah has proved to be one of the most prolific strikers to feature in West Asia over the last three seasons. His staggering overall tally in the Qatar Stars League prior to the 2019-20 campaign stood at 101 goal contributions (82 goals, 19 assists) in 61 games since his arrival from Tunisian giants Etoile du Sahel. And the six foot one Algerian showed his prodigious appetite for goals was not restricted to the domestic championship last year as the man from Oran scored 13 times to match Muriqui (2013) and Adriano's (2016) record in an AFC Champions League season.



AL ITTIHAD

Saudi Arabia

Qualified as: King's Cup – Winners

Founded: 1927

Stadium: King Abdullah Sports City, Jeddah (62,345)

Saudi Pro League (8): 2009, 2007, 2003, 2001, 2000, 1999, 1997, 1982

King's Cup (9): 2018, 2013, 2010, 1988, 1967, 1963, 1960, 1959, 1958

AFC Champions League (2): 2005, 2004

Runners-up 2009; Semi-Finals 2012, 2011; Quarter-Finals 2014, 2006; Group Stage 2016, 2010, 2008



Coach Jose Luis Sierra

Chilean coach Jose Luis Sierra is in his second spell in charge of Al Ittihad after returning to the helm in February, replacing predecessor Slavan Bilic. The 50-year-old was tasked with guiding the eight-time Saudi Pro League champions out of the relegation zone with nine matches left as well as navigating through the Group Stage of the 2019 AFC Champions League; both of which were accomplished. The mission now will be for Sierra to turn a solid foundation into trophies, such as he enjoyed in his previous stint at Al Ittihad (July 2016 to June 2018) when the club lifted the 2017 Crown Prince Cup and 2018 King's Cup titles.



Only archrivals Al Hilal have appeared in more AFC Champions League editions than Al Ittihad when it comes to Saudi Arabian representation in Asia's most prestigious club competition.

And yet, there is no question that it is Al Ittihad who can boast the greater success at the tournament since the revamp in 2002-2003. Back-to-back winners in 2004 and 2005, the Tigers of Jeddah also finished runners-up in 2009 and appeared in the semi-finals at the 2011 and 2012 editions.

Since that heyday, though, things have proved more difficult for the black and yellow striped men. In the six years prior to the 2019 edition, Al Ittihad appeared at just two previous AFC Champions Leagues, reaching the quarter-finals in 2014 and exiting at the Group Stage in 2016.

Domestically too, Saudi Arabia's oldest club have struggled. Although a Crown Prince Cup and a King's Cup were lifted in 2017 and 2018 respectively, one needs to go back to 2009 for the last time the club claimed the Saudi Pro League title.

And in the 2018-19 season, they certainly looked

further away than ever from ending that slump. At times under a real threat from relegation, Al Ittihad eventually finished a hugely disappointing 10th position, just three points clear of the drop and a giant 36 points behind champions Al Nassr.

Their AFC Champions League campaign so far, though, has proved a very welcome distraction from their domestic woes. A tournament that is well-loved and revered by their fan base, the two-time champions returned to the 2019 edition after a two-year absence and couldn't have asked for a better homecoming, inflicting a heavy 5-1 defeat on Qatar's Al Rayyan in their Matchday One opener.

Al Ittihad's momentum following the big win in Jeddah did hit a bump in the very next Continental fixture, however, when they suffered their own comprehensive 4-1 loss at the hands of Al Wahda in Abu Dhabi.

That setback was overcome at the halfway point in the Group Stage in a rollercoaster 3-2 win back on home turf against Uzbekistan's Lokomotiv with forward Fahad Al Muwallad scoring a penalty in injury time to secure a priceless victory.

The points were shared in the return meeting in

Tashkent when Romarinho's opener for the visitors was cancelled out by Temurkhujja Abdukholiqov in a 1-1 draw, a result that was notable for Al Ittihad having 20 shots registered but with only one goal to show for their efforts.

"We did not take advantage of the many opportunities we had to win the game, but we are happy with the point," admitted coach Jose Luis Sierra, following the game.

"Perhaps if we were a bit more clinical we could have taken all three, but I have no problems with our attack. Our forward line is doing very well and most importantly we are creating opportunities to score."

The Chilean tactician would have been heartened by the response in the penultimate Group Stage tie as both of his forwards, Nasser Al Shamrani and Romarinho, found the net in a 2-0 away win over Al Rayyan.

And the latter was also on target in the final Group B game as Al Ittihad signed off the first phase of the AFC Champions League with a draw at home to group winners Al Wahda to line up a Round of 16 clash against the Islamic Republic of Iran's Zobahan.

After falling behind early on in the first leg in Dubai, Luis Jimenez levelled before Ziyad Al Sahafi struck the winner to hand the Jeddah side the advantage ahead of the return meeting in Doha.

Emiliano Vecchio opened the scoring as half-time approached and, after Zobahan had equalised, an own goal and a Romarinho brace put Al Ittihad 4-1 up and cruising before they eventually advanced 6-4 on aggregate.

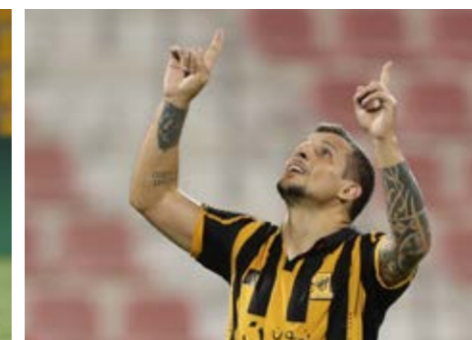
Their last 16 success now sees them in an all-Saudi clash against domestic rivals Al Hilal and there can be little doubt that this will be one of the most eagerly anticipated ties in the West region if not the entire quarter-finals.

While the Riyadh team will likely start as slight favourites, Al Ittihad's form on the Continent will give them cause for optimism, having not lost since Matchday Two and winning five of their eight games to date.

The arrival of midfielder Vecchio has proved a welcome addition, with the Argentine influential in the win over Zobahan. Ahead of him, Carlos Villanueva and Jimenez offer up plenty of creativity and Romarinho is a constant threat in and around the penalty area.

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	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
Al Wahda	6	4	1	1	14	9	+5	13
Al Ittihad	6	3	2	1	13	9	+4	11
Lokomotiv	6	2	1	3	10	11	-1	7
Al Rayyan	6	1	0	5	9	17	-8	3

Group Stage

04/03/19
Al Ittihad 5-1 Al Rayyan
 Fahad Al Muwallad 45, 78, Abdulaziz Al Aryani 45+1, Ziyad Al Sahafi 48, Abdulrahman Al Ghamdi 70; Gonzalo Viera 23

11/03/19
 Al Wahda 4-1 **Al Ittihad**
 Mohammed Al Menhali 16, Leonardo 52, 90+1, Ismail Matar 80; Nasser Al Shamrani 56

09/04/19
Al Ittihad 3-2 Lokomotiv
 Nasser Al Shamrani 48, Fahad Al Muwallad 50, 90+4; Jamshid Iskanderov 70, Filip Rajevac 82

22/04/19
 Lokomotiv 1-1 **Al Ittihad**
 Temurkhuja Abdukholiqov 36; Romarinho 12

07/05/19
 Al Rayyan 0-2 **Al Ittihad**
 Nasser Al Shamrani 62, Romarinho 67

21/05/19
Al Ittihad 1-1 Al Wahda
 Romarinho 68; Mohammed Al Menhali 71

Round of 16

05/08/19
Al Ittihad 2-1 Zobahan
 Luis Jimenez 9, Ziyad Al Sahafi 72; Ghasem Hadadifar 7

12/08/19
 Zobahan 3-4 **Al Ittihad**
 Luis Jimenez 53 OG, Hadi Mohammadi 72, Macauley Chrisantus 83; Emiliano Vecchio 45+1, Mohammadbagher Sadeghi 54 OG, Romarinho 64, 70

Key Player
Romarinho



Now in his fifth consecutive AFC Champions League campaign, prolific Brazilian striker Romarinho knows what it takes to find the net in the Continent's premier club competition having found success with three different sides in three different nations. Stand-out campaigns remain the 2016 edition, where the South American helped Qatar's El Jaish to the semi-finals, and last year's run with the UAE's Al Jazira that saw a Round of 16 finish. Now with his third AFC Champions League side, Al Ittihad, Romarinho has again proved to be the man to play a focal point in the attack, scoring in three games running in the Group Stage to help the Saudis into the knockout rounds, where he has already added a further two goals.





AL HILAL

Saudi Arabia

Qualified as: Saudi Pro League –Winners

Founded: 1957

Stadium: King Saud University Stadium, Riyadh (25,000)

Saudi Pro League (15): 2018, 2017, 2011, 2010, 2008, 2005, 2002, 1998, 1996, 1990, 1988, 1986, 1985, 1979, 1977

King's Cup (8): 2017, 2015, 1989, 1984, 1982, 1980, 1964, 1962

Asian Club Championship (2): 2000, 1991

Asian Cup Winners' Cup (2): 2002, 1997

Asian Super Cup (2): 2000, 1997

AFC Champions League: Runners-up 2017, 2014; Semi-Finals 2015, 2010; Quarter-Finals 2012, 2007; Round of 16 2016, 2013, 2011, 2009; Group Stage 2018, 2006, 2004, 2003

Coach

Razvan Lucescu

Razvan Lucescu was entrusted with the head coach role after winning the league-cup double with Greek side PAOK in 2018-19, with the all-conquering team also remaining unbeaten throughout the league season. Son of the legendary Romanian coach Mircea Lucescu, the 50-year-old enjoyed cup success with Rapid Bucharest in his homeland in the early years of his managerial career, while he also was head coach of Romania between 2009 and 2011. A first foray into Asian football saw Lucescu win the Qatari Stars Cup with El Jaish in 2012-13, before three successful years at Greek side Xanthi earned him a move to PAOK, where he masterminded only the third league title in their history.



After a disappointing AFC Champions League campaign in 2018 saw Al Hilal's run of nine successive knockout round appearances come to an end, the Saudi Arabian giants have returned to the quarter-finals and are once again looking a strong contender for Continental glory.

Two years ago, Al Hilal reached the final for the second time but, just like in 2014 when they lost to Australia's Western Sydney Wanderers, they missed out by a one-goal margin suffering a narrow 2-1 aggregate defeat to Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds as the Riyadh side endured further heartbreak.

Nevertheless, Al Hilal remain one of the most successful clubs in Asian football, having twice won each of the Asian Club Championship, Asian Cup Winners' Cup and Asian Super Cup, as well as a record number of domestic honours.

And after being denied a third consecutive Saudi Pro League title by city rivals Al Nassr earlier in 2019, Al Hilal have added incentive to finally win Asia's biggest club competition and lift a trophy they have long since coveted.

Paired in Group C with two of the sides who ensured Al Hilal's 2018 campaign ended at the Group Stage – the

United Arab Emirates' Al Ain and the Islamic Republic of Iran's Esteghlal – the Saudi side would get their revenge.

Veteran Mohammad Al Shalhoub netted the only goal of the game as Al Hilal claimed a first-ever victory in Al Ain, before Frenchman Bafetimbi Gomis scored his maiden AFC Champions League goal in a 3-1 win over Qatar's Al Duhail.

A slight setback followed with a 2-1 defeat to Esteghlal on Matchday Three but Sebastian Giovinco's goal made it three wins from four as the Iranian side were seen off 1-0 in the return fixture and Al Hilal edged closer to the last 16.

The win would prove Croatian coach Zoran Mamic's last in the position after he was dismissed following a 5-0 home loss to Al Taawoun in the King's Cup semi-final. Pericles Chamusca was brought in on an interim basis until the end of the domestic season, with one of his targets being to guide the side to the AFC Champions League knockout rounds.

The Brazilian did precisely that as qualification to the next phase as group winners was secured with a game to spare after an early goal from Hattan Bahebri and a late

strike from Shalhoub claimed a 2-0 victory over Al Ain to also eliminate the Emirati side. Gomis then added another two goals to his tally on Matchday Six in a 2-2 draw against Al Duhail, who joined the Saudis in the Round of 16.

With Razvan Lucescu now in full-time charge, a hotly anticipated match-up against domestic rivals Al Ahli was first on the agenda for the Romanian as Al Hilal faced Saudi opposition in the competition for the first time since losing to another Jeddah team, Al Ittihad, in 2011.

But there was to be no such misery this time round as Gomis twice levelled in the first leg at King Abdullah Sports City before completing his hat-trick midway through the second half. Abdullah Al Hafith then gave Al Ahli a mountain to climb in the reverse fixture by securing a 4-2 victory.

With the Jeddah side needing to score at least three in Riyadh, Al Hilal started as strong favourites and, although Abdulfattah Asiri scored just before half-time, the 1-0 defeat saw Lucescu's team progress 4-3 on aggregate to line up a mouthwatering date with Al Ittihad.

In striker Gomis and creative forward Giovinco, Al

Hilal boast the attacking prowess to rival any side on the Continent, while recent Peruvian signing Andre Carrillo adds some South American flair to the side. The acquisition of Korea Republic defensive midfielder Jang Hyun-soo, meanwhile, further strengthens a squad with high aspirations for the title.

The core of the side, though, is made up by established Saudi Arabia internationals, with full-backs Mohammed Al Burayk and Yasser Al Shahrani constant threats down the flanks and midfielders Abdullah Otayf and Salman Al Faraj a solid unit in the centre of the park.

Wide midfielder Bahebri joined prior to the 2019 campaign and forward Salem Al Dawsari is arguably the finest Saudi player of the current generation. Still going strong at the age of 38, club legend Al Shalhoub has spent his entire career with Al Hilal and would love nothing more than to add an AFC Champions League medal to his already bulging trophy cabinet.

If Al Hilal are to lift the Continental title, they will have to end a West Asian drought that stretches all the way back to 2011 when Qatar's Al Sadd were crowned champions after defeating Korea Republic's Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors.



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	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
Al Hilal	6	4	1	1	10	5	+5	13
Al Duhail	6	2	3	1	11	8	+3	9
Esteghlal	6	2	2	2	6	8	-2	8
Al Ain	6	0	2	4	4	10	-6	2

Group Stage

- 05/03/19
Al Ain 0-1 Al Hilal
Mohammad Al Shalhoub 65
- 12/03/19
Al Hilal 3-1 Al Duhail
Carlos Eduardo 25, Ali Al Bulaihi 77, Bafetimbi Gomis 79; Shoya Nakajima 75
- 08/04/19
Esteghlal 2-1 Al Hilal
Ali Karimi 5, Pejman Montazeri 30; Bafetimbi Gomis 71
- 23/04/19
Al Hilal 1-0 Esteghlal
Sebastian Giovinco 51
- 06/05/19
Al Hilal 2-0 Al Ain
Hattan Bahebri 1, Mohammad Al Shalhoub 90
- 20/05/19
Al Duhail 2-2 Al Hilal
Youssef El Arabi 15, Khalid Muneer 90+2; Bafetimbi Gomis 29, 55

Key Player Bafetimbi Gomis



Bafetimbi Gomis has scored goals at the highest level in his native France, England and Turkey, while he has also earned 12 caps for his country. After starting his playing days with Saint-Etienne, the striker went on to enjoy five years at Lyon in what was arguably the finest period of his career. After a two-year spell in England's Premier League with Swansea City and year with Olympique Marseilles, Gomis won the Turkish Super Lig with Galatasaray, finishing as the top scorer having netted almost a goal a game. Powerful, quick and good in the air, Gomis has already shown what he is capable of in the AFC Champions League and Al Hilal will hope his goals will fire them to Continental glory.

Round of 16

- 06/08/19
Al Ahli 2-4 Al Hilal
Omar Al Soma 6, Djaniny 39; Bafetimbi Gomis 15, 48, 65, Abdullah Al Hafith 81
- 13/08/19
Al Hilal 0-1 Al Ahli
Abdulfattah Asiri 42



QUARTER-FINAL FIRST LEG

26/8/2019
King Fahd International Stadium
Riyadh

QUARTER-FINAL SECOND LEG

16/9/2019
Jassim bin Hamad Stadium
Doha

QUARTER-FINAL FIRST LEG

27/8/2019
King Abdulla Sports City
Jeddah

QUARTER-FINAL SECOND LEG

17/9/2019
King Saud University Stadium
Riyadh

QUARTER-FINAL FIRST LEG

27/8/2019
Shanghai Stadium
Shanghai

QUARTER-FINAL SECOND LEG

17/9/2019
Saitama Stadium 2002
Saitama

QUARTER-FINAL FIRST LEG

28/8/2019
Tianhe Stadium
Guangzhou

QUARTER-FINAL SECOND LEG

18/9/2019
Kashima Soccer Stadium
Kashima



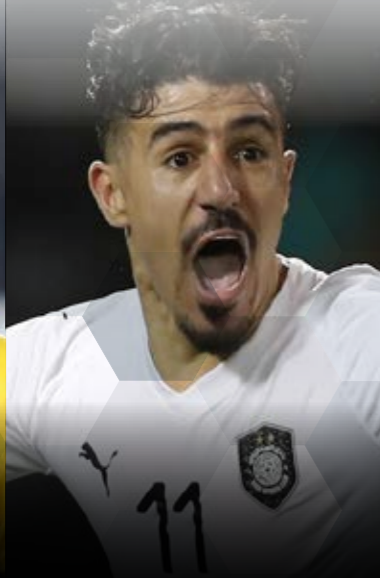
AL NASSR

Saudi Arabia



AL SADD

Qatar



AL ITTIHAD

Saudi Arabia



AL HILAL

Saudi Arabia



**SHANGHAI
SIPG**

China PR



**URAWA RED
DIAMONDS**

Japan



**GUANGZHOU
EVERGRANDE**

China PR



**KASHIMA
ANTLERS**

Japan





SHANGHAI SIPG



China PR

Qualified as: Chinese Super League - Winners

Founded: 2005

Stadium: Shanghai Stadium, Shanghai (56,842)

Chinese Super League (1): 2018

AFC Champions League:

Semi-Finals 2017; Quarter-Finals 2016;

Round of 16 2018

Coach

Vitor Pereira

Having only played at amateur level during his playing days, Vitor Pereira went on to make his name as a coach and, following spells with Porto's youth teams and on the backroom staff, he was appointed head coach of the Portuguese giants in 2011. After adding two league titles to Porto's trophy cabinet, Pereira spent a year with Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli before winning another league championship with Greek powerhouse Olympiacos. Stints in Turkey and Germany followed before the now 51-year-old took over the Shanghai SIPG hot seat from fellow Portuguese Andre Villas-Boas at the end of 2017. In his first season in charge he masterminded the end of Guangzhou Evergrande's seven-year reign to steer Shanghai to a first-ever Chinese Super League title.



Back in the quarter-finals for the third time in four years, Shanghai SIPG are the only remaining side in the East Zone who have yet to taste Continental glory, but the 2018 Chinese Super League champions will be confident this is their year.

Shanghai made their AFC Champions League debut in 2016 and advanced all the way to the last eight before a heavy defeat to eventual winners Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors. They then bettered that performance the following year by reaching the semi-finals, only to narrowly fall at the hands of Urawa Red Diamonds, who would go on to lift the title.

Last year, under current coach Vitor Pereira, the Chinese team again progressed from the Group Stage but this time were eliminated by Kashima Antlers in the last 16 and, with the J.League side also going on to win the competition, Shanghai have a strange record of having only been ousted by the eventual champions.

But Pereira's appointment has proved a shrewd one nonetheless, with his Shanghai side finally ending Guangzhou Evergrande's dominance in the Chinese Super League by winning the title at the end of 2018 and in doing so claiming their first major honour.

They returned to the AFC Champions League for the fourth successive year although their form in the Group Stage was inconsistent and they only just managed to edge through to the last 16.

A late penalty by their captain and talisman, Hulk, on Matchday One saw them off to a winning start in Group H after defeating Japanese champions Kawasaki Frontale at Shanghai Stadium, before a 1-0 defeat away at Ulsan Hyundai.

Pereira's team then drew 3-3 at Sydney FC, salvaging a point through the now departed Elkeson's late equaliser, before the two sides played out a 2-2 draw in China to leave qualification firmly in the balance.

Hulk broke the deadlock in a crucial Matchday Five encounter at Kawasaki when he scored one of the goals of the tournament so far by running half the length of the pitch and finishing with aplomb. But the J.League team went 2-1 up after the interval to leave Shanghai in a perilous position, only for the Brazilian to add his second with 20 minutes to play as the visitors claimed a crucial point.

That result left qualification in Shanghai's hands as they went into their final game – at home to group winners Ulsan

– a point ahead of Kawasaki and needing only to match the Japanese side's result to advance to a fourth consecutive knockout round.

And Shanghai had few problems in overcoming the Koreans as Oscar netted a hat-trick in a comprehensive 5-0 victory to line up a clash with their 2016 conquerors Jeonbuk.

Pereira's side couldn't have got off to a worse start at Shanghai Stadium, though, as Moon Seon-min scored the second-fastest goal of the tournament this year to put Jeonbuk one up. But defender Wang Shenchao levelled shortly before the interval and, after Hulk struck the woodwork late on, the game eventually ended all square.

Jeonbuk began as favourites in the second leg in Jeonju, although the visitors were desperate to avenge the 5-0 loss from three years earlier. It was the home team who broke the deadlock, though, with the towering Kim Shin-wook netting just before the half hour. But once again Hulk would prove Shanghai's savior, equalising late on to force extra-time and eventually penalties.

The AFC Champions League's all-time leading scorer Lee Dong-gook missed the first kick of the shootout and would be made to pay as Pereira's side scored all five of their

efforts from 12 yards to secure a place in the last eight.

Next up Shanghai face Urawa in a repeat of the 2017 semi-final and, once more, they will host the first leg. In four years of Continental action and 19 games in front of home support, the Chinese side have still yet to lose at Shanghai Stadium.

As ever, they will look to Hulk for inspiration, with the 33-year-old skipper thriving from wearing the armband. Elsewhere, fellow Brazilian Oscar has created more chances than any other player in this season's tournament, while classy Uzbekistan international Odil Ahmedov has the ability to dictate play from the centre of the park.

While the goals have flowed over the years, they have often been leaked at the other end, but defender Wang has been solid in the current campaign and has even popped up with the odd goal. Having recently claimed China's Number One jersey, goalkeeper Yan Junling will also be key to his side's chances.

Finally, the arrival of Marko Arnautovic adds intrigue, with the enigmatic Austrian set to make his first foray into Asian football. A classy operator when on his game, the 30-year-old has the potential to set the tournament alight.



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Key Player Hulk



The man for the big occasion, Hulk has been at Shanghai SIPG since mid-2016 and holds a strong claim to be among the club's best-ever signings. In his first full season, he netted nine times in the AFC Champions League en route to a first semi-final. A year later and the former Porto and Zenit Saint Petersburg forward was instrumental in Shanghai's march towards a maiden Chinese Super League title, scoring 13 goals and creating a further 12. The Brazilian boasts power, speed, skill and an eye for a goal and will be vital if Shanghai are to become only the second side from China to lift the AFC Champions League.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
Ulsan Hyundai	6	3	2	1	5	7	-2	11
Shanghai SIPG	6	2	3	1	13	8	+5	9
Kawasaki Frontale	6	2	2	2	9	6	+3	8
Sydney FC	6	0	3	3	5	11	-6	3

Group Stage

- 06/03/19
Shanghai SIPG 1-0 Kawasaki Frontale
Hulk 89
- 13/03/19
Ulsan Hyundai 1-0 Shanghai SIPG
Junior Negrao 66
- 10/04/19
Sydney FC 3-3 Shanghai SIPG
Siem de Jong 3, Adam Le Fondre 32, Alex Brosque 84; Lu Wenjun 27, Yu Hai 36, Elkeson 89
- 23/04/19
Shanghai SIPG 2-2 Sydney FC
Elkeson 47, Wang Shenchao 59; Brandon O'Neill 33, Adam Le Fondre 62
- 07/05/19
Kawasaki Frontale 2-2 Shanghai SIPG
Leandro Damiao 13, Shogo Taniguchi 66; Hulk 6, 71
- 21/05/19
Shanghai SIPG 5-0 Ulsan Hyundai
Oscar 7, 42, 76, Li Shenglong 67, Hu Jinghang 88

Round of 16

- 19/06/19
Shanghai SIPG 1-1 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors
Wang Shenchao 39; Moon Seon-min 1
- 26/06/19
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 1-1 Shanghai SIPG
Kim Shin-wook 27; Hulk 80
Shanghai win 5-3 on penalties



URAWA RED DIAMONDS

Japan

Qualified as: Emperor's Cup – Winners

Founded: 1950

Stadium: Saitama Stadium 2002, Saitama (63,700)

J.League (1): 2006

Emperor's Cup (3): 2018, 2006, 2005

AFC Champions League (2): 2017, 2007

Semi-Finals 2008; Rounds of 16 2016;

Group Stage 2015, 2013



Coach Tsuyoshi Otsuki

With coaching experience from the likes of Mito Hollyhock, Omiya Ardija and Vegalta Sendai, 46-year-old Tsuyoshi Otsuki now faces his biggest challenge yet as he takes the helm for Urawa's upcoming 2019 AFC Champions League knockout stage campaign.

Otsuki has been a member of the backroom staff at the Saitama club since 2012, and was briefly in charge after the dismissal of 2017 AFC Champions League-winning coach Takafumi Hori in April 2018. Upon the appointment of Oswaldo de Oliveira later that month, Otsuki took on the assistant coach role under the Brazilian. However, a little more than a year later, Otsuki was once more put in the hot seat after de Oliveira's dismissal in May.



There is a feeling amongst those at Urawa Red Diamonds of unfinished business at the AFC Champions League. Winners in 2017, the Reds were unable to qualify for the 2018 edition and thus never had the opportunity to retain their title.

The return to the Continental competition this year has, instead, been perceived as a belated defence of the championship they memorably lifted at Saitama Stadium after a victory over Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal.

"I was watching the 2018 AFC Champions League on the television and it made me feel frustrated and regretful," recalled defender Tomoaki Makino, who played every minute of every game in the victorious 2017 campaign.

"We played the whole of the 2018 season with the target of getting back into the competition and now I'm so happy we are here. We will fight as one team and challenge to become champions."

And so far, the 'title defence' is on track as Urawa secured their fourth quarter-final appearance since the 2002-2003 AFC Champions League revamp when they edged out Korea Republic side Ulsan Hyundai in the last 16 after finishing second in Group G ahead of China PR's Beijing FC.

Urawa famously became the first Japanese side to win the rebranded AFC Champions League in 2007, a year before rivals Gamba Osaka, and also reached the semi-finals in 2008, but since then had struggled to make an impression on the tournament until a decade on from their Continental crowning.

Initially led by coach Mihailo Petrovic before he was replaced in the summer by Takafumi Hori, Urawa went all the way to the 2017 AFC Champions League final before edging Saudi Arabia giants Al Hilal 2-1 on aggregate to lift the trophy in front of over 57,000 fans at Saitama Stadium.

Unable to defend their title, due to failing to qualify for the 2018 tournament, Urawa were back at this year's competition and began their campaign in style with a comprehensive 3-0 victory over Thailand's Buriram United courtesy of a brace from youngster Daiki Hashioka.

Urawa's attackers drew a blank in their next two ties, however, in a goalless draw away at Beijing FC before a narrow 1-0 home defeat to eventual Group G winners Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors.

A second defeat, in the return meeting with Jeonbuk at Jeonju World Cup Stadium, saw Urawa's hopes of a Round of

16 place hanging by a thread, but an important away victory in Thailand against Buriram meant a winner-takes-all match on the final Matchday against Beijing.

The Chinese Super League side had been on a tear in their domestic championship and the scene was set for a titanic contest at Saitama Stadium, but the hosts shrugged off the pressure and goals from Kazuki Nagasawa, Yuki Muto and Shinzo Koroki secured an emphatic 3-0 victory to seal their place in the last 16.

This meant a meeting with Korea's Ulsan, the Group H winners, in a battle of former Continental champions.

Although Urawa lost the first leg 2-1 at home courtesy of goals from Joo Min-kyu and Hwang Il-su, they were able to come out on top in style in the return meeting at Ulsan Munsu Football Stadium, where Koroki's brace and Ewerton's late strike saw the visitors secure a stunning 3-0 away win for a 4-2 aggregate scoreline victory.

They will now face a quarter-final against familiar foes with 2017 semi-final opponents Shanghai SIPG their last eight obstacle. With five goals so far, including his two vital headers against Ulsan in the quarter-finals, fan-favourite Koroki will again be leading the line and he is also a man on

a mission.

"I really want to win the AFC Champions League again," said the 33-year-old, who has been at Urawa since 2013.

"The whole team has that goal in mind [to repeat the efforts from 2017] so we absolutely want to keep winning to achieve that.

"We're a team full of great players – a collection not individuals – and so there's always options throughout the squad. It doesn't matter who plays; we are together as a unit."

As Koroki says, Urawa have had contributions from all areas of the field. Muto and Kenyu Sugimoto have played their part in the attack with some important goals, while just behind the forwards 2017 AFC Champions League MVP Yosuke Kashiwagi continues to pull the strings as chief playmaker in midfield.

Japan international defender Makino remains the experienced and demonstrably passionate veteran in the rearguard, while Ewerton and Mauricio Antonio possess the Brazilian touch that has always been an element of successful Urawa sides in the AFC Champions League that have included the likes of Robson Ponte in 2007 and Rafael Silva in 2017.

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	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors	6	4	1	1	7	3	+4	13
Urawa Red Diamonds	6	3	1	2	9	4	+5	10
Beijing FC	6	2	1	3	6	8	-2	7
Buriram United	6	1	1	4	3	10	-7	4

Group Stage

- 06/03/19
Urawa Red Diamonds 3-0 Buriram United
Tomoaki Makino 50, Daiki Hashioka 75, 88
- 13/03/19
Beijing FC 0-0 Urawa Red Diamonds
- 09/04/19
Urawa Red Diamonds 0-1 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors
Adriano 77
- 24/04/19
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 2-1 Urawa Red Diamonds
Ricardo Lopes 12, Kim Shin-wook 48; Shinzo Koroki 58
- 07/05/19
Buriram United 1-2 Urawa Red Diamonds
Pedro Junior 13; Shinzo Koroki 3, Yuki Muto 23
- 21/05/19
Urawa Red Diamonds 3-0 Beijing FC
Kazuki Nagasawa 34, Yuki Muto 41, Shinzo Koroki 81

Round of 16

- 19/06/19
Urawa Red Diamonds 1-2 Ulsan Hyundai
Kenyu Sugimoto 37; Joo Min-kyu 42, Hwang Il-su 80
- 26/06/19
Ulsan Hyundai 0-3 Urawa Red Diamonds
Shinzo Koroki 41, 80, Ewerton 87

Key Player Shinzo Koroki



One of the most popular players amongst the Urawa Red Diamonds support, Shinzo Koroki has taken his scoring feats to greater levels at this year's edition of the AFC Champions League. Having scored four in the entire 2017 campaign that saw the Saitama side lift the title, Koroki had already netted three by the end of the 2019 Group Stage with important goals in the final two Group G ties against Buriram United and Beijing FC. But by far his most important contribution so far came against Ulsan Hyundai. With Urawa 2-1 down from the first leg, Koroki stepped up to the plate with a pair of fine goals to wrest the initiative back to his side. If he can continue to find the net when it is most needed, Urawa could match their 2017 glory.



GUANGZHOU EVERGRANDE

China PR

Qualified as: Chinese Super League – Runners-up

Founded: 1954

Stadium: Tianhe Stadium, Guangzhou (60,000)

Chinese Super League (7): 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011

Chinese FA Cup (2): 2016, 2012

AFC Champions League (2): 2015, 2013

Quarter-Finals 2017, 2014, 2012; Round of 16 2018;

Group Stage 2016



Coach Fabio Cannavaro

One of the greatest defenders of his generation, Fabio Cannavaro captained Italy to FIFA World Cup glory in 2006 in what was his finest achievement as a player, while he also tasted league success with Real Madrid and won several cups with Parma. Since hanging up his boots, Cannavaro has had short spells coaching in the Middle East as well as a stint at Guangzhou between the reigns of Marcello Lippi and Luiz Felipe Scolari, but it was at Tianjin Quanjian where he enjoyed most success. Cannavaro guided Tianjin to promotion from the Chinese second tier before finishing third in 2017 and securing a place in the 2018 AFC Champions League. Now back in southern China, he is tasked with reclaiming both the AFC Champions League and Chinese Super League titles.



Two-time AFC Champions League winners Guangzhou Evergrande are aiming to become the first side to win the competition on three occasions, having also tasted Continental glory in 2013 and 2015.

Having won their first of seven straight Chinese Super League titles in 2011, Guangzhou made their AFC Champions League debut a year later, reaching the quarter-finals before being ousted by Saudi Arabia's Al Ittihad.

But under FIFA World Cup-winning coach Marcello Lippi, the club from Guangdong province returned a year later to advance all the way to the final and claim the title on away goals following a 3-3 aggregate draw against FC Seoul.

In 2014, Guangzhou were eliminated by eventual champions Western Sydney Wanderers, but coached by another FIFA World Cup winner in Brazilian Luiz Felipe Scolari they went all the way once more in 2015. Brazilian Elkeson – who scored home and away against FC Seoul in 2013 – netted the only goal in the second leg of the final as a narrow 1-0 aggregate win over the United Arab Emirates' Al Ahli saw them crowned champions for a second time.

The past three years have seen indifferent performances from Guangzhou, though, with a quarter-final appearance in 2017 the best they have managed since lifting the title at Tianhe Stadium

four years ago.

With Italian Fabio Cannavaro at the helm, the current campaign began well as goals from Talisca and Paulinho secured a 2-0 victory over Sanfrecce Hiroshima in Group F on Matchday One, but a 3-1 defeat in Korea Republic to debutants Daegu FC followed as the Chinese heavyweights were brought crashing back down to earth.

Talisca was again amongst the goals as Guangzhou returned to winning ways by easing past Melbourne Victory 4-0 at Tianhe Stadium, but by now Group F had developed into a three-way battle between Daegu, Sanfrecce and Cannavaro's men for two qualification spots.

Guangzhou claimed a point in Melbourne after veteran Huang Bowen scored in a 1-1 draw, but a 1-0 loss against Sanfrecce in Japan meant the group would go down to the wire, with the two-time champions needing victory against Daegu on Matchday Six to secure a place in the last 16.

They managed it, but only just, with Paulinho's deflected effort midway through the second half sealing a 1-0 win and a date with domestic rivals Shandong Luneng.

Having been eliminated by Chinese opposition in each of the past two seasons (Shanghai SIPG in 2017 and Tianjin Quanjian

in 2018), history was against Guangzhou ahead of the clash with Shandong, but a Wei Shihao strike and a late own goal secured a 2-1 first-leg win.

Drama ensued in the return meeting in Jinan as Shandong recovered from Paulinho's early strike to score twice after the interval and force extra-time. The hosts then went 3-1 up, only for Paulinho to score a superb free-kick to ensure the contest would be decided from the spot.

With the first 10 penalties all hitting the back of the net, Shandong's Cui Peng saw his effort saved by Liu Dianzuo, allowing Zhong Yihao to step forward to secure Guangzhou's place in the quarter-finals.

Guangzhou now face a repeat of the 2017 Round of 16 when they edged past Kashima Antlers on away goals after Paulinho scored in both legs. The Japanese side will be a different proposition this time round, though, as they go into the tie as defending champions after claiming their first Continental title in 2018.

After returning from Barcelona in mid-2018, Paulinho was quick to re-establish himself as Guangzhou's main man. His goals and overall contribution in the latter stages of the Group Stage and in the last 16 have proved vital at a time when other key players

were sidelined through injury.

"I am thankful that I have been able to score goals at crucial times for the team," said the Brazilian after the Shandong match. "I suppose it may be because I have played in many major tournaments and big games previously.

"In those kind of environments, you need to commit your full ability in these major games. I am just glad that I could take part in this big match and help my teammates qualify for the next round."

Fellow Brazilian Talisca began the campaign superbly and Cannavaro will hope he regains his best form after returning from injury ahead of the business end of the campaign. The return of Guangzhou legend Elkeson from Shanghai, meanwhile, will generate a further buzz around Tianhe Stadium.

Many of the domestic players have remained the same for a number of years, with the likes of captain Zheng Zhi, midfielder Huang, defender Zhang Linpeng and forward Gao Lin still playing key roles in the starting line-up.

Wei is among the newer faces having arrived from Beijing FC in early 2019 and the 24-year-old will be keen to produce more performances such as those against Shandong to help fire the Chinese powerhouse to glory.



	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
Sanfrecce Hiroshima	6	5	0	1	9	4	+5	15
Guangzhou Evergrande	6	3	1	2	9	5	+4	10
Daegu FC	6	3	0	3	10	6	+4	9
Melbourne Victory	6	0	1	5	4	17	-13	1

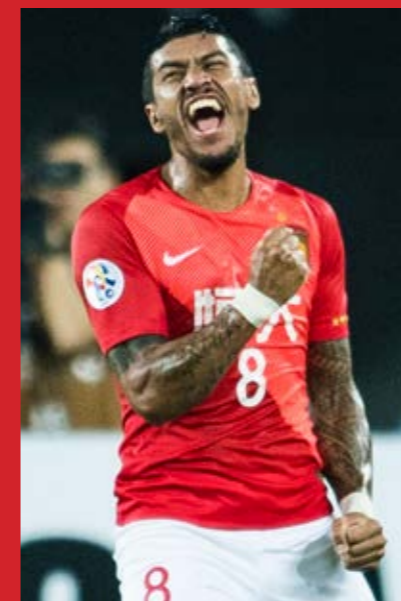
Group Stage

- 05/03/19
Guangzhou Evergrande 2-0 Sanfrecce Hiroshima
Talisca 19, Paulinho 26
- 12/03/19
Daegu FC 3-1 Guangzhou Evergrande
Edgar Silva 24, 43, Kim Dae-won 81; Talisca 53
- 10/04/19
Guangzhou Evergrande 4-0 Melbourne Victory
Talisca 6, 10, Yang Liyu 42, Leigh Broxham 73 OG
- 23/04/19
Melbourne Victory 1-1 Guangzhou Evergrande
Jai Ingham 26; Huang Bowen 24
- 08/05/19
Sanfrecce Hiroshima 1-0 Guangzhou Evergrande
Sho Sasaki 15
- 22/05/19
Guangzhou Evergrande 1-0 Daegu FC
Jeong Tae-wook 64 OG

Round of 16

- 18/06/19
Guangzhou Evergrande 2-1 Shandong Luneng
Wei Shihao 35, Zheng Zheng 80 OG; Zhang Chi 66
- 25/06/19
Shandong Luneng 3-2 Guangzhou Evergrande
Zhou Haibin 62, Marouane Fellaini 70, Liu Junshuai 93; Paulinho 13, 103
Guangzhou win 6-5 on penalties

Key Player Paulinho



Paulinho's move to Guangzhou in the summer of 2015 reignited his career as he went on to lift the Continental title, win several domestic trophies, earn a recall to the Brazil national team and, in 2017, was signed by FC Barcelona. A successful title-winning season in Spain followed before the 31-year-old returned to Guangdong after the 2018 FIFA World Cup. He has picked up where he left off, with his goals and energy in midfield key to Guangzhou's success. Paulinho's ability to ghost into the box continues to trouble opposition defences and, with talent such as Talisca and Elkeson ahead of him, his threat is only likely to increase as Guangzhou aim to reach a first semi-final since winning the competition in 2015.



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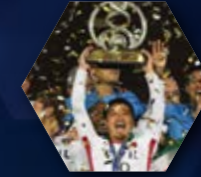
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KASHIMA ANTLERS

Japan

Qualified as: J.League – Third place via Play-offs
 Founded: 1991
 Stadium: Kashima Soccer Stadium, Ibaraki (37,638)
 J.League (8): 2016, 2009, 2008, 2007, 2001, 2000, 1998, 1996
 Emperor's Cup (5): 2016, 2010, 2007, 2000, 1997
 FIFA Club World Cup: Runner-up 2016



AFC Champions League (1): 2018

Quarter-Finals 2008; Round of 16 2017, 2011, 2010, 2009; Group Stage 2015, 2003

Coach Go Oiwa

Former Kashima Antlers defender, Go Oiwa knows what it takes to win silverware for Kashima as both a player and coach. Part of the side to win three successive J.League titles, Oiwa reached even greater heights last November when he helmed Kashima to their first AFC Champions League title. The coach's success is all the more remarkable considering he had only been promoted to the role from the backroom staff in May 2017. In the domestic championship, the man who made 160 appearances for the club in his playing days has yet to replicate the success he had on the field. The side narrowly missed out on the J.League title during his first season in charge, while his team finished third in the 2018 season.



The defending Asian club champions are looking to become only the second team in the AFC Champions League era to successfully retain their title after Saudi Arabia's Al Ittihad did so at the 2004 and 2005 editions.

The Japanese club do know what takes to defend championships, though. One of the most successful clubs to come from the Land of the Rising Sun, Kashima won three J.League titles in a row from 2007 to 2009, and went back-to-back in 2000 and 2001.

Prior to their historic campaign last year, Kashima had struggled to turn their domestic dominance into Continental success, generally proving good enough to progress from the Group Stage but exiting in the early knockout rounds.

Indeed, their appearance in the 2019 AFC Champions League quarter-finals is only the third time they have reached the last eight, with the first coming in 2008 before the introduction of the Round of 16.

Australia's Adelaide United proved the victors on that occasion, but a decade later it was a different story for the Ibaraki club.

Drawn in Group H, alongside two-time Continental champions Suwon Samsung Bluewings of Korea Republic, China PR's Shanghai Shenhua and Sydney FC of Australia, Kashima looked set for a tough challenge at the 2018 edition.

They began their campaign with a 1-1 home draw against Shenhua, before a successful trip to Korea Republic where Mu Kanazaki opened the scoring early on and doubled the advantage just before the hour in a 2-1 victory.

Goals from Shoma Doi and Naomichi Ueda secured a 2-0 win away in Sydney before a 1-1 home draw in the return meeting with the Australian side, while a 2-2 draw in Shanghai ensured progression to the Round of 16.

A 4-3 aggregate win took Kashima past fellow 2019 quarter-finalists Shanghai SIPG in the first round of the knockout stage, before summer signing Serginho inspired the Antlers past a second Chinese club, Tianjin Quanjian, after convincing 2-0 and 3-0 wins over the two legs.

A rollercoaster series of games took place against fellow Group H side Suwon in the semi-finals with 11 goals shared over the two matches – Kashima edging the contest 6-5 on aggregate.

In the final, Go Oiwa's men faced Islamic Republic of Iran heavyweights Persepolis but goals from Brazilian pair Leo Silva and Serginho proved to be the difference. The South Americans gave Kashima a 2-0 lead to take into the second leg in Tehran and, despite a cauldron of noise at the Azadi Stadium, the J.League defence held firm and saw out a goalless stalemate to lift the AFC

Champions League trophy.

Just a few months on from their crowning glory last November, Kashima were already beginning their title defence this February, defeating Australia's Newcastle Jets in the play-offs to qualify for the 2019 edition.

The Japanese side were drawn in Group E with China PR's Shandong Luneng and a pair of debutants – Korea Republic's Gyeongnam FC and Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) of Malaysia.

Although the holders began in winning fashion with a 2-1 home victory against JDT, the Group Stage proved a testing time for Kashima.

A 2-0 lead at Shandong was surrendered before half-time as the visitors were forced to settle for a draw, and two stoppage-time goals were needed to rescue Kashima from defeat at Gyeongnam in a rollercoaster 3-2 win in Korea.

Still unbeaten at the halfway point with two wins from three, Kashima's form then dropped significantly. A 1-0 loss at home to Gyeongnam was a disappointing result for the defending champions before a second defeat, this time to a history-making JDT in Malaysia, had Kashima's knockout stage ticket in jeopardy going into the final Matchday.

And, after Marouane Fellaini's 11th-minute opener for Shandong

on Matchday Six, for the best part of the next hour of play it looked like Kashima's hold on the AFC Champions League would end at the Group Stage.

It would have been just the third time in the tournament's history for the defending champions to be eliminated before the knockout stage, after Western Sydney Wanderers (2015) and Guangzhou Evergrande (2016) also fell in the first round.

But help was at hand for the holders, as striker Sho Ito's two-goal cameo from the bench saw Kashima edge through 2-1 and keep their defence alive.

Ito's efforts secured his side a Round of 16 meeting with fellow J.League club Sanfrecce Hiroshima and another of Kashima's Japanese forwards, Shoma Doi, took centre stage.

The 27-year-old created a wonderful assist for the only goal in the first leg with a lung-busting run from the halfway line, before scoring a crucial brace in Hiroshima as Kashima edged Sanfrecce on away goals following a 3-3 draw on aggregate.

Now set to face Guangzhou Evergrande in a repeat of their Round of 16 meeting in 2017, Kashima will be looking to avenge that away goals defeat, eliminate one of the competition's heavyweights and take their quest to retain their title one step further.

GO DARE YOURSELF



	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
Shandong Luneng	6	3	2	1	10	8	+2	11
Kashima Antlers	6	3	1	2	9	8	+1	10
Gyeongnam FC	6	2	2	2	9	8	+1	8
Johor Darul Ta'zim	6	1	1	4	4	8	-4	4

Group Stage

05/03/19
Kashima Antlers 2-1 Johor Darul Ta'zim
 Taiki Hirato 43, Serginho 56; Diogo 80

12/03/19
 Shandong Luneng 2-2 **Kashima Antlers**
 Graziano Pelle 20, 41; Sho Ito 10, 14

09/04/19
 Gyeongnam FC 2-3 **Kashima Antlers**
 Tomoya Inukai OG 56, Jordon Mutch 71; Woo Joo-sung OG 75, Takeshi Kanamori 90+1, Serginho 90+3

24/04/19
Kashima Antlers 0-1 Gyeongnam FC
 Takahiro Kumimoto 63

08/05/19
 Johor Darul Ta'zim 1-0 **Kashima Antlers**
 Syafiq Ahmed 69

22/05/19
Kashima Antlers 2-1 Shandong Luneng
 Sho Ito 68, 70; Marouane Fellaini 11

Round of 16

18/06/19
Kashima Antlers 1-0 Sanfrecce Hiroshima
 Serginho 24

25/06/19
 Sanfrecce Hiroshima 3-2 **Kashima Antlers**
 Patric 66, 90+6, Sho Sasaki 72; Shoma Doi 33, 89

Key Player Serginho



It's fair to say that, in his short time at Kashima, Serginho has become an AFC Champions League knockout stage specialist. Since arriving in Ibaraki last summer, the forward has scored in six of the eight matches he has played from the Round of 16 onwards. A focal point of the Kashima attack, it is no surprise that when Serginho's form dropped during the Group Stage so did his side's results. Yet a vital goal in the Round of 16 demonstrated that the Brazilian was back to his best and, should his prolific form at this stage of the competition continue, Kashima's dreams of retaining the title will be that much closer to reality.

ROLL OF HONOUR

AFC Champions League

Year	Winners	Score	Runners-up
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



• 2018 Winners - Kashima Antlers

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 Sadd	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



• 2017 Winners - Urawa Red Diamonds

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

Top Scorers 2019

- 9 Leonardo (Al Wahda)
- 7 Bafetimbi Gomis (Al Hilal)
- 7 Omar Al Soma (Al Ahli)
- 6 Alaa Abbas (Al Zawraa)
- 6 Graziano Pelle (Shandong Luneng)
- 5 Giuliano (Al Nassr)
- 5 Romarinho (Al Ittihad)
- 5 Shinzo Koroki (Urawa Red Diamonds)
- 5 Temurkhuja Abdukholiqov (Lokomotiv)



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