

AFC QUARTERLY

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ASIAN FOOTBALL CONFEDERATION

ISSUE 19

PLUS MALAYSIA

New FAM President
reveals his
ambitions for a
bright future

SUNIL CHHETRI

India's icon leading club and country to
continental glory


AFC
CHAMPIONS
LEAGUE 2017

Quarter-Final Preview

ISSUE 19

July 2017



MAYA YOSHIDA

Japan and Southampton
defender intent on taking
the Samurai Blue to
2018 FIFA World Cup



AMER SHAFI

Jordan legend recalls his
football career so far and
looks ahead to a fourth
AFC Asian Cup



STEFANO LILIPALY

The Indonesia star part of the
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scene



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Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President



Dear friends,

The second half of every season sees the finale of our outstanding club competitions with the AFC Champions League now at the quarter-final stage and the AFC Cup – with its new format – about to decide West Asia's Zonal Champions and winners from the Inter-Zone Play-offs.

Congratulations go to our first three Zonal Champions confirmed so far in the AFC Cup – Central Champions FC Istiklol from Tajikistan, Bengaluru FC from India in the South Zone and DPR Korea's 4.25 SC who won the East Zone. The West and ASEAN Champions will be crowned when the AFC Cup resumes in August.

In addition, this year there is huge interest as the FIFA World Cup 2018 Asian Qualifiers Final Round come to an end. We must congratulate the Islamic Republic of Iran who have already clinched their place in Russia with two matches to spare.

For so many other nations, however, the dream of competing on the world's greatest footballing stage is still alive after some extremely competitive and enthralling games. I wish everyone chasing the remaining places the very best of luck.

The AFC will have four direct qualifiers and the third teams in each of the two groups will play-off for the right to contest a place with the fourth team in CONCACAF.

At the same time, 24 teams have begun on the journey to secure the remaining 12 places at the AFC Asian Cup 2019 in the United Arab Emirates. Again, we have seen some engaging and exciting matches.

We are also working closely with the Local Organising Committee in the UAE to ensure, as prescribed by our Vision and Mission, that the competition is of the highest calibre and provides not only the perfect stage for the players but also captivates hundreds of millions of fans across the continent.

Returning briefly to our club competitions, we have witnessed some history this year. Firstly, in the AFC Champions League, we saw Chan Yuen-ting become the first ever female coach to lead a men's side into a continental competition when her team took on Guangzhou Evergrande, the 2015 Champions. No one will ever forget those wonderful pictures of Chan with Luiz Felipe Scolari.

And then in the AFC Cup, continental football returned to Iraq with the West Zone Semi-Final match being played in Erbil. We thank the Iraqi Football Association for their determination to make such a game possible and now we hope this leads to further matches, where security allows, in Iraq in the future.

There is much to look forward to as we reach the 'business-end' of the season. We are sure that there will be so much to excite the spectators whether they be in the stadiums, watching on television or engaging through our ever-growing social media channels.

Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President



At the heart of the image

Gallery



World Cup Bound

The Islamic Republic of Iran book their ticket to Russia following a 2-0 victory over Uzbekistan in Group A at Azadi Stadium in June as Carlos Queiroz's team also maintain their unbeaten record.

Gallery



10 Out Of 10

Reigning AFC Player of the Year Omar Abdulrahman enjoyed a match to remember in the Round of 16 at the end of May as he netted two goals and grabbed an assist to lead Al Ain past Islamic Republic of Iran's Esteghlal 6-2 on aggregate after a 6-1 win in the second leg at Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium.

Gallery



Red Army

Guangzhou Evergrande players celebrate with their massed ranks of travelling fans after their 2-1 defeat at Kashima Antlers at the end of May was enough to reach the AFC Champions League quarter-finals via the away goals rule.

Gallery



Champions On Track

Air Force Club's AFC Cup title defence continues after the Iraqi side defeat compatriots Al Zawraa 2-1 on aggregate in May to progress to September's West Asia Zone Final against Al Wahda of Syria.



World Cup Joy For Islamic Republic of Iran

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BECAME THE FIRST AFC MEMBER TO QUALIFY FOR THE 2018 FIFA WORLD CUP IN RUSSIA AFTER BEATING UZBEKISTAN 2-0 IN JUNE TO SECURE THEIR SPOT FROM GROUP A OF THE ASIA QUALIFIERS.

Sardar Azmoun and Mehdi Taremi scored the goals as the Islamic Republic of Iran recorded a 2-0 win over Uzbekistan in Matchday Eight of the Asian World Cup Qualifiers to become just the second team to qualify for Russia 2018. Azmoun's opener put Team Melli in control before Taremi's goal secured all three points for the Iranians, who kept an 11th consecutive clean sheet of the campaign. With the win, Iran secured one of two automatic berths from Group A and have won the group with just two games remaining as they sit seven points ahead of second placed side Korea Republic. "I am very happy that we have qualified for the World Cup for the second time in a row,"

said Taremi. "I feel so happy that I was able to score a goal and that my goal was able to help us win the match. "We are very happy with the performance and we hope we can maintain this level in the future and qualify for the World Cup every four years." Midfielder Alireza Jahanbakhsh was part of the squad that went to Brazil four years ago and the AZ Alkmaar midfielder is now relishing the chance to take on the world's best once more. "[The first World Cup] was a great experience, but I joined the team after they had qualified," added Jahanbakhsh. "But this time I've been here since the beginning and it's a great feeling to win a lot of games without conceding, so I think it was the best qualification ever for our

country. "In 2014, it was a really great experience, at the age of 19 I was playing at the World Cup and it was unbelievable, and now it's the second time so hopefully it'll be even better for us." Iran will next travel to Korea Republic at the end of August with their hosts hoping to join them in Russia 2018. The Koreans, though, are well aware that Uzbekistan are just a point behind in third, while Syria also remain in contention. In Group B, Japan, Saudi Arabia and Australia are separated by the slimmest margins in the top three places, while the United Arab Emirates still retain a mathematical chance of qualifying.



Inaugural Winners Al Ain To Meet Al Hilal

THE DRAW FOR THE QUARTER-FINALS OF THE 2017 AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE, WITH THE TIES SET TO TAKE PLACE IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER, PITS LAST YEAR'S FINALISTS AGAINST SAUDI HEAVYWEIGHTS AL HILAL

naugural winners Al Ain from the UAE will take on Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal in the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League following June's draw in Kuala Lumpur. Al Ain, who lifted the first AFC Champions League title in 2003 and reached the 2005 final, finished as runners-up in last year's edition after being edged out by Korea Republic side Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 3-2 on aggregate. Still smarting from the defeat last November, Al Ain will be determined to go one better this year with their first obstacle the visit of Al Hilal on August 21 before travelling to Saudi Arabia's capital city Riyadh for the return fixture three weeks later. Al Ain or Al Hilal will face either 2012 runners-up Al Ahli from Saudi Arabia or Islamic Republic of Iran's Persepolis, who will take

part in the last eight for the first time. In the East, two-time champions Guangzhou Evergrande will face Chinese compatriots Shanghai SIPG. And 2007 winners Urawa Red Diamonds meet their fellow countrymen from Japan, Kawasaki Frontale. The first legs of the quarter-finals will be played between August 21 and 23, with the return fixtures scheduled from September 11 to 13. The semi-finals will also be played on a home-and-away basis, firstly on September 26 and 27, with the second legs then to be played on October 17 and 18. The final will take place over two legs, with the semi-final winner from the East hosting the second leg on November 25 having travelled to the West for the first leg a week earlier.

Quarter-Final Draw		
	21/08/17 & 11/09/17 Al Ain vs Al Hilal	
	22/08/17 & 12/09/17 Persepolis vs Al Ahli	
	22/08/17 & 12/09/17 Shanghai SIPG vs Guangzhou Evergrande	
	23/08/17 & 13/09/17 Kawasaki Frontale vs Urawa Red Diamonds	



Defending Champions To Face Familiar Foes

THE NEXT PHASE OF THE AFC CUP WILL TAKE PLACE IN AUGUST WITH THE SEVEN QUALIFIERS ALL EYEING A PLACE IN NOVEMBER’S FINAL FOLLOWING JUNE’S DRAW IN KUALA LUMPUR.

Defending AFC Cup champions Air Force Club will face Syria’s Al Wahda in the 2017 tournament’s West Asia Zone Final following June’s draw in Kuala Lumpur as the Iraqi side look to retain their title, bolstered by an unbeaten record so far in this year’s campaign.

Air Force Club edged out JSW Bengaluru of India 1-0 in last year’s final to return the AFC Cup trophy to the West after Johor Darul Ta’zim had become the first side from the East to lift the title in 2015.

However, if they are to repeat their success, they must get past a side they have already met twice in this year’s competition in inaugural finalists Al Wahda, who finished just a point behind Air Force Club in Group B.

The winners of the two-legged encounter in September will progress directly to the final to face the winner of the Inter-Zone Play-off Final.

Before that, Singapore’s Home United will face Filipino club Ceres Negros in the ASEAN Zone Final. The first leg will be played on August 2 with the return fixture taking place a week later.

The winner will face the Central Zone Champion, FC Istiklol of Tajikistan, in the Inter-Zone Semi-Final first leg on August 22 before the decisive meeting three weeks later.

The victor will then face the champion of the other Inter-Zone Semi-Final, between Bengaluru and DPR Korea’s 4.25 SC, in the Inter-Zone Final, which takes places over two legs played on September 27 and October 18.

The final is to be played on November 4.

ASEAN Zone Final	
	
02/08/17 & 09/08/17 Home United vs Ceres Negros	
Inter-Zone Semi-Final	
	
22/08/17 & 12/09/17 FC Istiklol vs Home United/Ceres Negros	
	
23/08/17 & 13/09/17 JSW Bengaluru vs 4.25 SC	
WEST Zone Final	
	
12/09/17 & 26/09/17 Al Wahda vs Air Force Club	



Australia To Bid For Women’s World Cup 2023

AUSTRALIA HAVE ANNOUNCED THEY WILL LAUNCH A BID TO HOST THE FIFA WOMEN’S WORLD CUP 2023 AS THEY SEEK TO BECOME THE SECOND AFC MEMBER ASSOCIATION TO HOST THE BIGGEST TOURNAMENT IN THE WOMEN’S GAME.

Australia will bid to host the world’s largest and most prestigious women’s sporting event – the FIFA Women’s World Cup - in 2023.

The announcement was made by the Prime Minister of Australia, Malcolm Turnbull and Football Federation Australia Chairman (FFA), Steven Lowy AM in Canberra with the support of the Federal Minister for Sport, Greg Hunt and The Federal Minister for Women, Michaelia Cash.

The Australian Federal Government also announced that they will provide FFA with financial support in the form of initial funding to the value of 1 million with the balance of 4 million to be granted following fulfillment of designated criteria and milestones.

Australia could become the second AFC Member Association to host the FIFA Women’s World Cup after China did so in 1991 and 2007.

“This is the largest, most prestigious and most competitive contest in a women’s sport globally,” said Lowy. “We want to win the right to host it and then win the tournament itself.”

The Matildas, who are currently ranked eighth in the world and have been ranked as high as fifth, would look to emulate Japan who famously lifted the title in 2011.

“The benefits to Australia are many and varied with major economic impact to the wider community and, most importantly, a massive increase in exposure and investment in Women’s Football.

“A FIFA Women’s World Cup in Australia would inspire a whole new generation of

girls and women to take up the biggest participation sport in Australia, for many with the dream of winning the World Cup on home soil.

“Once FIFA officially announces the bidding process, we intend to make a compelling argument for Australia to be granted hosting rights for this prestigious event.

“We know that this will be a challenging process, but we believe that we have the expertise and world class facilities to host a fantastic tournament,” concluded Lowy.

The last tournament was held in Canada in 2015 and the next will be in 2019 in France.

The 2023 tournament would see 24 teams compete over 52 matches, hosted across a number of cities.

MAN ON A MISSION

UNRIVALED AS HIS COUNTRY'S STAR FOOTBALLER, SUNIL CHHETRI IS FAST DEVELOPING LEGENDARY STATUS IN HIS HOMETLAND AND, WITH A HUGE TWO YEARS AHEAD OF HIM, IS AIMING TO FIRE BOTH INDIA AND CLUB SIDE JSW BENGALURU TO CONTINENTAL GLORY.

By: Peter Alsop Photos: Lagardère Sports/All India Football Federation





Carrying the weight of expectation on your shoulders of any national team can't be easy, but when that country is India and you are by far and away the most popular footballer, then the

burden is huge.

Football may be a long way from rivalling cricket on the subcontinent, but it is undoubtedly growing in popularity. And, after a strong start to their AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 qualifying campaign, India are well placed to return to the continental competition for the first time since 2011.

The man charged with steering the Blue Tigers towards the tournament, at least on the pitch anyway, is Sunil Chhetri, India's most capped player and record goalscorer. Underlining the JSW Bengaluru forward's importance to the team, Chhetri is the main reason India sit three points clear on top of Group A after two games, on six points rather than two.

With the opening match of the third round of qualifiers against Myanmar in March into added time, 32-year-old Chhetri received the ball thirty yards from the India goal. The striker then turned before launching a quick-fire break that resulted in him side-footing home from 15 yards at the other end to claim all three points.

Three months later and Chhetri was at it again, this time against the Kyrgyz Republic. Picking up the ball in an almost identical position, with 20 minutes remaining, the forward charged forward before playing a give-

"WE DIDN'T GET [TO THE AFC ASIAN CUP] IN 2015 SO THIS TIME WE HAVE TO QUALIFY – IT'S VERY IMPORTANT IF WE WANT TO SHOW CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT."

and-go with Jeje Lalpekhlua and finishing first time into the bottom right corner.

The goal saw Chhetri become the fourth highest goalscorer for a nation among active players – behind Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi and Clint Dempsey – but more importantly kept India on maximum points ahead of a double header with bottom side Macau.

"It was tough in Myanmar as at times they dominated us but we defended well, were very resilient and finally we got the goal," reflected Chhetri.

"That was a good message to the whole team that none of the games are going to be easy. It was so important to get the three points because the way Myanmar played, I think they will challenge.

"Before the Kyrgyzstan game we had a meeting and we all understood the importance of getting three points at home. The target is nine points at home and we already have three.

"If we get three at home to Macau and Myanmar then we're in a great situation – also we have the bonus three from away in Myanmar. But it's easy to become complacent."

Should India, as expected, win the two games against Macau – in September and October – they could potentially claim their place at the AFC Asian Cup with two games to spare.

The South Asians finished as runners-up to Israel at the 1964 tournament and were eliminated at the first round stage in 1984, but in recent history have only appeared at the 2011 edition in Qatar.

It was a tough return to the competition as India were paired in a group alongside Korea Republic, Australia and Bahrain. They lost all three games but Chhetri, who netted two of his side's three goals, took only positives from the experience.

"It was one of the best tournaments I've played in my life," said Chhetri. "It was especially challenging because Korea, Australia and Bahrain were among the top sides in Asia.

"To see where you stand against these

teams is good. There were moments when people thought we were going to get thrashed but we didn't and this gives you confidence; losing against bigger opponents helps you learn a lot. You can never be complacent, you always have to give 100%."

India did not appear at the 2015 AFC Asian Cup in Australia four years later after failing to advance to the 2014 AFC Challenge Cup – at the time the qualification tournament for the lower-ranked countries.

But, in a huge boost for such nations, the 2019 continental competition has been expanded to feature 24 teams for the first time, which will allow India and similar-ranked sides the chance to compete at the highest level Asian football has to offer.

"Yes, in a way, but at the same time we still have to make sure we do our work," said Chhetri, when asked if the greater number of places available at the tournament would make things easier for India.

"It may seem like things are favourable but there are four teams vying for places and only two can qualify so it's not easy.

"We didn't get [to the AFC Asian Cup] in 2015 so this time we have to qualify – it's very important if we want to show constant improvement."

Born to an Indian father and Nepalese mother in Secunderabad, Telangana, Chhetri was raised in a footballing family. His father played

Top Left AFC Asian Cup 2011

Left AFC Cup 2013

Above AFC Cup Final 2016

I WAS SURPRISED [TO GET TO THE FINAL] BUT THAT'S NICE BECAUSE NOW WE KNOW WHAT WE CAN ACHIEVE AND NOW WE HAVE THE EXTRA MOTIVATION TO GET TO THE FINAL AGAIN AND IF WE DO WE WANT TO WIN IT."

for his army team and his now naturalised Indian mother, along with her twin sister, represented Nepal's women's team.

A sporting enthusiast in his younger years with football always his main passion, Chhetri admits that he never thought he could make it professionally, let alone turn out for his country.

He played purely for the love of the game but, on the back of signing on with Mohun Bagan when he was 17, the career that would make him a household name in his homeland began to gather momentum.

After representing his country at youth levels, Chhetri made his maiden appearance for India against Pakistan in 2005 and, in true fashion, scored his first goal against their bitter rivals.

"That goal always comes to my mind when

asked about my favourite goal," said Chhetri.

"It was against Pakistan, in Pakistan, and I was 19 or 20 at the time. It was my debut so it will always be special to me.

"There are a few great moments that also spring to mind but the 2008 AFC Challenge Cup when I scored a hat-trick against Tajikistan in the final [to progress to the 2011 AFC Asian Cup] was very sweet."

While Chhetri has long since been the star of the national team, taking over that particular mantle from India legend Baichung Bhutia, at club level the striker has been equally impressive.

After turning out for a number of I-League sides, in addition to brief stints with Sporting Kansas City in the USA and Sporting Lisbon's reserves in Portugal, Chhetri signed for JSW Bengaluru shortly after their formation in mid-2013.

The marriage has been a perfect fit with the prolific marksman helping his new side win two league titles in three years, as well as the Indian Federation Cup in 2014 and 2016.

But it was not only domestically that Bengaluru were creating a stir. After reaching the Round of 16 in their maiden AFC Cup campaign in 2015, The Blues returned in style the following year.

Making their qualification from the Group Stage all the more impressive, Bengaluru won three on the bounce to advance to the



Knockout Stage behind the then defending champions Johor Darul Ta'zim of Malaysia.

Chhetri then scored a brace in a 3-2 victory over Hong Kong's Kitchee in the last 16 before Singapore's Tampines Rovers were seen off in the quarter-finals to set up another date with the holders, who had twice defeated them previously.

And with momentum now fully behind them, Bengaluru came out on top following a 4-2 aggregate victory in which Chhetri scored two crucial second-leg goals to book a date with Iraq's Air Force Club in the final.

But, with a large contingent of Indian fans having made the journey to Doha, Bengaluru were unable to cross the finish line as Hammadi Ahmed's second-half strike ensured a 1-0 win for the Iraqi side.

"It was very disappointing but at the start of the tournament if someone had told us we would get to the final we would have been very happy," admitted Chhetri.

"We have looked back at the videos many times; the first half was even but they were strong in the second half, although we missed an open goal and if we had taken our chances who knows what would have happened.

"I was surprised [to get to the final] but that's nice because now we know what we can achieve and now we have the extra motivation to get to the final again and if we do we want to win it."

Success breeds expectation while also spurring others to knock you off your pedestal. As South Asia's strongest team last year, it has not been easy for Chhetri and company on the continent this time round.

Three successive wins to start the 2017 campaign were followed by back-to-back defeats to leave everything riding on a last game of the Group Stage against Maziya Sports & Recreation of the Maldives.

But cometh the hour, cometh the man as

Left & Right
2017 AFC Cup

Above
2019 AFC Asian Cup Qualifying

"WHEN YOU HAVE EVERYTHING IN THE COUNTRY, THAT'S WHEN THE SMALL JUMPS SHOULDN'T MAKE YOU HAPPY. THERE'S SUCH A BIG POOL TO PICK FROM, SO WE SHOULD BE HAPPY WHEN WE WIN BUT NOT SATISFIED."

Maziya, who would have won the group with a draw, were put to the sword thanks to Chhetri's stunning free-kick shortly before the hour as the 1-0 victory ensured top spot and a date with DPR Korea's 4.25 SC in the Inter Zone Semi-finals.

"We lost two games and weren't in a good situation, so we needed to beat Maziya at home," said the forward.

"We dominated them and were knocking on the door but they defended well so we needed a set piece to win the game. Our main target was to qualify for the next round and we did that."

It's fair to say that Chhetri is coping well with the demands of being the shining light for both club and country and, with a reputation so high, it's reasonable to think that what the striker says carries significant weight.

India are currently ranked 100 in the FIFA World Ranking and, with a population in excess of 1.3 billion, can at best be described as a work in progress.

But with the annual Indian Super League (ISL) attracting players from around the world and expected to expand in the near future, and the FIFA U-17 World Cup to be held in India in October, the spotlight is being thrust on the country like never before.

"The potential is huge, that's what's

bothering," admitted Chhetri.

"When you have everything in the country, that's when the small jumps shouldn't make you happy. There's such a big pool to pick from, so we should be happy when we win but not satisfied.

"I'm delighted that the World Cup is coming to our country, it's a massive step. We should give everything possible to our U-17s to allow them to prepare well, it's a once in a lifetime opportunity.

"We also have to be really good as a host and once the tournament finishes, the most important thing is we cannot have the mentality of: 'we did our job, let's go home'.

"The U-17 World Cup is just the start, it should be like a drug to us. We should think: 'we've done well as a country, as a host, so let's build on it'."

Strong words from a man who knows a thing or two about hard work and does not hide his pride at reaching the level he has done.

At 32, Chhetri refuses to look too far into the future when it comes to his own career, preferring to keep his targets in the short term: "Score more goals next week, win the next game".

It's a way of life he has followed throughout his career, and if he continues in that vein and fires the Blue Tigers into the AFC Asian Cup, then you can be sure Chhetri's stock in his homeland will rise just that little bit more.

"I'm living a dream. I never thought I could have achieved what I have – playing for my country, scoring for my country, it's a dream and I'm honoured and privileged.

"I don't take it for granted and I work really hard for it. There are times when you can't take the criticism and all the people in your life, so you just want to shut down.

"But I've got used to it with age. It used to bother me but it's a very, very small price."



AND THEN THERE WERE EIGHT

EIGHT SIDES REMAIN IN CONTENTION TO BE NAMED 2017 AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE WINNERS, BUT WHO WILL COME OUT ON TOP AS THE TOURNAMENT ENTERS THE QUARTER-FINAL STAGE?

With four clubs who have already tasted continental glory, a former finalist, a team with a superstar attack, undefeated pass-masters, and a side who can boast a home support of six figures per match all in the mix to be crowned kings of Asian football, the 2017 AFC Champions League quarter-finals are eagerly anticipated.

Al Ain of the United Arab Emirates remain in the hunt for a second Asian title that will help heal the heartbreak of last November's final defeat by Korea Republic's Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors.

The previous year's winners, Guangzhou Evergrande, are appearing in

their fifth quarter-finals, while Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal and Japanese heavyweights Urawa Red Diamonds also know what it takes to lift the continental title.

Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli went all the way to the final in 2012 and the Jeddah-based side will be looking to go one better this time out.

China's Shanghai SIPG, meanwhile, have added playmaker Oscar and midfielder Odil Ahmedov to an attack that already includes Hulk, Elkeson and Wu Lei.

Kawasaki Frontale from the J.League are undefeated on the continent so far and the talented technicians boast the best possession and passing accuracy stats of any team this year on the continent.

For Persepolis, though, the quarter-final stage is uncharted territory but with over 100,000 fans backing them at the intimidating Azadi Stadium anything is possible.





Shanghai SIPG

First Leg - 22/08/17



Having made their AFC Champions League debut in last year's competition, Shanghai SIPG have at worst matched their quarter-final finish in the 2016 edition, but their sights will be set going even further under coach Andre Villas-Boas.

Under the former Chelsea and Zenit Saint Petersburg manager, the club have impressed in their second continental campaign, qualifying from Group F with a game to spare ahead of last years' semi-finalists FC Seoul and 2014 winners Western Sydney Wanderers, although they were pipped to top spot by Urawa Red Diamonds of Japan.

Shanghai would be drawn against and defeat fellow Chinese side Jiangsu FC in the Round of 16 thanks to a brace of goals from Hulk in a 5-3 aggregate win.

Brazilian forward Hulk, who is tied in second place in the competition's leading scorer chart with six goals, is part of a formidable attack that includes former Chelsea midfielder Oscar and China's Wu Lei.



Top
Oscar

Above
Hulk



COACH Andre Villas-Boas

Andre Villas-Boas is still only 39 years old yet boasts seven major trophies to his name. The youngest manager ever to win a European championship when he led Porto to the Europa League title in 2011, Villas-Boas joined Shanghai for the 2017 campaign on the back of three trophies in two years with Zenit Saint Petersburg.



Guangzhou Evergrande

Second Leg - 12/09/17



Guangzhou Evergrande's impressive run at the AFC Champions League, one that has seen them win two of the last four editions, continued with the club qualifying for their fifth quarter-final appearance in six continental campaigns.

Coached by FIFA World Cup winner Luiz Felipe Scolari, who led Guangzhou to Asian glory in 2015, Guangzhou went into the current edition of the AFC Champions League as Chinese Super League champions after claiming their sixth consecutive domestic title.

A 2-2 draw with Korea Republic's Suwon Samsung Bluewings in the final round of group matches ensured Guangzhou joined Kawasaki Frontale in qualifying from Group G before the Chinese club saw off Kashima Antlers on away goals in the last 16.

Goal-scoring Brazilian midfielder Paulinho has been key to Guangzhou's performance so far this year, while further up the field his compatriots Alan and Ricardo Goulart make up one of the most talented trios in the last eight.



Top
Paulinho

Above
Alan



COACH Luiz Felipe Scolari

Winner of the 2002 FIFA World Cup with Brazil, Luiz Felipe Scolari took over the Guangzhou reins in 2015 and followed a domestic-continental double in his first season with a league-cup double a year later. The Brazilian guided Portugal to the UEFA Euro 2004 final and his homeland to FIFA Confederations Cup glory in 2013.



Kawasaki Frontale

First Leg - 23/08/17



Kawasaki Frontale's progress to the knockout stages looked anything but certain after the first four matches of Group G when the Sky Blues improbably, but consistently, drew every match.

However, two crucial wins in the remaining games over Suwon Samsung Bluewings and Eastern SC took the Japanese side through to a last 16 meeting with Thailand's Muangthong United.

Last time in the knockout stage, Kawasaki were eliminated in the Round of 16 by eventual winners Western Sydney Wanderers in 2014 but the J.Leaguers do boast two previous quarter-final appearances in 2007 and 2009.

Striker Yu Kobayashi has been Kawasaki's main source of goals, although it was their miserly defence that was more of note in the Group Stage when they conceded just three times in six games.

Also shining brightly is creator-in-chief Kengo Nakamura, despite turning 37 in October, continuing to ooze class on the ball.



Top
Yu Kobayashi

Above
Koji Miyoshi



COACH Toru Oniki

Toru Oniki made more than 150 appearances for Kawasaki during his playing days. Following the departure of Yahiro Kazama to Nagoya Grampus, Oniki was handed his first head coach role after previously working with the Kawasaki youth teams and backroom staff.



Urawa Red Diamonds

Second Leg - 13/09/17



Former winners Urawa Red Diamonds were among the most impressive sides in the group stage netting 18 times as they won Group F, with the goals coming from 10 different players, edging China's Shanghai SIPG into second place.

While Urawa did lift the continental title in their maiden appearance at the AFC Champions League in 2007, this year's quarter-final appearance already represents their best campaign in the continental competition since 2008 when they reached the semi-finals.

Rafael Silva has top-scored for Urawa with four goals so far but the likes of Shinzo Koroki, Tadanari Lee and Takahiro Sekine have also chipped in with vital contributions in attack.

Urawa were close to elimination in the Round of 16 at the hands of Jeju United after a 2-0 defeat in the first leg in Korea Republic.

However, a stirring 3-0 win in the second leg did ultimately see them through to the last eight and a meeting with Kawasaki Frontale.



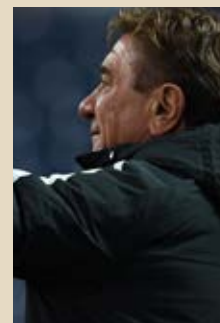
Top
Tadanari Lee

Above
Yosuke Kashiwagi



COACH Mihailo Petrovic

Former Yugoslavia international Mihailo Petrovic swapped Sanfrecce Hiroshima for Urawa at the end of 2011 and has since established the Saitama club as a team to once more be reckoned with. The Serb took the helm at Hiroshima in 2006, where he followed up promotion in 2008 with a fourth-place top-flight finish a year later.





Al Ain



First Leg – 21/08/17



Inaugural champions Al Ain had stuttered through the Group Stage last year on their way to the 2016 final but there were no such problems this time around as they went undefeated in six matches.

Reigning AFC Player of the Year Omar Abdulrahman is in, if anything, even better form than last time out and the midfielder leads the AFC Champions League scorers' chart with seven goals so far.

The frizzy-haired playmaker was in particularly superlative form when he led Al Ain past Esteghlal in the Round of 16 as the Emiratis overturned a 1-0 deficit from the first leg in spectacular fashion with a 6-1 win in the return meeting with Abdulrahman netting twice.

The loss of midfielder Lee Myung-joo, who has returned to his native Korea Republic and FC Seoul, is a blow but Al Ain have secured the services of former Sanfrecce Hiroshima player Tsukasa Shiotani to fill the gap he leaves behind.



Top
Mohamed Abdulrahman

Above
Omar Abdulrahman



COACH Zoran Mamic

Croatian tactician Zoran Mamic took over the Al Ain helm following the departure of compatriot Zlatko Dalic ahead of the 2017 AFC Champions League. The 45-year-old was previously at Saudi Pro League side at Al Nassr and before that enjoyed a highly successful spell with native side Dinamo Zagreb who he led to three consecutive league championships.



Al Hilal

Second Leg – 11/09/17



Al Hilal's mission to go one step further than their runners-up finish in 2014 will be bolstered when the AFC Champions League resumes in August by the permanent signing of Syria striker Omar Khribin following a successful loan spell.

The 23-year-old has netted four times so far and has formed a fine understanding in attack with Brazilian Carlos Eduardo.

Along with the dynamic duo, Uruguayan midfielder Nicolas Milei has been vital to the side's unbeaten progress to the last eight stage.

The Riyadh-based club comfortably topped Group D ahead of Persepolis, Al Rayyan and Al Wahda before easing past Islamic Republic of Iran club Esteghlal Khuzestan with 2-1 wins in each of the two Round of 16 legs.

Al Hilal's squad remains one of the strongest in the Asian club game, with veteran defenders Osama Hawsawi and Abdullah Al Zori bringing solidity and experience to the team while Salman Al Faraj and Salem Al Dawsari add steel and speed in the midfield.



Top
Omar Khribin

Above
Salman Al Faraj



COACH Ramon Diaz

Former Argentine international Ramon Diaz assumed his first coaching role in Asian football when he took over in 2016. Diaz represented his country at the 1982 FIFA World Cup, as well as Inter Milan and Monaco, and brings with him a wealth of experience having helmed River Plate and Independiente in addition to the Paraguay national team.



Persepolis

First Leg – 22/08/17



Persepolis will be making their first-ever appearance in the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League but the talented side from the Islamic Republic of Iran should not be underestimated.

Three last 16 appearances in their last four AFC Champions League campaigns showed consistency, but the club from Tehran were unable to reach the next stage until this year when they edged past Lekhwiya – themselves quarter-finalists in 2013 and 2015 – with a narrow 1-0 aggregate win.

Progress from a tricky Group D also went to the wire with Persepolis ultimately reliant on both their 4-2 win over Al Wahda and Al Hilal's 4-3 defeat of Al Rayyan to progress to the knockout stage.

Crowned Iranian league champions earlier this year, Persepolis boast several members of the all-conquering national team including a key spine of the side that comprises star striker Mehdi Taremi, midfielder Vahid Amiri, defender Jalal Hosseini and goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand.



Top
Vahid Amiri

Above
Mehdi Taremi



COACH Branko Ivankovic

Branko Ivankovic took over the Persepolis reins in 2015 having previously managed in Europe and Asia. In 2002, the Croat led Iran's U-23 team to glory at the Asian Games after which he led the senior side to third place at the 2004 AFC Asian Cup, as well as guiding them to the 2006 FIFA World Cup.



Al Ahli

Second Leg – 11/09/17



Al Ahli were inconsistent in last year's continental competition, winning three and losing three of their Group Stage encounters as El Jaish and Al Ain beat them to knockout stage qualification, but this time around there were no mistakes.

The 2012 runners-up handed Al Ahli from the United Arab Emirates – finalists themselves in 2015 – a 4-2 aggregate defeat in the Round of 16 to cap what had been an impressive run of results for Al Ahli since the tournament kicked off in late February.

Al Ahli had a flying start to the Group Stage, dealing out back-to-back defeats to Bunyodkor and Zobahan in the first two Matchdays to signal their intent.

Key to the club's impressive performances has been Syrian striker Omar Al Soma whose phenomenal strike record has continued into the continental tournament. Domestically, Al Soma has averaged better than a goal a game for Al Ahli, while his scoring record in the AFC Champions League currently stands at 11 goals in 15 appearances.



Top
Housain Al Mogahwi

Above
Omar Al Soma



COACH Sergei Rebrov

Ukrainian coach Sergei Rebrov is a newcomer to the Asian game, having been appointed coach of Al Ahli following the departure of Christian Gross ahead of the AFC Champions League quarter-finals. A club icon as a player at Dynamo Kiev, Rebrov has also enjoyed success there as a coach, winning five trophies in his four-season spell.





AFC
CUP

GAME OF ZONES

DEFENDING CHAMPIONS AIR FORCE CLUB WILL LOOK TO WIN BACK-TO-BACK AFC CUP TITLES AND EXTEND WEST ASIAN DOMINANCE OF THE COMPETITION, BUT THE NEW ZONAL FORMAT OF THE TOURNAMENT COULD SPRING SOME SURPRISES.

AFC QUARTERLY LOOKS AT THE SEVEN SIDES WHO WILL CONTEST THE KNOCKOUT STAGE.

Air Force Club's defeat of JSW Bengaluru last year reasserted West Asia's dominance in the AFC Cup. Since its inception in 2004, teams from West Asia have excelled. Ten of the 11 champions from 2004 to 2014 were from the West Asia region with Uzbekistan's Nasaf the one exception after they secured the 2011 title.

In 2015, Malaysia's Johor Darul Ta'zim did see East Asia finally taste continental glory but last year's crowning of the club from Iraq suggests it was an anomaly rather than a changing of the guard. Or was it?

With the AFC's new zonal set-up of

the knockout stage, a host of intriguing ties await with the title up for grabs. In the West Asia Zone Final, Air Force Club must overcome the challenge of Al Wahda, runners-up in 2004, and a side the Baghdad club twice failed to overcome in this year's Group Stages.

Also in the mix are last year's runners-up Bengaluru who will look to go one step further and create history for India, while DPR Korean side 4.25 SC are playing in their maiden AFC Cup campaign and are an unknown quantity.

Another former finalist, FC Istiklol, have enjoyed an unbeaten record so far while the ASEAN Zone is well represented by two attack-minded sides in the form of Ceres Negros and Home United.





Al Wahda

First Leg - 12/09/17

Al Wahda advanced to the West Asia Zone final in emphatic style after defeating Jordan's Al Wehdah 4-2 on aggregate having progressed as runners-up from Group B behind Air Force Club, their opponents in September's ties.

Raafat Muhammad's side have plundered 14 goals from their eight matches so far with nine different players getting their names on the scoresheet - 34-year-old veteran striker Raja Rafe leads with three to his name.

Indeed, the Syrian club were the top scoring West Asian team in the Group Stage and were just a point shy of Air Force Club in the final standings. The sides could not be separated in the two meetings in Group B after a 0-0 draw in Sidon was followed by a 1-1 stalemate in Al Wakrah.

Despite reaching the AFC Cup final in 2004, Al Wahda are making just



their second appearance in the knockout stage, although they did appear in the AFC Champions League in 2005.

While the Syrians will be forced to play their home tie at a neutral venue due to the security situation at home, their team spirit and togetherness mean they should not be written off.



Air Force Club

Second Leg - 26/09/17

Defending champions Air Force Club remain on course to defend their title but the Iraqi side have gone about their campaign far differently to last year's championship run.

By this time last year, striker Hammadi Ahmed had netted 12 goals in just seven games to almost single-handedly haul the Baghdad-based side into the knockout stages.

Ahmed and Air Force Club have netted just eight times in their eight AFC Cup matches so far, the worst goals per game average of any of the seven sides remaining in the competition.

Despite this, the Iraqi team remain the only side unbeaten in eight continental matches and retain the bulk of last year's title-winning side in their ranks. Seven of these were called up for Iraq's most recent World Cup qualifier against Japan including talented midfield



pair Humam Tariq and Bashar Resan.

With an impressive combination of experience and youth, Air Force Club go into their meeting with Al Wahda as favourites to be crowned West Asia Zone champions and secure a place in November's final.



JSW Bengaluru

First Leg - 23/08/17

The 2016 runners-up JSW Bengaluru are back in the latter stages of the AFC Cup and looking to go one better after their narrow 1-0 defeat to Air Force Club in last November's championship climax.

Reaching the 2016 AFC Cup Final in just their second appearance in the continental competition was remarkable, and followed a quarter-final appearance in their maiden tournament the previous year.

This time around, Bengaluru sealed their place in the knockout stage by the slimmest of margins after they edged out Maziya Sports & Recreation by virtue of a superior head-to-head record, having secured two 1-0 wins over the Maldivian side.

With the title of South Asia Zone champions also earned as a result of winning Group E, Bengaluru qualified for the Inter-Zone



Semi-Finals where they will meet DPR Korea's 4.25 SC.

Should the I-League club wish to proceed to the AFC Cup final for a second year in a row, much will depend - as usual - on India captain and icon Sunil Chhetri who has been in superb form this campaign.



4.25 SC

Second Leg - 13/09/17

DPR Korea's 4.25 SC have enjoyed a successful debut in the AFC Cup thus far, but the real challenge begins in their Inter-Zone Semi-Final against JSW Bengaluru.

The Pyongyang based-side progressed into the knockout stage after they topped Group I ahead of fellow countrymen Kigwancha on head-to-head record.

The 15-time DPR Korea League winners have enjoyed previous experiences in continental competition with three appearances in the AFC Asian Club Championship to their name, most memorable of those being a fourth-place finish at the 1990-1991 edition.

Much of 4.25's hopes will rest of the shoulders of clinical striker Kim Yu-song. The 22-year-old DPR Korea international is the current



leading scorer in the 2017 AFC Cup with nine goals, five of which came in their opener: a 6-0 victory over FC Erchim.

Key midfielder Myong Cha-hyon, 27, along with Kim, was also in action for The Chollima in their recent 2019 AFC Asian Cup qualifiers.



Home United

First Leg - 02/08/17

Singapore's Home United are channeling the 2004 generation with their performances so far this year in the AFC Cup after they defeated Filipino side Global FC to reach the ASEAN Zone Final.

The inaugural competition 13 years ago saw Home United go all the way to the semi-finals before a defeat to Syria's Al Wahda.

Since then, the Singaporeans have reached the quarter-finals on two occasions in 2005 and 2008 but this year's team are poised to go even further and look to improve upon domestic rivals Tampines Rovers' quarter-final finish last year.

A goal-filled Group Stage saw Home United average three goals a game as they topped Group H ahead of Vietnam's Than Quang Ninh and Yadanarbon of Myanmar, a campaign that saw some memorable scorelines including a rollercoaster 5-4 win away in Quang Ninh.



Home United striker Stipe Plazibat netted a stunning four times in that nine-goal thriller and the Croatian has unquestionably been the key man for the S.League side with seven goals so far including three goals in the ASEAN Zone Semi-Final.



Ceres Negros

Second Leg - 09/08/17

Filipino club Ceres Negros continue to make strides in the continental game as they followed up their Round of 16 appearance in last year's AFC Cup with a place in the ASEAN Zone Final against Singapore's Home United.

The Bacolod-based club edged into the knockout stages ahead of Vietnam's Hanoi FC by virtue of their superior head-to-head record against the Vietnamese club in Group G.

Even better was to come in the ASEAN Zone Semi-Finals, though, where Southeast Asian superpower and 2015 AFC Cup winners Johor Darul Ta'zim of Malaysia were beaten on away goals in a stunning upset.

Anchored at the back by Philippines defender Simone Rota, Ceres also boast significant firepower up front in the shape of



prolific forward Bienvenido Maranon, who has scored eight times so far, and countryman Fernando Rodriguez.

The Ceres midfield is full of internationals with Luke Woodland, Iain Ramsay, Manuel Ott and Kevin Ingreso all regulars in the Philippines' squad.



FC Istiklol

First Leg - 22/08/17

Second Leg - 12/09/17

Tajikistan champions FC Istiklol enjoyed an AFC debut to remember two years ago when they reached the final of the 2015 edition in their first attempt.

A surprise Group Stage elimination last year was disappointing but the Dushanbe-based club returned to winning ways this time around with a near flawless qualification for the knockout stage from Group D.

Five wins from six games with a draw away at Altyn Asyr the only blemish to their record, FC Istiklol scored an impressive 15 goals in the process, conceding just one.

Tajikistan striker Manuchehr Dzhalilov was the focal point in attack with five goals to his name in the competition so far.

Fellow internationals Jahongir Aliev and Dilshod Vasiev have also been on the scoresheet for The Crowns, and featured in Tajikistan's



most recent 2019 Asian Cup qualifier.

Having earned the title of Central Asian Zone Champions, FC Istiklol must now await the winner of the ASEAN Zone to determine their next opponent.



AFC CUP 2017

ASEAN Zone Final

Home United

VS

Ceres Negros

Inter-Zone Semi-Final

FC Istiklol

VS

JSW Bengaluru

VS

4.25 SC

WEST Zone Final

Al Wahda

VS

Air Force Club

SAMURAI PRIDE

MAYA YOSHIDA WAS JUST 21 YEARS OLD WHEN HE MOVED HALFWAY ROUND THE WORLD TO JOIN DUTCH SIDE VVV-VENLO AND JUST OVER 12 MONTHS LATER HE WAS LIFTING THE AFC ASIAN CUP WITH JAPAN. NOW APPROACHING HIS PEAK YEARS, THE SOUTHAMPTON DEFENDER IS LOOKING TOWARDS HIS SECOND FIFA WORLD CUP APPEARANCE IN RUSSIA NEXT YEAR.

By: Peter Alsop Photo: Lagardère Sports

Having already packed so much into his career, it's easy to forget that Maya Yoshida is still only 28 years old. A move to Europe just a few months after his 21st birthday was followed by continental glory with Japan in early 2011 and then captaining his country to a fourth-place finish at the 2012 Olympic Games. Fast forward five years and the now Southampton defender is well on his way towards gaining 100 caps for the Samurai Blue, is a proven performer in England's Premier League and is eyeing a return to the FIFA World Cup after a disappointing showing in Brazil three years ago. "I didn't have a lot of experience of international football at that time so I just followed the senior players," said Yoshida, reflecting on the 2011 AFC Asian Cup success in Qatar where Japan defeated Australia 1-0 in the final. "It was a great experience for me to get the title, but after that we didn't go on to get good results in Brazil or in the Asian Cup in Australia (when Japan were eliminated on penalties by the United Arab Emirates in the quarter-finals). "We just came back from a difficult situation and are getting our confidence back little by little. That's why we have to get through these qualifiers and go to Russia." Japan's 1-1 draw with Iraq in Tehran in June moved the East Asians a point clear of Saudi Arabia and Australia with two games remaining in Group B of the FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign. A home win over the Socceroos at the end of August will see the Samurai Blue advance to a sixth successive World Cup, a remarkable achievement considering the country had never been involved in the tournament prior to 1998. Indeed, Japan didn't even appear at their first AFC Asian Cup until a few months after

Yoshida's birth, when the country's first genuine footballing superstar Kazuyoshi Miura had still yet to make his debut. "Miura is one of the legends of Japan who is still playing even though he's 50 years old," said Yoshida when asked to recall his childhood idols. "Also [Hidetoshi] Nakata because he opened the door for Japanese players to go to Europe and he is the pioneer of Japanese football, so I always watched these two." While Miura did have a short loan stint in Europe with Genoa in the 1994-95 season, Nakata's seven years in Italy and



one season in England mark him out as the undoubted trailblazer who allowed the likes of Yoshida to follow in his footsteps. Now having spent almost exactly the same amount of time on that side of the world, Yoshida knows better than most that it takes more than just ability to succeed in such a different environment. "It's not all about football. We have to adapt to a different culture, a different life because Japan is totally different to Europe so we have to understand this," he explained. "We have to accept the difference and we have to adapt to the language and culture, to respect the people who live there if we want to get the respect back. "I was also very proud of [Shinji]

Okazaki for being a member of the [Leicester City] team that won the league. "He made another great step for the history of Japanese football and hopefully more Japanese players will move to Europe." Yoshida also came close to winning silverware in England earlier in 2017, only to see Zlatan Ibrahimovic pop up with a late goal to secure a 3-2 win for Manchester United in the League Cup Final. For Yoshida's national team hopes, meanwhile, the draw with Iraq in the World Cup qualifiers, while not ideal, at least means Japan have their destiny in their own hands ahead of the double header with Australia and Saudi Arabia at the end of August. It has, in truth, been a campaign of mixed fortunes, one which has seen the East Asians bounce back from an opening-day defeat to remain unbeaten ever since, but rarely reach the level expected of one of the continent's powerhouses. Japan have twice reached the last 16 of the World Cup – on home soil in 2002 and eight years later in South Africa – but suffered a disappointing exit in Brazil after picking up just one point from three games. "We had a difficult start because no one expected us to lose to the UAE," added Yoshida, who knows a win over fellow Asian heavyweights Australia will avoid a potentially tricky encounter away in Saudi Arabia in the final round of fixtures to determine the Asian representatives at Russia 2018. "After that we came back, not in a perfect way, but still we have a chance to qualify and we are still positive and I'm confident in myself, my teammates and my country. "I don't want that [Saudi Arabia] game to have to decide our destiny so hopefully we can qualify for the World Cup before going there. "The best result Japan has had was to reach the second round of the World Cup – that's my personal target and it would mean another step for Japanese history."



WAKING THE TIGER

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS TUNKU ISMAIL SULTAN IBRAHIM, THE CROWN PRINCE OF JOHOR, WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIA EARLIER THIS YEAR HAVING ALREADY TURNED JOHOR DARUL TA'ZIM INTO THE PREEMINENT FORCE IN THE COUNTRY. NOW, THE MAN KNOWN AS 'TMJ' IS AIMING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE AT NATIONAL LEVEL.

By: Michael Church Photos: Lagardère Sports/Johor Darul Ta'zim



Not long after crossing the causeway that connects Singapore with Malaysia, the impact His Royal Highness Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim has had on football in his own backyard becomes

apparent. Blue and red flags bearing the crest of Johor Darul Ta'zim adorn pillars and walls and numerous commuters shuffle around with the shirt of the 2015 AFC Cup winners on their backs.

For a club formed as recently as 2013, the achievements of JDT are remarkable: three-time Malaysia Super League champions and winners of the AFC Cup, the Southern

Tigers have established themselves as one of the rising forces of the Southeast Asian club scene.

State of the art facilities ensure players and management are catered for in the best possible manner, pointing the way for others to follow; JDT have shown the right kind of investment can reap significant dividends.

None of it would have been possible without the input of the man known as 'TMJ'. The initials are an abbreviation of the title in Malay by which he is known (Tunku Mahkota Johor, or the Crown Prince of Johor) and they adorn many of the man's possessions, including the number plate of his immaculate Rolls Royce convertible.

Under the Crown Prince, JDT have been a stellar success but now TMJ is seeking



to make his mark on an altogether bigger project, and it is one that could present him with his greatest challenge yet: reestablishing Malaysia as a force within the regional and continental game.

It has been decades since Malaysia were significant actor on the continental scene, the country's last great hurrah coming when qualification was sealed for the Olympic Games in Moscow in 1980. It ended an era when Malaysia could consistently compete with the Confederation's strongest nations.

And yet, despite the immense passion of the fans, for more than 35 years Malaysia's national team has slipped behind Asia's best as professionalism and a commitment to long-term planning have taken hold elsewhere.

There have been false dawns before for Malaysian football, but the Crown Prince - the recently elected president of the Football Association of Malaysia - believes he knows how to address an issue that has perplexed those who have gone before him.

"The only way you can improve something is to first accept you have a weakness," says TMJ. "What are we lacking? Be very realistic and very accepting when it comes to what is our problem.

"The problem in this country and why a lot of people cannot solve problems is because a lot of people cannot accept that they have

a problem. We need to first accept it and then analyse it and then come up with the best solution."

Over the years, Malaysian football has been blighted by any number of issues. A series of match fixing and corruption scandals stretching back to the 1990s severely damaged the game at all levels, while a lack of investment and the rivalry between the state federations that make up the FAM have resulted in a dearth of forward planning.

The biggest loser has been the country's national team, with the position of the Harimau Malaya - the Malayan Tigers - on the FIFA Ranking list slipping to 155th with Malaysia not qualifying for the AFC Asian Cup since 1980, appearing in 2007 only by virtue of co-hosting the competition.

And all this despite a passion for the game that has until recently seen clashes in the keenly contested Malaysia Cup, one of the oldest knockout competitions in Asian football, sell out venues the length and breadth of the country season after season.

Being patron of JDT has afforded the Crown Prince the opportunity to view the game from a perspective few in Malaysian football have been able to take in decades.

Participating in the latter stages of the AFC Cup and taking his team to face off against some of the continent's best in the preliminary

rounds of the AFC Champions League means he is well placed to judge the enormity of the gap that exists between his nation and the best in Asia.

"When we went to Gamba Osaka (for the AFC Champions League Play-offs in February with JDT), the first thing that hit me was that we have been sleeping for 30 years, and you can't expect JDT to do it in four years. You need more time," he says of the Malaysian game.

"Look at the clubs in Thailand. How long has it taken them to get into the AFC Champions League? I believe one day JDT will be in the AFC Champions League but when I saw us playing against Gamba Osaka, I looked at my sporting director and my coaches and I said: 'We're not far off'. We lost because of individual mistakes and a lack of experience, but we played good football.

"That, at least, gave me the motivation to fight and push more. There's hope and we'll keep on working hard."

As a result, the Crown Prince has already formulated a plan to put Malaysia back on the right track.

In May he hired vastly experienced Portuguese coach Eduardo 'Nelo' Vingada, an AFC Asian Cup winner with Saudi Arabia in 1996, to head up the national side and he has further plans to take the country forward

during his tenure.

"First of all, we need to improve the structure of the domestic competition," he says. "We need education in terms of educating all of the participating teams to spend within their means, especially to spend in which particular areas where we need to improve like youth development, infrastructure and football innovation.

"And after that, it's to help the national team to play a good style of football with a different philosophy, different motivation and different areas to look at in terms of professionalism. These are my plans for Malaysian football.

"I want to set a policy that, regardless of who becomes the president in the future, the policy will always remain the same so that we will have stability. Otherwise, whoever the new president is and he brings in his own policy we will go back to square one.

"We are trying to do what Thailand is doing very well; Indonesia is going to pick up very soon and the Philippines too. But we have our own way of doing things and to run things in Malaysia is a bit different because I think most people here are very complacent.

"This is where me and the FAM with my ExCo are trying to be as close as possible to the affiliates, to share our opinions and to guide them and have a healthy competition.

"We have to have a good coach for the

national team and a different energy and try to improve the national team's ranking and style of play. Our goals in other tournaments in which we will be participating with the national team and, the under-22s, will be to make sure we work very closely with the affiliates and say: 'This is what has to be done, everybody has to follow the rules.'

"We have zero tolerance when it comes to corruption and we have zero tolerance when it comes to match fixing and also not paying players' salaries. This is the immediate plan. But obviously when it comes to long term improvement you need to have more time."

Having achieved so much in such a short time with JDT, there is the risk the Crown Prince will be expected to deliver similar results at national level despite a new set of problems now residing on his desk. Education and development are key issues, but so is managing expectations.

"It's completely different because it's a different scenario and a different situation altogether," he says. "In JDT I run the club as my own and obviously I have key people in the club who play a role in helping me out. It's easier here.

"But being in FAM is harder because it involves other states, other clubs including the management inside FAM. Things have to be done differently. The approach is different.

With his position with the Johor royal family, the Crown Prince has no need to involve himself in the affairs of the FAM but, he stresses, it is a passion for the game and his devotion to JDT as well as the broader Malaysian game that has seen him move into his new role.

"I love football in general and football, as we know, is a unifying factor," he says. "Johor is a very unique state, with our tradition and history, with our motto which is, regardless of any race or religion you are known as a Johorean. Football plays a very strong part in that, in reminding people to be united. That's why I love football. And I've loved the sport in general since I was a kid.

"What drives me to take charge of Malaysian football is that I can't afford for Malaysian football to fall into the hands of the politicians. That would destroy all the great things we have built here. I never wanted to be the president, but I had to sacrifice and take the bullet for a couple of years and then we will see how it goes.

"We're trying to improve the system because we all know when it comes to Malaysian football it is a duty and that's what I want to contribute to the sport. But when it comes to JDT, it is my love because I created it from scratch. That's the balance between the two."

LOYAL CUSTODIAN

AFTER MAKING HIS DEBUT FOR THE NATIONAL TEAM AT 20 YEARS OLD, 35-YEAR-OLD AMER SHAFI CONTINUES TO HOLD ON TO HIS PLACE BETWEEN THE STICKS. AND HAVING ALREADY APPEARED AT THREE AFC ASIAN CUPS, THE LEGENDARY GOALKEEPER NOW HAS HIS EYES FIRMLY SET ON REACHING THE UAE IN JUST UNDER TWO YEARS' TIME.

By: Peter Alsop Photo: Lagardère Sports

The number of players who represent their country for fifteen years is low, primarily because a new generation comes along to displace them. Or, in the case of the elite performers, the decision is taken to retire and spend more time with loved ones in favour of lengthy away trips.

Even fewer players manage to give two decades of service. Italy legend Gianluigi Buffon is closing in on a remarkable 20-year career with his country and that is exactly where fellow custodian and long-standing Jordan number one Amer Shafi sees himself in five years' time.

"It's the dream of every player to be part of the national team," says Shafi, who gained his first cap for his country in a 1-1 draw with Kenya as a 20-year-old back in 2002.

"A goalkeeper has a longer lifespan than a player, so I'm hoping to be with the team at the next AFC Asian Cup in the UAE and I want to play on until I am 40 years old."

Two years after his debut, Jordan qualified for the AFC Asian Cup for the first time, by which time Shafi had firmly established himself as his country's first choice goalkeeper, and it was in China in 2004 that the charismatic custodian really made a name for himself.

Paired in a group alongside continental powerhouses Korea Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, Jordan advanced to the quarter-finals in second place after a win and two draws in which Shafi kept three clean sheets.

The West Asians then almost caused an almighty shock in the last eight by taking eventual winners Japan to penalties following a 1-1 draw, before ultimately losing 4-3 after the Samurai Blue had missed their first two spot kicks.

"It was a big thing for me to be at the tournament at that age," reflected Shafi. "My performance helped me gain confidence for

the future.

"I started in 2002, but that time was also the first big steps of the Jordan national team with the coach, Mahmoud Al Gohary.

"Since then I have been with three different generations and have seen a lot of progress and development in that time, which I hope continues in the future."

Now with 140 caps to his name, the Al Wehdat goalkeeper is his country's leading appearance maker and has starred at three of the last four AFC Asian Cups.

His status as icon of his national team may not have come about had it not been for an injury to a teammate in Shafi's



teenage years.

"It's true. I started as a midfielder with a team called Al Yarmouk in Amman," revealed the custodian.

"One game, when I was 16, the goalkeeper got injured and I volunteered to go in goal and it was that moment that I decided to keep being a goalkeeper."

As far as decisions go, that one proved to be inspired as Shafi has been an integral player in the most successful period in Jordan's history.

Having narrowly missed out on the AFC Asian Cup in 2007, Jordan returned to the continental competition in Qatar in 2011, when they again reached the quarter-finals before suffering a 2-1 reversal to Uzbekistan.

Then, three years later as part of a team that Shafi classes as perhaps the best he has been part of, Jordan came as close as they ever have to qualifying for the FIFA World Cup.

A third-place finish in the third qualifying round set up a continental play-off with Uzbekistan, which the Jordanians won 9-8 on penalties in Tashkent after a 2-2 aggregate scoreline.

Luck was not on the side of the west Asian nation, though, as Jordan were then tasked with overcoming a Uruguay team that had finished fourth in the previous World Cup and boasted the likes of Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani within their ranks.

"The people of Jordan were expecting us to qualify for the World Cup because it was a good generation between 2011 and 2014," said Shafi, whose side lost the first leg 5-0 in Amman before the return fixture in Montevideo ended scoreless.

"Unfortunately we changed the coach and [some of the] players were pushed out of the team for whatever reason, which did not affect the team positively. But I still hope that this generation can have a chance to go to a World Cup."

The 2015 AFC Asian Cup in Australia saw Jordan fall at the first hurdle but, looking ahead, Shafi and company are on course to advance to the 2019 edition in the United Arab Emirates.

After a 7-0 victory over Cambodia in March, Jordan drew 0-0 in Vietnam in June to mean, ahead of a double header with bottom side Afghanistan, they sit top of the Group C standings and are firm favourites to progress.

"In my opinion the best team was the one from the 2011 AFC Asian Cup in Qatar but now I'm also seeing a good generation with this team, which has a young average age," added Shafi.

"My main highlight was qualifying for the 2004 Asian Cup in China, which was a huge thing at that stage in my career. But if we can qualify for the next tournament that can also be another big highlight."



HOTSHOT

LEBANON’S MOHAMMED GHADDAR HAS TORN DEFENCES APART IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE MALAYSIA SUPER LEAGUE SEASON, SCORING 18 TIMES IN 11 GAMES FOR KELANTAN BEFORE SIGNING FOR 2015 AFC CUP WINNERS JOHOR DARUL TA’ZIM AND SETTING HIS SIGHTS ON SUCCESS FOR BOTH HIS CLUB AND HIS COUNTRY.

By: Michael Church Photos: Lagardère Sports

The statistics don't lie: with a total of 19 goals in 13 league games so far this season, Mohammed Ghaddar is on fire, terrifying defences the length and breadth of Malaysia with his unerring eye for goal.

Eleven of those games - and all but one of the goals, at a remarkable strike rate of close to two per game - were completed in the colours of Kelantan, a club Ghaddar joined for a third time at the start of this season before departing in early June to join the Malaysia Super League's biggest hitters,

Johor Darul Ta'zim.

The three-time defending champions and winners of the 2015 AFC Cup were already in pole position in the domestic standings, but that did not stop the Southern Tigers from scooping up the league's leading scorer in an attempt to guarantee themselves a fourth straight domestic crown.

"You know I played before for Kelantan and I scored 18 goals in 11 games and JDT gave me this offer," says the Lebanon international striker. "It looked good to me, especially as I'm now 32 years old. A proposal like that wouldn't come again for someone of my age."





“I asked Kelantan if I could go, because it’s a good offer and from a big team. If you come to Johor you see the quality and you see the stadium and it’s very impressive, so after one week or 10 days the transfer was agreed.

“I’ve come here to join a big team. Johor is the star of Malaysian football. In 2015 they won the AFC Cup and I’m coming here to win the AFC Cup, the league and everything.

“I’m here for one-and-a-half years. In Kelantan it’s different than here. Here you have many players who are stars. Not five, not two, not three, but all. There you have two players or three players. Of course the Kelantan team is good, but not all the players are stars.

“In Kelantan, they gave me freedom in the game, on the pitch, I can play as I like but here it’s different tactically. You have a different coach who wants, if you lose the ball, for you to come back. This for me is good and this gives me happiness in the game.”

In the form of his life and with a bumper contract in his back pocket, Ghaddar’s joy is not only confined to life on the pitch. The gregarious, ebullient striker constantly flashes his beaming smile as he discusses his latest transfer in what is his third stint in Malaysian football.

Ghaddar is well travelled; after starting out his career in his homeland with Nejmeh, he has played in Bahrain, Syria, Jordan and Iraq while JDT are his third club in Malaysia after three spells with Kelantan and a short sojourn with Felda United.

Despite his nomadic existence, the Southeast Asian nation continues to lure him back.

“I had already played in Malaysia for several years and I had an offer to go and play in Iraq and I left,” he says of his shift to Naft Al Wasat. “And after that I was in Jordan and I joined Al Faisaly, they are one of the stars of Asia because they have won the AFC Cup twice. “But after this Tan Sri Annuar Musa called

me to come back to Kelantan. ‘You are part of the family at Kelantan,’ he said, so I said: ‘Give me the offer and I’ll come’. He gave me a good offer and I came back and I played this season.

“But Kelantan is not the same as before. Everything was good when I was playing, I was scoring and Johor saw that I scored 18 goals and they needed a striker. Coach Bojan Hodak, who coached me before in Kelantan, called me and said: ‘JDT needs you Ghaddar’, so I came. I met with them a few times and it was all finalised.”

The slick professionalism on display at JDT is something Ghaddar believes is missing from the game back in his native Lebanon, with his absence from Miodrag Radulovic’s squad for the recent AFC Asian Cup qualifier against Malaysia in June raising eyebrows.

The incident, however, has not put Ghaddar off the idea of pulling on the white shirt of The Cedars again in the near future, with both personal and national pride at stake.

Lebanon have only appeared at the finals of the AFC Asian Cup once, in 2000 when the country hosted the competition, while he also has his sights on matching national hero Roda Antar as the country’s all-time leading goal scorer.

“In the national team I have scored 19 goals. Number one is Roda with 20 and I have 19 so I need one goal more,” he says.

“At the 2000 AFC Asian Cup in Lebanon, we played three games. Against Iran we lost 4-0, we drew with Iraq and with Thailand, but were knocked out. People liked football in Lebanon before. But not so much now.

“(Former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic) Al Hariri died and now you don’t have people going to the games. I think this season the fans are coming back but it needs time for the people to come again.”

Lebanese football did experience a brief upturn in 2013 when the nation – coached by Germany’s Theo Buckner – reached the final phase of Asia’s qualifying tournament for the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil, the first time Lebanon had advanced so far along the road to a World Cup.

It was a perfect storm of talents, foreign-based players coming together, claims Ghaddar, and, while he believes much of the momentum from a qualifying campaign that saw the Lebanese defeat both Korea Republic and Iran has been lost, the nation can rekindle some of that spirit to qualify for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.

“Before we never had this in Lebanon,” he says. “We had many players who were stars and we had many players who were playing

outside Lebanon, we had players playing in Germany, in Sweden, in the Emirates, in Iran. There were many outside, I think as many as 16 players.

“I know the coach was good, from Germany, and he worked in Lebanon for maybe 15 years and he knows the players’ mentality, the Lebanese.

“Previously, there was no money in the national team or the league, but at that time when we won a game we would get \$10,000. In Lebanon the players earn in one month just \$1,000. This is different.

“We were playing for the shirt, not just the money, but the money was good for the players. The coach did well and we won against Iran and Korea Republic and we reached the final 10. But now I don’t believe it will be possible.

“Before, so many players played outside and now it’s only seven and some of the players have ended their careers, like our captain Roda Antar. Many players have retired.”

Despite the loss of key players, Lebanon currently stand in a strong position to book

their place at the AFC Asian Cup finals for the first time through the qualifiers having secured back-to-back wins over Hong Kong and Malaysia in a group that also features DPR Korea.

With two teams progressing from each group, Radulovic’s team is in a strong position to advance.

“Now we have six points and have won two games,” says Ghaddar. “Malaysia lost and after this game Hong Kong and DPR Korea drew 1-1, so it’s good for Lebanon.

“If we go to this one it will be very good for Lebanon and for the league if we go to the Emirates in 2019 and play there. I think it will be very nice. I think we will go there.”

Appearing at the AFC Asian Cup finals could be the perfect way for Ghaddar to call time on his career. But, with so much going on in the immediate future, he dares not look so far ahead.

“I’m not thinking about anything,” he says. “I’m in Johor and I’m in this team and I need to play well and be scoring and be in the game. We need to win the league, we need to win the cup, you need to win it all. After that, who knows?

“It’s the same here as in Europe. In Malaysia, JDT’s number one. I’ve played here for four years, I know all of Malaysia and here is the top.”

Top Left & Left
AFC Cup 2014

Bottom Left FIFA
World Cup Qualifying 2014

Above In action for
Johor Darul Ta’zim

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

AFTER GROWING UP IN THE NETHERLANDS AND REPRESENTING THE ORANJE AT YOUTH LEVEL, STEFANO LILIPALY HAS BECOME A KEY MEMBER OF THE INDONESIA SIDE. THE MIDFIELDER NOW HOPES THE SECOND-PLACE FINISH AT LAST YEAR’S AFF CHAMPIONSHIP IS JUST THE START OF A BRIGHT FUTURE ON THE PITCH FOR THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRY.

By: Peter Alsop Photo: Lagardère Sports

As the clocked ticked down at Manila’s Rizal Memorial Stadium in November last year, Singapore and Indonesia were tied 1-1 in their third and final group stage match at the AFF Championship. As it stood, the Indonesians were heading out of the competition. It had been more than 18 months since the senior team’s last competitive action and the next appeared to be some time coming.

Then, with just five minutes to go, a cross from captain Boas Salossa bounced up invitingly for Stefano Lilipaly, who struck home from the penalty spot to spark wild celebrations among the Indonesian players, staff and handful of supporters in the stadium. The goal sealed the Garuda’s place in the semi-finals and was seen as a turning point after a low period following a FIFA-enforced suspension.

Under the guide of experienced Austrian coach Alfred Riedl, Indonesia’s run would stretch on. Vietnam were put to the sword 2-1 in Bogor City in the first leg of the semi-final, before a 2-2 draw after extra-time in the return fixture in Hanoi, in which Lilipaly opened the scoring, saw Indonesia advance to their first final since 2010.

Thailand ultimately lifted the trophy following a 3-2 aggregate win in the final, but for Indonesia the tournament had undoubtedly proved a huge success.

“We put Indonesia back on the map,” said Lilipaly, who was born in Arnhem to an Indonesian father and Dutch mother and currently plays his club football for Netherlands second-tier side SC Cambuur.

“We started all over with a new team and everyone was thinking we were the underdogs and would not even make it past the group stage. In the end we got to the final – unfortunately we did not win it, but I think we surprised everyone.

“[The goal against Singapore] was a very special moment because it was my first goal for the national team and it was one of the most important goals in the tournament. If I didn’t score that we wouldn’t have made the semi-finals.”

Frustratingly for Indonesia, FIFA’s lifting of the ban came too late for them to participate in the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 qualifying campaign, meaning that they must sit out while the rest of the continent battles to be part of an expanded 24-team tournament in just over 18 months’ time. But the Garuda now have



their eyes firmly fixed on the future.

At 67, Riedl has stepped down to be replaced by former Barcelona and Real Madrid player Luis Milla. Perhaps more significant than his time with the La Liga giants, though, is his years spent with Spain’s youth teams – from U-19 to U-23 – as Indonesia shift their focus to their own youth set-up.

Indonesia will head to Malaysia in August to compete at the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games, an U-22 competition that allows three overage players, before hosting next year’s Asian Games, where three senior players are again permitted to what is an U-23 tournament. Lilipaly aims

to be part of both.

“The U-22 side has two big tournaments. All the senior team games we now play with U-22 players and only pick five senior players,” said Lilipaly, whose wife gave birth to his first child, Jax Elion, in June.

“I’m one of the five players and for the Asian Games, which will be in Jakarta, maybe I’ll be one of the selected three. I still haven’t played for the national team in Jakarta and I cannot imagine how crazy it would be.

“That type of support, the atmosphere is something you only experience in Indonesia. You don’t have that kind of support in Europe, when Indonesia plays the whole country is proud.”

There have also been renewed efforts to improve the standard of Indonesia’s domestic championship, with stars including Michael Essien, Peter Odemwingie and Didier Zokora arriving to take part in Liga 1.

For Lilipaly, the foreseeable future remains in European football. SC Cambuur finished second in the league, only narrowly missing out on promotion to the top flight via the play-offs, and also beating Ajax en route to reaching the semi-finals of the Dutch Cup.

Eight goals and nine assists was a fine return for a player who only joined midway through the season and, while a return to Indonesia where he had a brief spell with Persija Jakarta remains an option one day, his eyes are firmly fixed on the game’s highest level.

“After the tournament we saw that they wanted to do good things with the Indonesian league and I think with more foreigners the league will do better,” he added.

“Maybe it will help the clubs improve the facilities and become more professional. After three years I may go back to Asia because in the end I want to end in Indonesia.

“The support and atmosphere is amazing. But first I want to focus on Europe and get to the highest level possible.”





Iran Qualify For Russia 2018

Islamic Republic of Iran took the headlines at the end of Matchday Eight of the 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifiers with their 2-0 win over Uzbekistan ensuring they would become the first Asian nation to qualify for Russia 2018.

Sardar Azmoun and Mehdi Taremi scored in either half as Team Melli not only maintained their unbeaten record in qualifying but also extended their run of Group A clean sheets to eight.

Any disappointment Uzbekistan might have felt at the defeat was mitigated by Korea Republic's shock 3-2 loss in Qatar.

The former World Cup semi-finalists did level the tie in Doha after goals from Hasan Al Haydos and Akram Afif had seen them go 2-0 down but a third from Al Haydos negated the work of Ki Sung-yueng and Hwang Hee-chan.

The stunning result was the catalyst for the subsequent dismissal shortly after of coach Uli Stielike.

Qatar's surprise victory also sees the Road to Russia remain open for Syria after Ahmad Al Salih's late free-kick earned a point against China in an entertaining 2-2 draw in Melaka.

Mahmoud Al Mawas had given the Syrians the lead in the 12th minute when he converted from the spot before Gao Lin scored with a penalty of his own in the 68th minute after a foul on Zhang Linpeng.

Wu Xi looked to have given the Chinese a win seven minutes later but Al Salih's curling free-kick salvaged a share of the spoils.

Iran have already won the group as they hold a seven-point lead over second-placed Korea with just two games remaining.

Uzbekistan remain hot on the Koreans' heels just a point behind and Syria a further three back.

Qatar and China do still have mathematical possibilities of making third place and the play-off but the gap is five and six points respectively.

The story is quite different in Group B where three teams are vying for the two automatic places at Russia 2018 with Japan, Australia and Saudi Arabia all in the reckoning.

The Socceroos played a week early due to 2017 FIFA Confederations Cup commitments and came out on top in an exciting 3-2 win over the Saudis in Adelaide.

Tom Juric twice gave the home side the

decisive third for Australia 18 minutes into the second half when the Saudi defence gave the Celtic midfielder time and space on the edge of the area to drive his shot into the top corner of Al Mosaillem's goal.

Japan's 1-1 draw with Iraq at PAS Tehran Stadium does see the Samurai Blue remain in top spot but by just the slimmest of margins after Yuya Osaka's eighth minute opener was cancelled out by Mahdi Kamel.

In Bangkok, the United Arab Emirates knew that anything but a draw against Thailand would see them eliminated from contention, while anything but the three points would see them only mathematically still in the running.

Both teams had changed coaches since their first meeting in Abu Dhabi last October with Mahdi Ali and Kiatisuk Senamuang being replaced by Edgardo Bauza and Milovan Rajevac.

Thailand took the lead through Mongkol Tossakrai on 68 minutes but Ali Makhout levelled late on in injury time to deny the Southeast Asians a first win in the final round of World Cup qualifiers.

There remains all to play for at the top in Group B with August's Matchday Nine tie between Japan and Australia set to whet the appetite.

The UAE are now six points off the three leading sides but a win over Saudi Arabia at home in their next fixture could haul them back into contention.

Iraq and Thailand are already eliminated but will look to finish off the qualifiers with a winning momentum and build towards the 2019 AFC Asian Cup in the UAE.



lead in the first-half, capitalising on goalkeeper Yasser Al Mosaillem's mistake to put Australia ahead after just seven minutes before Salem Al Dawsari used his pace to latch on to Mohammad Al Sahlawi's return pass to level the scores 16 minutes later.

Juric's second in the 36th minute was cancelled out by a fine team effort on the stroke of half-time when Al Sahlawi struck from eight yards out.



Group A										Group B									
	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts			P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts	
IR Iran	8	6	2	0	8	0	8	20	12/06/17										08/06/17
Korea Republic	8	4	1	3	11	10	1	13	IR Iran 2 (Sardar Azmoun 23, Mehdi Taremi 88)										Australia 3 (Tomi Juric 7, 36, Tom Rogic 64)
Uzbekistan	8	4	0	4	6	6	0	12	Uzbekistan 0										Saudi Arabia 2 (Salem Al Dawsari 23, Mohammad Al Sahlawi 45+2)
Syria	8	2	3	3	4	5	-1	9	13/06/17										13/06/17
Qatar	8	2	1	5	6	10	-4	7	Syria 2 (Mahmoud Al Mawas 12, Ahmad Al Salih 90+3) China 2 (Gao Lin 68, Wu Xi 75)										Thailand 1 (Mongkol Tossakrai 69) United Arab Emirates 1 (Ali Mabkhout 90+3)
China	8	1	3	4	5	9	-4	6	Qatar 3 (Hasan Al Haydos 25, 75, Akram Afif 51)										Iraq 1 (Mehdi Kamel 73) Japan 1 (Yuya Osaka 8)
									Korea Republic 2 (Ki Sung-yueng 62, Hwang Hee-chan 70)										



Former Winners Remain In Contention

Former winners Guangzhou Evergrande, Urawa Red Diamonds and Al Ain all advanced to the AFC Champions League quarter-finals, where they will be joined by Shanghai SIPG, Kawasaki Frontale, Persepolis and Saudi Arabian pair Al Ahli and Al Hilal when the continental tournament resumes in late August.

Two-time champions Guangzhou scraped into the last eight after seeing off Kashima Antlers on away goals in the Round of 16 at the end of May. Paulinho's strike 15 minutes from time ensured a 1-0 first leg victory but Luiz Felipe Scolari's men fell behind in the return fixture in Ibaraki to leave the game on a knife edge.

Paulinho then restored his side's advantage as the Chinese Super League outfit returned to the quarter-finals for the first time since 2015, despite conceding a late goal that saw the tie end 2-2 on aggregate.

Guangzhou will now face an all Chinese clash with Shanghai SIPG in the last eight after Andre Villas-Boas' men overcame another domestic rival in Jiangsu FC in the Round of 16.

Hulk and Odil Ahmedov each scored in a 2-1 first leg win in Shanghai but Jiangsu, whose form on the continent was in stark contrast to that in the Chinese Super League, were expected to offer a greater challenge at home.

Shanghai, though, had the game all but tied up by half-time as Elkeson and Yang Xiaotian's own-goal gave them a 2-0 lead. Jiangsu rallied after the interval but it was too little too late as the visitors ran out 3-2 winners and 5-3 on aggregate.

Last year's runners-up Al Ain made light work of two-time continental champions Esteghlal in their last 16 encounter despite suffering a 1-0 defeat in the first leg in Tehran.

It took 27 minutes of the return fixture for Caio to level the scores but after that it was one-way traffic as the Brazilian doubled his tally six minutes later to give the Emiratis a 2-0 lead at the interval.

Omar Abdulrahman put the hosts in control shortly after the restart before a rare goal from the now departed Lee Myung-joo put the result beyond doubt. Abdulrahman added another on the hour



and Nasser Al Shamrani rubbed salt into the Esteghlal wounds, before Kaveh Rezaei netted a consolation.

Next up for the inaugural winners is a date with Al Hilal, who defeated debutants Esteghlal Khouzeestan 4-2 over two legs.

After falling behind in the first leg in Muscat, quick-fire goals by Abdulla Al Dossary and Carlos Eduardo secured a 2-1 victory, before a similar scenario played out in the reverse fixture in Doha.

Aloys Nong restored parity on aggregate but Omar Khribin and Salem Al Dawsari ensured another 2-1 win as the Saudi champions

returned to the last eight for the sixth time.

Winners in 2007, Urawa Red Diamonds had not advanced to the last eight since 2008, but produced a stunning second leg display to reverse a two-goal first leg deficit against Jeju United.

Appearing in the last 16 for the first time, Jeju ran out 2-0 winners on home soil,

but Shinzo Koroki and Tadanari Lee had the scores all level by the interval in the return leg.

Cho Yong-hyung was then sent off for the visitors in the final 10 minutes and, deep into extra time, Ryota Moriwaki popped up with

the winner as Urawa booked a date with compatriots Kawasaki Frontale in the next round.

Kawasaki had no such problems in disposing of Thai champions Muangthong United after Kengo Nakamura, Yu Kobayashi and Hiroyuki Abe helped claim a 3-1 first-leg win.

The second leg proved even more one sided as Kobayashi, Tatsuya Hasegawa, Eduardo Neto and Rhayner all got on the scoresheet as a 4-1 victory ensured the J.League team advanced 7-2 on aggregate.

A clash of the Al Ahlis saw the Saudi and Emirati teams end 1-1 in the first leg in Jeddah, before the Saudi Arabian outfit proved too strong in Dubai.

Taiseer Al Jassam and Hussain Al Moqahwi put the visitors two up inside 25 minutes and, after Makhete Diop had been sent off on the hour, Saad Abdulameer made it three before the score finally ended 3-1 on the night and 4-2 on aggregate.

Next up for Al Ahli under their new coach Sergei Rebrov is Persepolis, after the Iranian champions sealed their place in the last eight for the first time.

Mehdi Taremi missed a first-leg penalty but the unfortunate Chico Flores' own-goal in the second leg meant Persepolis progressed by the narrowest of margins.

The first legs of the quarter-finals will take place between August 21 and 23 with the return fixtures being held two weeks later.

Group Stage																	
Group A									Group B								
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/–	Pts		P	W	D	L	F	A	+/–	Pts
Al Ahli (UAE)	6	3	2	1	10	5	5	11	Lekhwiya	6	4	2	0	15	6	9	14
Esteghlal	6	3	2	1	10	5	5	11	Esteghlal Khouzestan	6	2	3	1	6	5	1	9
Al Taawoun	6	1	2	3	7	12	–5	5	Al Fateh	6	1	3	2	7	9	–2	6
Lokomotiv	6	1	2	3	7	12	–5	5	Al Jazira	6	0	2	4	3	11	–8	2
20/02/2017 Al Taawoun 1 (Talat Al Absi 67) Lokomotiv 0 Al Ahli 2 (Makhete Diop 45+1, 90) Esteghlal 1 (Omid Ebrahimi 74) 27/02/2017 Lokomotiv 2 (Salamat Kutibaev 1, Marat Bikmaev 57) Al Ahli 0 Esteghlal 3 (Kaveh Rezaei 1 Mohsen Karimi 70, Leandro Padovani 89) Al Taawoun 0 13/03/2017 Esteghlal 2 (Farshid Esmaceli 78, Ali Ghorbani 84) Lokomotiv 0 Al Ahli 0 Al Taawoun 0 11/04/2017 Lokomotiv 1 (Marat Bikmaev 13) Esteghlal 1 (Kaveh Rezaei 87) Al Taawoun 1 (Alassane N'diaye 63 pen) Al Ahli 3 (Makhete Diop 37, 59, Everton Ribeiro 45) 25/04/2017 Lokomotiv 4 (Marat Bikmaev 20, 32 pen, 47, Jaloliddin Marsharipov 81) Al Taawoun 4 (Abdulmajed Al Suwat 18, Jehad Al Hussein 65, Alassane N'diaye 69, Ricardo Machado 90+1) Esteghlal 1 (Kaveh Rezaei 58) Al Ahli 1 (Abdelaziz Sangour 17) 09/05/2017 Al Ahli 4 (Salmin Khamis 28, Ismail Al Hammadi 59, Asamoah Gyan 72, Everton Ribeiro 77) Lokomotiv 0 Al Taawoun 1 (Mohammed Al Saiari 36) Esteghlal 2 (Jaber Ansari 19, Kaveh Rezaei 76)									20/02/2017 Esteghlal Khouzestan 1 (Abolfazl Alaii 80) Al Fateh 0 Lekhwiya 3 (Yousseff El Arabi 11, 90, Youssef Msakni 80) Al Jazira 0 27/02/2017 Al Fateh 2 (Nathan Junior 40 pen, Sayyaf Al Bishi 56) Lekhwiya 2 (Youssef El Arabi 18, Nam Tae-hee 86) Al Jazira 0 Esteghlal Khouzestan 1 (Aloys Nong 2) 14/03/2017 Esteghlal Khouzestan 1 (Hassan Beit Saeid 8 pen) Lekhwiya 1 (Ismail Mohamed 11) Al Fateh 3 (Ali Al Zaqan 12, 51, Hamad Al Juhayyim 45+1) Al Jazira 1 (Ali Mabkhout 38) 10/04/2017 Lekhwiya 2 (Nam Tae-hee 35, Almozee Ali 43) Esteghlal Khouzestan 1 (Aloys Nong 9) Al Jazira 0 Al Fateh 0 25/04/2017 Al Fateh 1 (Ali Al Zaqan 85) Esteghlal Khouzestan 1 (Salman Bahrani 90+10) Al Jazira 1 (Mbark Boussoufa 18 pen) Lekhwiya 3 (Nam Tae-hee 27 pen, 62, Youssef Msakni 77) 09/05/2017 Esteghlal Khouzestan 1 (Mehdi Zobeidi 86) Al Jazira 1 (Humaid Al Hammadi 44) Lekhwiya 4 (Mohamed Musa 9, Youssef Msakni 20, Ali Afif 27, Chico Flores 45+1) Al Fateh 1 (Chico Flores OG 87)								
Group E									Group F								
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/–	Pts		P	W	D	L	F	A	+/–	Pts
Kashima	6	4	0	2	13	5	8	12	Urawa	6	4	0	2	18	7	11	12
Muangthong	6	3	2	1	7	3	4	11	Shanghai SIPG	6	4	0	2	15	9	6	12
Ulsan Hyundai	6	2	1	3	9	9	0	7	FC Seoul	6	2	0	4	10	16	–5	6
Brisbane Roar	6	1	1	4	4	16	–12	4	Western Sydney	6	2	0	4	10	22	–12	6
21/02/2017 Brisbane Roar 0 Muangthong United 0 Kashima Antlers 2 (Mu Kanazaki 64, Yuma Suzuki 82) Ulsan Hyundai 0 28/02/2017 Ulsan Hyundai 6 (Kim In-sung 10, 68, Mislav Orsic 13, 34, Ivan Kovacec 55, Lee Jong-ho 90+3) Brisbane Roar 0 Muangthong United 2 (Theerathon Bunmathan 12, Xisco 90+4) Kashima Antlers 1 (Pedro Junior 47) 14/03/2017 Kashima Antlers 3 (Yuma Suzuki 43, Naomichi Ueda 76, Yasushi Endo 80) Brisbane Roar 0 Ulsan Hyundai 0 Muangthong United 0 12/04/2017 Brisbane Roar 2 (Jamie Maclaren 18, Brett Holman 49) Kashima Antlers 1 (Ryota Nagaki 79) Muangthong United 1 (Teerasil Dangda 37) Ulsan Hyundai 0 26/04/2017 Ulsan Hyundai 0 Kashima Antlers 4 (Mu Kanazaki 52, 67, Pedro Junior 54, Leo Silva 90) Muangthong United 3 (Xisco 37, Chanathip Songkrasin 83, Teerasil Dangda 89) Brisbane Roar 0 10/05/2017 Kashima Antlers 2 (Yuma Suzuki 19, 60) Muangthong United 1 (Teerasil Dangda 45) Brisbane Roar 2 (Jamie Maclaren 18, 37) Ulsan Hyundai 3 (Suh Myeong-won)									21/02/2017 Western Sydney 0 Urawa 4 (Shinzo Koroki 56, Tadanari Lee 58, Tomoaki Makino 68, Rafael Da Silva 86) FC Seoul 0 Shanghai SIPG 1 (Hulk 53) 28/02/2017 Urawa 5 (Yuki Muto 9, Tadanari Lee 11, Takahiro Sekine 15, Tomoya Ugajin 21, Yoshiaki Komai 45) FC Seoul 1 (Park Chu-young 14) Shanghai SIPG 5 (Hulk 2, Oscar 17, Shi Ke 25, Elkeson 27, Wu Lei 75) Western Sydney 1 (Mitch Nichols 20) 15/03/2017 FC Seoul 2 (Yun Il-lok 66, 71) Western Sydney 3 (Lachlan Scott 24, Terry Antonis 40 pen, Jaushua Sotirio 63) Shanghai SIPG 3 (Shi Ke 10, Elkeson 45, Hulk 52) Urawa 2 (Rafael Da Silva 72 pen, Wataru Endo 84) Muangthong 0 Urawa 1 (Daisuke Nasu 48) 11/04/2017 Western Sydney 2 (Terry Antonis 77, Lachlan Scott 90+2) FC Seoul 3 (Lee Seok-hyun 4, Dejan Damjanovic42, 71) Urawa 1 (Rafael Da Silva 44) Shanghai SIPG 0 26/04/2017 Urawa 6 (Takahiro Sekine 14, Zlatan Ljubijankic 18, Tadanari Lee 43, Rafael Da Silva 71, 80, Shinzo Koroki 90+4) Western Sydney 1 (Junpei Kusukami 66) Shanghai SIPG 4 (Hulk 27, Zhang Wei 32, Wu Lei 45, Oscar 74) FC Seoul 1 (Park Chu-young 70) 10/05/2017 FC Seoul 1 (Yoon Seung-won 38) Urawa 0 Western Sydney 3 (Junpei Kusukami 3, Steven Listica 6, Jaushua Sotirio 89 Shanghai SIPG 1 (Wu Lei 1, Elkeson 23 pen)								
Round of 16																	
22/05/2017 Esteghlal 1 (Kaveh Rezaei 90+2 pen) Al Ain 0 29/05/2017 Al Ain 6 (Caio 27, 33, Omar Abdulrahman 49, 60, Lee Myung-joo 56, Nasser Al Shamrani 75) Esteghlal 1 (Kaveh Rezaei 83)									22/05/2017 Al Ahli (KSA) 1 (Abdulfattah Asiri 38) Al Ahli (UAE) 1 (Khamis Esmacel 21) 29/05/2017 Al Ahli (UAE) 1 (Asamoah Gyan 90+1 pen) Al Ahli (KSA) 1 (Taiseer Al Jassam 18, Hussein Al Moqahwi 24, Saad Abdulameer 72 pen)								
Al Ain win 6-2 on aggregate									Al Ahli (KSA) win 4-2 on aggregate								
23/05/2017 Guangzhou Evergrande 1 (Paulinho 75) Kashima Antlers 0 30/05/2017 Kashima Antlers 2 (Pedro Junior 28, Mu Kanazaki 90+1) Guangzhou Evergrande 1 (Paulinho 55)									23/05/2017 Muangthong United 1 (Teerasil Dangda 45+2) Kawasaki Frontale 3 (Kengo Nakamura 66, Yu Kobayashi 69, Hiroyuki Abe 89) 30/05/2017 Kawasaki Frontale 4 (Yu Kobayashi 31, Tatsuya Hasegawa 32, Eduardo Neto 40, Rhayner 79) Muangthong United 1 (Teerasil Dangda 1)								
Guangzhou Evergrande win on away goals									Kawasaki Frontale win 7-2 on aggregate								
23/05/2017 Jeju United 2 (Marcelo Toscano 7, Jin Seong-uk 90+2) Urawa Red Diamonds 0 31/05/2017 Urawa Red Diamonds 3 (Shinzi Koroki 18, Tadanari Lee 34, Mirowaki Ryota 114) Jeju United 0									24/05/2017 Jeju United 2 (Marcelo Toscano 7, Jin Seong-uk 90+2) Urawa Red Diamonds 0 31/05/2017 Urawa Red Diamonds 3 (Shinzi Koroki 18, Tadanari Lee 34, Mirowaki Ryota 114) Jeju United 0								
24/05/2017 Shanghai SIPG 2 (Hulk 33 pen, Odil Ahmedov 45+1) Jiangsu FC 1 (Roger Martinez 8) 31/05/2017 Jiangsu FC 2 (Hong Jeong-ho 75, Wu Xi 90+3) Shanghai SIPG 3 (Elkeson 34, Yang Xiaonan 43 OG, Hulk 90+4)									24/05/2017 Shanghai SIPG 2 (Hulk 33 pen, Odil Ahmedov 45+1) Jiangsu FC 1 (Roger Martinez 8) 31/05/2017 Jiangsu FC 2 (Hong Jeong-ho 75, Wu Xi 90+3) Shanghai SIPG 3 (Elkeson 34, Yang Xiaonan 43 OG, Hulk 90+4)								
Shanghai SIPG win 5-3 on aggregate									Shanghai SIPG win 5-3 on aggregate								



Holders Stay On Course

Defending AFC Cup champions Air Force Club of Iraq are two games away from a second successive final, while Tajikistan's FC Istiklol and India's JSW Bengaluru – runners-up in 2015 and 2016 respectively – also remain in the hunt for the title.

Elsewhere, Syria's Al Wahda, Ceres Negros of the Philippines, Singapore's Home United and debutants 4.25 SC of DPR Korea make up the seven teams vying to be crowned continental champions.

In the tournament's revamped format, Iraqi duo Al Zawraa and Air Force Club squared off in the West Asia Zone Semi-Finals after winning Groups A and B, while Group C winners Al Wehdat of Jordan faced Al Wahda – the best-placed runner-up in the West – in the second semi-final.

After playing out a 1-1 draw in the first leg in Erbil, Emad Mohsin's goal on 50 minutes was enough to see the holders edge past their domestic rivals in the second leg in Doha to set up a clash with Al Wahda.

Their Syrian opponents, meanwhile, had made their place in the West Asia Zone Final virtually assured as early as the first leg when two goals in three minutes helped secure Hossam Al Sayed's side a comprehensive 4-1 win over Al Wehdat of Jordan.

Mohamad Al Hasan gave the Syrians the lead 14 minutes into the game and although Munther Abu Amara levelled the scores 18 minutes later, Mohammad Al Ghabbash put Al Wahda back in front before a Raja Rafe brace put his side in the driving seat.

Al Wehdat did bounce back in front of 13,000 fans in Amman with Abdallah Deeb securing a second leg win for the Jordanians on the night in a 1-0 scoreline, but the damage had already been done and it will be Al Wahda who face the holders in the West Asia Zone Final in September.

In the ASEAN Zone, Philippines pair Global FC and Ceres Negros progressed from Groups F and G, while Home United came out on top of Group H to qualify for the Zonal Semi-Finals, where they would be joined by the highest-placed runners-up from the three groups, 2015 AFC Cup champions Johor Darul Ta'zim.



Having already beaten Johor to win their group, Global might have fancied their chances against Home United but the Filipino side were rocked by a striker in red-hot form in Croatian Stipe Plazibat.

The 27-year-old snatched a late equalizer in Manila in the first leg to give the Singaporeans the edge in the return meeting at the Jalan Besar Stadium.

But after a nervy start on home turf The Protectors found themselves behind on the night and in the tie after Kemy Agustien put Global in front.

Song Ui-young restored parity and Home's slim advantage half-an-hour later, but Shu Sasaki then edged Global back in front.

The tide turned after a straight red card to Global's Dennis Villanueva in the 71st minute, though, and Home United's pressure finally paid off as Plazibat levelled in the 89th minute before arcing in a free-kick late on to spark mass celebrations.

There was better news for the Philippines in



the ASEAN Zone's other semi-final where Ceres pulled off a huge upset to eliminate former winners Johor.

The visitors brought a slim one-goal advantage into the tie at Pana-ad Park and Football Stadium after a 3-2 win in Johor Bahru a fortnight earlier, but Kota Kawase put Ceres into the driving seat on 26 minutes after he finished from six yards out.

Argentine Gabriel Guerra restored parity on the night and put Johor 4-3 ahead on aggregate after he was set-up by his compatriot Gonzalo Cabrera in the 65th minute.

The Malaysians may have thought they had done enough to progress to the ASEAN Zone Final, but in added time Rodriguez was brought down inside the penalty area, and the Spaniard duly converted the spot-kick.

Worse was to follow for Johor as Farizal Malias received a straight red card for violent conduct shortly after as the former champions bowed out of the tournament.

Ceres' reward is a match against Home United in August to determine the ASEAN Zone Champion and an Inter-Zone Semi-Final against Central Asia Zone champions FC Istiklol.

The winner of which will play the victor between JSW Bengaluru and 4.25 SC for the right to a place in November's final.

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/−	Pts
Al Zawraa	6	3	3	0	9	3	6	12
Al Jaish	6	3	0	3	6	9	−3	9
Al Ahli	6	1	3	2	5	6	−1	6
Al Suwaiq	6	1	2	3	3	5	−2	5

20/02/2017

Al Jaish 1 (Mohammad Hamdkou 24) Al Ahli 0

Al Zawraa 0 Al Suwaiq 0

06/03/2017

Al Suwaiq 0 Al Jaish 1 (Mohammad Hamdkou 68)

Al Ahli 1 (Tall Malick 35) Al Zawraa 1 (Alaa Al Azzawi 61 pen)

13/03/2017

Al Suwaiq 0 Al Ahli 0

Al Zawraa 3 (Mohanad Karrar 41, 90+1, Ezzeddin Al Awad 50 OG) Al Jaish 1 (Bashar Khashrif 54)

04/04/17

Al Ahli 2 (Tall Malick 62, Ahmad Al Essawi 76) Al Suwaiq 1 (Yaseen Al Sheyadi)

Al Jaish 0 Al Zawraa 3 (Mohanad Abdulraheem 48, 89, Alaa Mhawvi 68)

18/04/17

Al Suwaiq 0 Al Zawraa 1 (Amjed Kalaf 25)

Al Ahli 1 (Tall Malick 85) Al Jaish 2 (Zakaria Al Kaddour 22, Youssef Kalifa 41)

02/05/17

Al Zawraa 1 (Alaa Abdulzahra 90+2) Al Ahli 1 (Ahmad Al Essawi 5)

Al Jaish 1 (Abdulmalek Al Anizan 55) Al Suwaiq 2 (Mamadou Diagne 69, Tchetché Kipre 73)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/−	Pts
Air Force Club	6	3	3	0	6	2	4	12
Al Wahda	6	3	2	1	10	3	7	11
Al Hidd	6	3	0	3	8	5	3	9
Safa SC	6	0	1	5	1	15	−14	1

20/02/2017

Safa SC 0 Air Force Club 0

Al Hidd 0 Al Wahda 1 (Osama Omari 40)

06/03/2017

Al Wahda 2 (Mohammed Fares 28, Raja Rafe 66) Safa SC 0

Air Force Club 2 (Hammedi Abdullah 62, Emad Mejbel 70) Al Hidd 1 (Uche Agba 76)

14/03/2017

Al Wahda 0 Air Force Club 0

Al Hidd 3 (Jfedayo Olusegun 11, 62, Uche Agba 32) Safa SC 1 (Standly Echabe 33)

03/04/17

Safa SC 0 Al Hidd 2 (Sayed Mohamed Adnan 7, 80)

Air Force Club 1 (Ahmed Kadhim 88) Al Wahda 1 (Khaled Mobayed 23)

18/04/17

Al Wahda 0 Al Hidd 2 (Mohammad Al Dawud 59, 77)

Air Force Club 2 (Ali Al Saadi 29 OG, Amjad Radhi 38) Safa SC 0

02/05/17

Safa SC 0 Al Wahda 6 (Majed Al Haj 43, Mohammad Fares 45+3, Mohamad Al Hasan 48, Osama Omari 83, Abdulhadi Shalhu 89, Qusay Habib 90+3)

Al Hidd 0 Air Force Club 1 (Amjad Radhi 71)

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/−	Pts
Al Wehdat	6	3	3	0	9	6	3	12
Al Muharraq	6	3	1	2	9	8	1	10
Saham	6	2	1	3	9	9	0	7
Nejmeh	6	1	1	4	5	9	−4	4

21/02/2017

Saham Club 3 (Badar Jabri 33, Mohsin Al Khaldi 45, Mohammed Al Ghassani 88) Al Muharraq 2 (Ismaeel Hasan 11, Abdulla Yaser 51 pen)

Al Wehdat 1 (Monther Abu Amara 63) Nejmeh 0

07/03/2017

Nejmeh 2 (Akram Moghrabi 45, Nicholas Cofie 70)

Saham Club 1 (Mohammed Al Ghassani 47)

Al Muharraq 1 (Ismaeel Hasan 8) Al Wehdat 1 (Monther Abu Amara 29 pen)

13/03/2017

Nejmeh 1 (Khaled Takaji 65 pen) Al Muharraq 2 (Doris Fuakuputu 16, 47)

Al Wehdat 2 (Ahmed Wridat 27, Mohammad Mustafa 49)

Saham Club 1 (Mohammed Al Ghassani 13)

04/04/17

Saham 1 (Jildemar 28) Al Wehdat 1 (Baha Faisal 84)

Al Muharraq 1 (Jamal Rashid 90+3) Nehmeh 0

17/04/17

Nejmeh 1 (Abdelrazaq Al Hussain 88) Al Wehdat 1 (Hassan Wasswa 84 OG)

01/05/15

Al Wehdat 3 (Sebastijan Antic 1, Munther Abu Amara 45+1, Baha Faisal 60) Al Muharraq 2 (Doris Fuakuputu 49, Ali Jamal 75)

Saham 3 (Mohammed Al Ghassani 36, 74, 87) Nehmeh 1 (Nicholas Cofie)

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/−	Pts
FC Istiklol	6	5	1	0	15	4	11	16
Altyn Asyr	6	4	1	1	12	4	8	13
Dordoi FC	6	1	0	5	6	16	−10	3
FC Alay	6	1	0	5	9	18	−9	3

14/03/2017

FC Alay 1 (Akramzhon Umarov 55) Altyn Asyr 2 (Altynmyrat Annadurdyev 43, Akramzhon Umarov 55 OG)

FC Istiklol 2 (David Muvator 16, Jahongir Aliev 22)

Dordoi FC 0

04/04/17

Dordoi FC 1 (Alisher Azizov 87) FC Alay 0

Altyn Asyr 1 (Altynmyrat Annadudyev 49) FC Istiklol 1 (Jahongir Aliev)

18/04/17

Dordoi FC 0 Altyn Asyr 2 (Myrat Yagysyev 43, Altynmyrat Annadudyev 85)

FC Istiklol 3 (Nuriiddin Davronov 45+1, David Mavutor 68, Dilshod Vasiev 89) FC Alay 1 (Alia Sylla 59)

03/05/17

FC Alay 1 (Odiljon Abdurakhmanov 89) FC Istiklol 4 (Manuchekhr Dzhallilov 33, 39, Dilshod Vasiev 79, 82)

17/05/17

Altyn Asyr 4 (Myrat Yagysyev 32, 42, 82, 85) FC Alay 1 (Murolimzhon Akhmedov 53)

Dordoi FC 1 (Zarifou Soulemana 50) FC Istiklol 4 (Manuchekhr Dzhallilov 8, 46, 75, Igor Potapov 90+3 OG)

31/05/17

FC Alay 5 (Umarbek Tukhtasinov 30, Murolimzhon Akhmedov 61, Issa Sidibe 73, 88, Ilyaz Alimov 90+3)

Dordoi FC (Islam Shamshev 11, Alisher Azizov 26, Kairat Zhyrgalbek 75, 81)

FC Istiklol 1 (Dilshod Vasiev 90+2) Altyn Asyr 0

Group E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/−	Pts
JSW Bengaluru	6	4	0	2	7	6	1	12
Maziya S&R	6	4	0	2	10	4	6	12
Mohun Bagan	6	2	1	3	10	11	−1	7
Abahani Ltd Dhaka	6	1	1	4	4	10	−6	4

14/03/2017

Abahani Limited Dhaka 0 Maziya S&R 2 (Mohamed Umair 5, Abdulla Asadnulla 88)

JSW Bengaluru 2 (Sandesh Jhingam 51, Sunil Chhetri 57)

Mohun Bagan 1 (Yuya Katsumi 36)

04/04/17

Maziya S&R 0-1 JSW Bengaluru 1 (John Johnson 90+3)

Mohun Bagan 3 (Jeje Lalpekhlua 45+1, Balwant Singh 48, Sony Norde 87) Abahani Limited Dhaka 1 (Jonathan Brown 21)

18/04/17

JSW Bengaluru 2 (Nishu Kumar 40, Marjan Jugovic 83)

Abahani Limited Dhaka 0

19/04/17

Mohun Bagan 0 Maziya S&R 1 (Mohamed Umair 34)

03/05/17

Maziya S&R 5 (Yasfaadh Habeeb 13, Mohamed Umair 27, Aleksandar Rakic 45, 60, Asadnulla Abdulla 55) Mohun Bagan 2 (Kingsuk Debnath 48, Jeje Lalpekhlua 78)

17/05/17

Maziya S&R 2 (Mohamed Umair 59, Aleksandar Rakic 85)

Abahani Limited Dhaka 0

Mohun Bagan 3 (Jeje Lalpekhlua 9, Kean Lewis 74, Bikranjit Singh 80) JSW Bengaluru 1 (Seminlen Doungel 52)

31/05/17

JSW Bengaluru 1 (Sunil Chhetri 57) Maziya S&R 0

Abahani Limited Dhaka 1 (Emeka Onuoha 8) Mohun Bagan 1 (Kastumi Yusa 83)

Group F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/−	Pts
Global FC	6	5	0	1	13	9	4	15
Johor	6	4	1	1	16	5	11	13
Beoungket Angkor	6	1	1	4	3	12	−9	4
Magwe FC	6	0	2	4	5	11	−6	2

21/02/2017

Global FC 1 (Misagh Bahadoran 39) Magwe FC 0

Johor Darul Ta'zim 3 (Gabriel Guerra 3, Muhammad Nazmi 11, Safiq Rahim 89) Beoungket Angkor 0

07/03/2017

Magwe FC 1 (Sekou Sylla 89) Johor Darul Ta'zim 1 (Gopi Ramachandra 28)

Beoungket Angkor 0 Global FC 2 (Paul Mulders 5, 65 pen)

14/03/2017

Beoungket Angkor 1 (Joon Oulai 34 OG) Magwe FC 0

Johor Darul Ta'zim 4 (Mahalli Jasuli 30, Safiq Rahim 34 pen, Brian Ferreira 87, Marcos Antonio 90+2)

Global FC 0

05/04/17

Magwe FC 1 (Sekou Sylla 62) Beoungket Angkor 1 (Khoun Laboravy 61)

Global FC (Dennis Villanueva 27, Shu Sasaki 32, Mani Aguinaldo 35) Johor Darul Ta'zim 2 (Gabriel Guerra 49, 83)

19/04/17

Magwe FC 2 (Naing Naing Kyaw 38, Naing Lin Tun 90+3)

Global FC 4 (Hikaru Minegishi 72, Darryl Roberts 82, 83, Shu Sasaki 89)

Beoungket Angkor 0 Johor Darul Ta'zim 3 (Safawi Rasid 8, Nazmi Faiz 26, Gabriel Guerra 90+2)

03/05/17

Johor Darul Ta'zim 3 (Gabriel Guerra 16, 59, 79) Magwe FC 1 (Kyaw Svar Linn 3)

Global FC 3 (Paul Mulders 12, Hikaru Minegishi 28, Darryl Roberts 90+3) Beoungket Angkor 1 (Sath Rosib 50)

Group G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/−	Pts
Ceres Negros	6	3	2	1	16	8	8	11
Hanoi FC	6	3	2	1	14	10	4	11
Tampines Rovers	6	2	0	4	8	17	−9	6
Felda United	6	1	2	3	7	10	−3	5

21/02/2017

Hanoi FC 1 (Nguyen Van Dung 57) Ceres Negros 1 (Bienvenido Maranon 49)

Tampines Rovers 2 (Son Yong-chan 64, Khairul Amri 83)

Felda United 1 (Fazrul Hazli 86)

07/03/2017

Felda United 1 (Zah Rahan Krangar 23) Hanoi FC 1 (Do Hung Dung 90+1)

Ceres Negros 5 (Iain Ramsay 1, Bienvenido Maranon 24, 64, Manuel Ott 38, Fernando Rodriguez 72) Tampines Rovers 0

15/03/2017

Hanoi FC 4 (Loris Arnaud 16, Nguyen Van Quyet 65, Do Hung Dung 89, Gonzalo Marronke 90+3) Tampines Rovers 0

Ceres Negros 0 Felda United 0

04/04/17

Felda United 3 (Syahid Ziadon 5, Hadin Azman 66, Fazrul Hazli 77) Ceres Negros 0

Tampines Rovers 1 (Yasir Hanapi 68) Hanoi FC 2 (Nguyen Van Quyet 75, Pham Van Thanh 90+2)

19/04/17

Ceres 6 (Bienvenido Maranon 13, 90, Kevin Ingreso 21, Fernando Rodriguez 53, Alvaro Silva 69 OG, Jason de Jong 89) Hanoi FC 2 (Pham Thanh Luong 25, Do Hung Dung 86)

Felda United 1 (Norshahrul Idlan 51) Tampines Rovers 3 (Ivan Dzoni 29, Khairul Amri 68, 72)

03/05/17

Hanoi FC 4 (Pham Duc Huy 52, Nguyen Van Quyet 76, 86, Do Hung Dung 90) Felda United 1 (Gaston Cellerino 90+3)

Tampines Rovers 2 (Yasir Hanapi 24, 60) Ceres Negros 4 (Bienvenido Maranon 6, 22, Fernando Rodriguez 44, Kota Kawase 65)

Group H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/−	Pts
Home United	4	3	0	1	12	8	4	9
Than Quang Ninh	4	1	1	2	10	9	1	4
Yadanarbon	4	1	1	2	3	8	−5	4

22/02/2017

Yadanarbon 1 (Aung Thu 45+2) Home United 0

08/03/2017

Than Quang Ninh 1 (Vu Minh Tuan 45 pen)

Yadanarbon 1 (Yan Paing 22)

14/03/2017

Home United 3 (Song Ui-young 3, 84, Faris Ramli 58)

Than Quang Ninh 2 (Patiyo Tambwe 32, Vu Minh Tuan 40)

05/04/17

Than Quang Ninh 4 (Jumaat Jantan 36 OG, Bui Van Hieu 44, Vu Minh Tuan 78, Nghiem Xuan Tu 90+2) Home United 5 (Khairul Nizam 11, Stipe Plazibat 15, 64, 69, 86)

18/04/17

Home United 4 (Afiq Yunos 12, Faris Ramli 16, Irfan Fandi 26, Adam Swandi 72) Yadanarbon 1 (Sithu Aung 45+3)

02/05/17

Yadanarbon 0 Than Quang Ninh 3 (Nay Myo Aung 38 OG, Duong Van Khoa 56, Nguyen Hai Huy 74)

Group I

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/−	Pts
4.25 SC	4	2	2	0	14	3	11	8
Kigwancha	4	2	2	0	13	3	10	8
Erchim FC	4	0	0	4	0	21	−21	0

14/03/2017

4.25 SC 6 (Kim Yu-song 12, 22, 24, 31, 59, Om Chol-song 77) Erchim FC 0

04/04/17

Erchim FC 0 Kigwancha 3 (Kim Yong-il 40, 90+3, Taguldur Galy 46 OG)

18/04/17

4.25 SC 1 (Pak Myong-song 45) Kigwancha 1 (Pak Kun-hyok 56)

03/05/17

Kigwancha 2 (Rim Kwang-hyok 35, Ri Un-il 61) 4.25 SC 2 (An Il-bom 80, Kim Yu-song 90+8)

17/05/17

Erchim 0 4.25 SC 5 (Kim Yu-song 23, 57, 85, An Il-bom 40, Ri Hyong-jin 69)

31/05/17

Kigwancha 7 (Rim Kwang-hyok 30, 40, 79, 82, Kang Kuk-chol 60, Han Thae-hyok 70, Kim Yong-il 74)

Erchim 0

West Asia Zone

16/05/17

Al Wahda 4 (Mohamad Al Hsan 14, Moohammad Al Ghabbash 74, Raja Rafe 77, 85)

Al Wehdat 1 (Munther Abu Amara 32)

30/05/17

Al Wehdat 1 (Abdallah Deeb 7) Al Wahda 0

Al Wahda win 4-2 on aggregate

ASEAN Zone

16/05/17

Global 2 (Darryl Roberts 15, Mani Aguinaldo 53) Home United 2 (Adam Swandi 34, Stipe Plazibat 90+5)

30/05/17

Home United 3 (Song Ui-young 36, Stipe Plazibat 89, 90+4) Global FC 2 (Kemy Austien 6, Shu Sasaki 49)

Home United win 5-4 on aggregate

17/05/17

Johor Darul Ta'zim 3 (Gonzalo Cabrera 18, Safiq Rahim 45+1, Hazan Bakri 68)

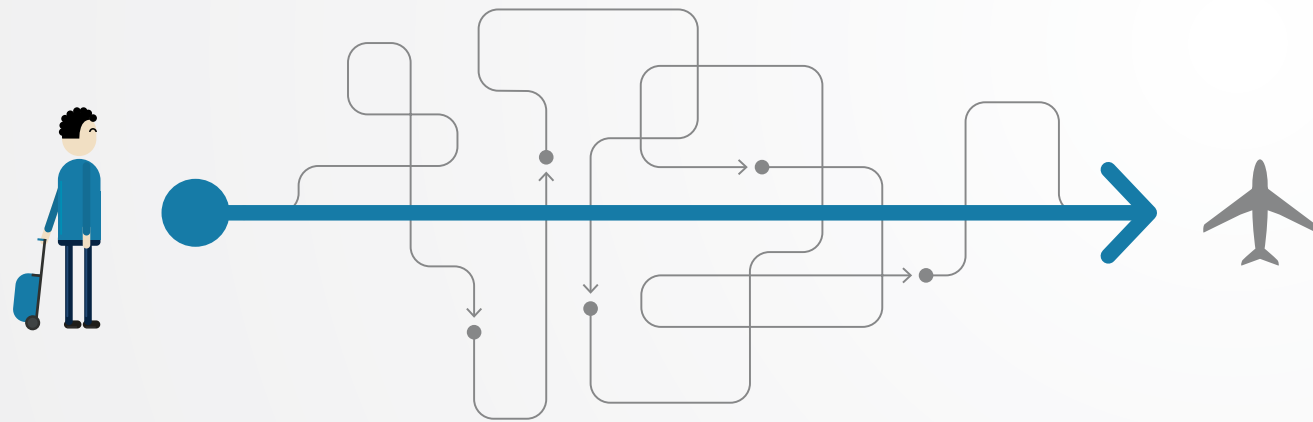
Ceres Negros 2 (Fernando Rodriguez 21, Bienvenido Maranon 25)

31/05/17

Ceres Negros 2 (Kota Kawase 26, Fernando Rodriguez 90+3) Johor Darul Ta'zim 1 (Gabriel Guerra 65)

Ceres Negros win on away goals

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India, Lebanon, Palestine and the Philippines all maintained perfect records after the conclusion of an enthralling Matchday Two of the third round of 2019 AFC Asian Cup qualifiers in June.

Sunil Chhetri was India's Group A match-winner once more as he netted the only goal in sublime fashion after the Blue Tigers defeated Kyrgyzstan 1-0 in Bangalore.

Meanwhile, Myanmar bounced back from a defeat in their opener to comprehensively beat Macau 4-0.

In Group B, Lebanon came back from a goal down to beat Malaysia 2-1 in Johor Bahru as the West Asians retain top spot with the chasing pack five points or more behind.

DPR Korea have only played one game, though, but they may have been disappointed by the 1-1 draw in Hong Kong where they were dominant for long spells.

By contrast, Group C remains tightly poised with Matchday One's bottom side Cambodia now leaping to second spot after a win over Afghanistan in front of 40,000 in

Phnom Penh.

Leaders Jordan are just a point ahead of the Kingdom after being held to a goalless draw with Vietnam in Ho Chi Minh City.

After thrashing Bhutan 14-0 in Matchday One in Group D, Oman found Palestine a much tougher proposition going down 2-1 to the West Asians in Al Ram.

The Maldives also got the better of Bhutan in Thimphu, winning 2-0, to join Oman on three points.

Singapore suffered a shock 2-1 defeat at home to Chinese Taipei in Group E, while Bahrain's 2-1 win away at Turkmenistan sees Singapore already two points off third after two games.

Over 15,000 fans in Dushanbe saw



Philippines eventually defeat Tajikistan 4-3 on a rollercoaster night at Pami Stadium in Group F.

A goalless stalemate in Katmandu had less drama but it now puts Yemen clear in second, three points ahead of opponents Nepal.

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
India	2	2	0	0	2	0	2	6
Myanmar	2	1	0	1	4	1	3	3
Kyrgyz Republic	2	1	0	1	1	1	0	3
Macau	2	0	0	2	0	5	-5	0

13/06/2017

Macau 0 Myanmar 4
India 1 Kyrgyzstan 0

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Lebanon	2	2	0	0	4	1	3	6
DPR Korea	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Hong Kong	2	0	1	1	1	3	-2	1
Malaysia	1	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0

13/06/17

Hong Kong 1 DPR Korea 1
Malaysia 1 Lebanon 2

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Jordan	2	1	1	0	7	0	7	4
Cambodia	2	1	0	1	1	7	-6	3
Vietnam	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	2
Afghanistan	2	0	1	1	1	2	-1	1

13/06/17

Cambodia 1 Afghanistan 0
Vietnam 0 Jordan 0

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Palestine	2	2	0	0	5	1	4	6
Oman	2	1	0	1	15	2	13	3
Maldives	2	1	0	1	2	3	-1	3
Bhutan	2	0	0	2	0	16	-16	0

13/06/17

Bhutan 0 Maldives 2
Palestine 2 Oman 1

Group E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Bahrain	2	1	1	0	2	1	1	4
Turkmenistan	2	1	0	1	4	3	1	3
Chinese Taipei	2	1	0	1	3	4	-1	3
Singapore	2	0	1	1	1	2	-1	1

13/06/17

Singapore 1 Chinese Taipei 2
Turkmenistan 1 Bahrain 2

Group F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Philippines	2	2	0	0	8	4	4	6
Yemen	2	1	1	0	2	1	1	4
Nepal	2	0	1	1	1	4	-3	1
Tajikistan	2	0	0	2	4	6	-2	0

13/06/17

Nepal 0 Yemen 0
Tajikistan 3 Philippines 4

UNHCR Becomes Social Responsibility Partner

The AFC signed a partnership agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in June. Cooperation between the two organisations will take place under auspices of the recently launched AFC Dream Asia Foundation.

The signing ceremony took place at the AFC House in Kuala Lumpur. Speaking at the ceremony, AFC General Secretary Dato' Windsor John said: "The AFC is delighted to work with UNHCR to have a real, positive impact on lives across Asia. Football is a powerful tool for social development and it is our responsibility to spread the joy of the beautiful game as wide as possible.

"The plight of displaced people is distressing and affects the whole continent. Working with established humanitarian organisations like the UNHCR, and with our new AFC Dream Asia Foundation, I am sure we will see our efforts bear fruit, to the benefit of refugees across

Asia."

Richard Towle, UNHCR Representative in Malaysia, said: "Refugees often remain invisible in society. As the UNHCR looks to find ways to make their plight visible, we are excited to partner with the Asian Football Confederation, an international football organisation with integrity and credibility.

"Football can help refugees connect with their host countries, giving them visibility and purpose, in addition to providing health and educational benefits."

The cooperation agreement between the AFC and the UNHCR is based on the organisations' vision statements and objectives.

The objective of the AFC, which signed an international MoU with UNHCR last December, is to undertake effective social responsibility campaigns and promote the game of football and its unifying educational, cultural and humanitarian values.



Chinese Taipei Benefits From AFC Women's Programme

Chinese Taipei has become the latest beneficiary of the AFC Women's Assistance Programme (WAP). The AFC Technical Division carried out the first assessment visit under the programme in Chinese Taipei over three days at the end of May.

The AFC WAP offers Member Associations (MA) technical support to take their women's football to the next level. The aim of the initial assessment visit is to gain an understanding of the status of women's football development.

AFC's Head of Women's Football Development Bai Lili carried out the visit which included observing women's football activities and meeting with women's football stakeholders in order to identify the key issues and challenges facing women's football in Chinese Taipei.

The visit included meetings with the Chinese Taipei

Football Association (CTFA) General Secretary, Women's Football Committee Deputy Chairperson and Technical Director. The WAP was introduced to the CTFA in detail and, in turn, the CFTA provided a presentation on the status of women's football in Chinese Taipei. Bai Lili was also given an introduction to the Mulan women's national league, meeting representatives of the clubs.

The visit will be followed by the development of a women's football strategic plan, which was also discussed during the visit. The plan will be accompanied by a supporting report which outlines key development priorities. Once these are defined, the MA

can be offered further technical expert support and the AFC will also link the MA with relevant AFC development programmes available, working hand in hand with the MA.



Beach Soccer Insight For Japan Coaches

An AFC Beach Soccer Coaching Certificate Level 1 was held in Kanagawa, Japan in May.

In total, 16 coaches attended the course, viewed as a vital step in the right direction for the growth and improvement of beach soccer in Japan.

In attendance at the course opening were Tsuyoshi Kitazawa, Head of the Japan Football Association Futsal Committee, Yasuhisa Okuda, Director of the JFA Futsal & Beach Soccer Department, Shuzo Nakamura,

Assistant Manager of the JFA Futsal & Beach Soccer Department, AFC Beach Soccer Elite Instructor Mr. Ling Luhui and AFC Beach Soccer Assistant Instructor Moreira Ozu.

Mr. Okuda said: "At the recent FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in the Bahamas, Japan were knocked out at the Group Stage, so we have to think about improving in the future. This is the first AFC Beach Soccer Coaching Certificate Course Level 1 in Japan. Everyone here will be key to further developing Beach Soccer in Japan."



Tajikistan Clubs Get Marketing Perspectives

Within the AFC's League Development framework, a two-day seminar on club and league marketing was held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, in May.

The first day of the seminar was attended by representatives of the eight clubs playing in Tajikistan's highest league and the two-day event was led by Azerbaijan's Elnur Mammadov, an AFC strategic planning, marketing and infrastructure consultant.

Welcoming the participants, Alisher Urunov, Tajikistan Football Federation (TFF) Vice President and general director of the Football League of Tajikistan said: "In modern football, marketing plays a key role.

"Thanks to marketing, football continues to progress. In this regard, we decided to hold a seminar on marketing. I wish you a good and fruitful dialogue and that you learn as much as possible, and then apply it in practice in your clubs."

Mammadov noted that the seminar's purpose was to demonstrate the value of football marketing and sponsorship to club representatives, using specific

examples.

The specialist from Azerbaijan provided useful information on the development of club marketing in his presentation, with sponsorship and advertising, sponsorship portfolio, marketing strategy, ticket sales, working with fans, structure of the commercial department of the club, problems of sponsorship, and the development of an Internet strategy among the topics discussed.

On the second day of the seminar, Mammadov met with the sponsors and partners of the TFF and the Football League of Tajikistan and made a presentation titled 'Sponsorship and Advertising in Football: Opportunities and Benefits'.

In his opening speech, Juraev Dilshod TFF Vice President, stressed the importance of common aspirations among the federation's marketing specialists and stakeholders in searching

for new partners and sponsors, as well as fostering an attractive product which will bring fans to the stadium.

A number of ideas were voiced during the seminar, and domestic specialists were able to gain valuable insight into the experience of other countries in working with fans and promoting their respective brands.



Asian Members Elected To FIFA Council

In May, the AFC Member Associations elected Mahfuza Kiron (Bangladesh), Zhang Jian (China PR), Chung Mong Gyu (Korea Republic) and Mariano V. Araneta Jr. (Philippines) for the four places allocated to Asia on the FIFA Council at the AFC Congress 2017 in Manama, Bahrain.

With three male positions available, Zhang Jian, Chung Mong Gyu and Mariano V. Araneta Jr. secured their positions by acclamation. For the single female seat, Mahfuza Kiron secured the simple majority required, obtaining 27 votes over Australia's Moya Dodd who received 17 votes in the first round after Han Un Gyong (DPR Korea) and Susan Shalabi Molano (Palestine) withdrew from the contest before the election.

As part of the FIFA Reforms, the AFC will now have seven members on the FIFA Council – an increase of three from before. The reforms also aim to increase the role of women in football governance and each Confederation will have one female representative on

the new body. The term of office for all the FIFA Council Members is from 2017 until 2019.

AFC President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa congratulated the four elected members for their win and commended all candidates for their hard work and commitment. Shaikh Salman said: "Let me be the first to congratulate the four successful candidates - Zhang, Chung, Mariano and Mahfuza - who will join us on the FIFA Council. I look forward to working with you to elevate Asian football on the world stage."

"This result is a testament to their dedication and passion towards the development of football

in Asia. I am confident that Asia will provide four extremely capable and trustworthy members to represent the interests of our great game in the years to come.

"Today represents yet another step in the reform process – one that reinforces the unity, solidarity and commitment of Asian football."



AFC Grassroots Football Day Breaks Records Again

The AFC's commitment to ensure football remains the most popular sport in the continent has been further strengthened as an unprecedented 38 Member Associations (MA) celebrated the AFC Grassroots Football Day 2017 in May.

Celebrating a new participation record for the fifth successive year since 2013, enthusiasts of the beautiful game of all ages and abilities commemorated the landmark occasion this year, marking a consecutive year-on-year increase of nearly 60% from 2015 to 2017.

AFC President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa said: "Every journey in football begins at the grassroots. The AFC Grassroots Football Day brings to life our ambition, under the banner of One Asia, One Goal, to ensure that football continues to flourish and expand its reach to all segments of our continent."

"I am delighted to see our Member Associations embracing the core values of leadership, professionalism and unity by empowering and bringing joy to people and communities of all backgrounds

through football.

"Ultimately, the strong foundation we build today will lead to a more dynamic and competitive landscape for our great game to thrive in Asia."



Indian Football Gets Road Map For Future

Stakeholders in Indian football have agreed a clearly defined road map to create the right structure for Indian club football in the coming years which will culminate in a new and sustainable future for the game across the country.

At a roundtable meeting held in Kuala Lumpur in June - facilitated by the AFC - a consensus was reached on working together to find the way forward for the development of Indian club football.

Chaired by AFC General Secretary Dato' Windsor John, the meeting included representatives of the All India Football Federation (AIFF), the Sports Ministry of India, the I-League and ISL clubs as well as from FIFA, the players' representatives and the AFC.

Agreement was reached that the ultimate goal was to establish the right structure for league football in India and that a strong league would help develop better players and coaches,

which would enhance the national team and that would then, in turn, assist the continued growth of club football.

In the meeting, it was agreed that the history, commitment and contributions made for more than 100 years as well as the new skills, investments and marketing and promotional skills required respect.

Independent research would be commissioned and analysed before being evaluated by the AIFF and the stakeholders, with the decisions on the medium and long-term pathway being taken as soon as possible after the FIFA U-17 World Cup, held in India later this year.

Dato' Windsor said: "The objectives were clear; to help

provide a road map for the future development of Indian football by reaching a consensus on the way forward.

It was a significant step forward that there was unanimous agreement that the right structure for the game should be paramount."



AFC Signs Second MoU With CONCACAF

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) strengthened its partnership with the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) after AFC President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa and CONCACAF President Victor Montagliani signed a second Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Confederations in Manama, Bahrain in May.

The Presidents were joined by AFC Directors and the CONCACAF Council at the signing ceremony. The first MoU between the AFC and CONCACAF was signed in 2015.

The MoU establishes a framework to strengthen collaboration between the two Confederations, to encourage knowledge exchange and to enhance football development in the respective territories.

"The AFC is a firm believer in strengthening our partnerships with our sister Confederations. Today we

further enhance the strong bonds that exist with our friends at CONCACAF," said Shaikh Salman.

"Our Confederations share many challenges but more importantly, we also hold similar aspirations to build a brighter future for our great game."

Montagliani said: "We are very proud to expand the collaboration with AFC. This MoU represents an important step forward in achieving our ONE CONCACAF Vision as we continue our efforts to advance the game."

Through the MoU, the AFC and CONCACAF will focus on joint efforts to explore the possibility of competitions opportunities between the two Confederations.

It will also pave the way for technical and administrative training exchanges in several areas including good governance, management, development, competitions, refereeing, marketing and communications, sports integrity, technology, and social responsibility.



Workers' Stadium

Beijing, China

located in the Chaoyang District in the northeast of China's capital, Workers' Stadium is a multi-purpose venue with a capacity of just over 66,000 that is home to Chinese Super League club Beijing Guoan.

Initially built in 1959, the stadium was renovated in 1994 as part of China's

ultimately unsuccessful bid to hosts the 2000 Olympic Games.

While athletics has been a major player at the venue over the years, football has remained its primary use and, in addition to hosting Chinese Super League and AFC Champions League fixtures, it also was the setting for the 2009 Premier League Asia Trophy.

The venue would undergo further

renovations when China staged the AFC Asian Cup finals for the first time in 2004, with Workers' Stadium playing host to all of China's games on their march to a second final appearance.

Four years later, the venue was also used in the Olympic Games and hosted semi-finals in the men's and women's football tournaments as well as the women's Gold Medal match.



Explore new worlds in every bite

Go on gourmet adventures with each course from our regionally inspired menus. From Indian dishes marinated in distinctive tikka spices to classics from Provence with thyme and seasonal vegetables. Savour global flavours that take you places.



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**“I’m living a
dream. I never
thought I could
have achieved
what I have
– playing for
my country,
scoring for
my country,
it’s a dream
and I’m
honoured
and
privileged.”**

Sunil Chhetri
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