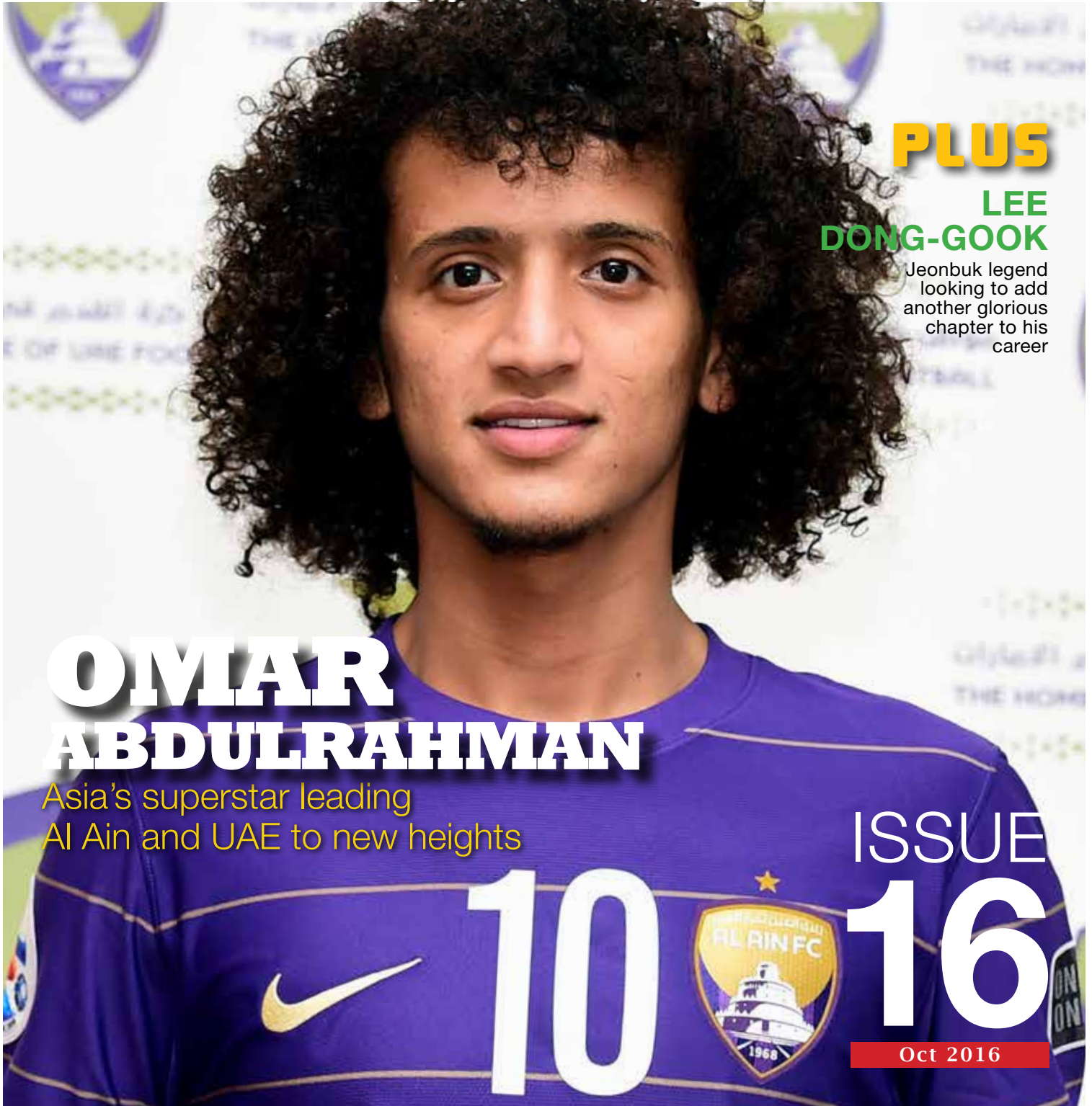


AFC QUARTERLY

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ASIAN FOOTBALL CONFEDERATION

ISSUE 16



PLUS
LEE DONG-GOOK

Jeonbuk legend looking to add another glorious chapter to his career

OMAR ABDULRAHMAN

Asia's superstar leading Al Ain and UAE to new heights

ISSUE
16

Oct 2016



ABBAS OBEID

Former Iraq captain and Asian Club Championship winner on the moment that made him a legend on both sides of the continent



TAKEFUSA KUBO

Japan's Barcelona-trained teen sensation lights up the AFC U-16 Championship and ignites hopes for future stardom



SUPHAWUT THUEANKLANG

Thailand futsal hero on his stellar 2016 season following success on world and continental stage with his nation and Chonburi Bluewave

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AFC QUARTERLY

Issue No. 16

October-December 2016

Official quarterly publication of the Asian Football Confederation

Published on behalf of the Asian Football Confederation by Lagardère Sports

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Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President



Dear friends,

It has been another busy and exciting period for the Asian Football Confederation both on and off the field and Asian football still has many big occasions to look forward to before the year draws to a close. The AFC's flagship club competitions – the AFC Champions League and AFC Cup – reach their climax in the coming weeks and both competitions have already provided fans with some world-class performances. I wish those teams who have made it to the final stages the very best of luck. Asia is home to some of the world's finest young talents and the AFC U-19 Championship, taking place in Bahrain, will help further develop their abilities and in turn strengthen the foundations for Asian players and teams to perform on the world's biggest stages. Recent AFC competitions have provided Asian fans with some enthralling action. The AFC Futsal Club Championship Finals took place in Thailand in July where Japan's Nagoya Oceans claimed the title for a record third time. Our member associations put in some great displays at the Olympic Football Tournament in Rio de Janeiro where Korea Republic and China PR reached the quarter-finals of the Men's Olympic Football and Women's Olympic Football respectively. Our referees were also honoured with Ali Faghani (Islamic Republic of Iran) controlling the men's final between Germany and winners Brazil. I would like to congratulate the IR Iran who claimed a historic third place in the FIFA Futsal World Cup in Colombia. Their spectacular displays and consistency throughout the competition reflected the growth and success of Asian futsal. And finally, I also congratulate Iraq who defeated the IR Iran after a tense final match at the AFC U-16 Championship India Finals. High-quality competitions together with strategic youth development form the cornerstones to a successful future for the game in Asia and I would like to thank all our Member Associations and valued stakeholders for their continued support. Our AFC Extraordinary Congress also highlighted the unity and solidarity which exists in Asia and we were all proud to stand under the banner – One Asia, One Goal.

Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President

Gallery



.....
Looking Up
.....

Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors returned to the AFC Champions League final for a third time after defeating FC Seoul 5-3 on aggregate despite losing their semi-final second leg 2-1 at Seoul World Cup Stadium.

Gallery



Flying High

Iraq's Air Force Club will face JSW Bengaluru of India in the final of the AFC Cup after they overcame Lebanese side Al Ahed 4-3 on aggregate at Sports City Stadium in Beirut.

Gallery



Full House

The AFC Futsal Club Championship Thailand 2016 in July eclipsed the aggregate spectatorship of all the previous AFC Futsal Club Championships combined since the competition started in 2010.

Gallery



Spot On

Iraq defeated Islamic Republic of Iran on penalties to win AFC U-16 Championship India 2016 in September after the two sides had shared a goalless stalemate in the AFC youth tournament's final.



Nagoya Oceans Land Third Futsal Club Crown

YUSHI SEKIGUCHI SCORED THE WINNING PENALTY IN THE SHOOTOUT AS JAPAN'S NAGOYA OCEANS CLAIMED A THIRD AFC FUTSAL CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP TITLE AFTER DEFEATING IRAQ'S NAFIT AL WASAT IN JULY'S FINAL.

Japan's Nagoya Oceans became the first-ever three-time AFC Futsal Club Championship winners in August after edging out Iraq's Nafit Al Wasat 6-5 on penalties in the final in Bangkok. Having become the first side to lift the title twice at the 2014 edition in Chengdu, Nagoya bounced back from their disappointing quarter-final elimination in last year's tournament to clinch their third championship courtesy of goalkeeper Yushi Sekiguchi's heroics in the shootout at the 2016 climax. Nagoya stuttered through the group stage but then eliminated defending champions Tasisat Daryaei in the quarter-finals – gaining revenge for their last eight defeat to the Iranians in the 2015 edition – before besting Emirati side Dibba Al Hissin in their semi-final encounter.

"I think we deserved to win in 40 minutes; we tried to press up high and worked very hard in defence. We didn't deserve to go to penalties," said Nagoya coach Pedro Costa. "When we won on penalties against the defending champions, that was when the players started to think it was possible."

Nafit Al Wasat's route to the final included winning Group C ahead of Dibba Al Hissin and China's Dalian Yuan Dynasty, as well as a quarter-final win over Qatar's Al Sadd and a final four elimination of hosts Chonburi Bluewave.

"I want to thank all my players for their work during this championship. Now I think they need a good rest. We lost this game but we'll go away and prepare well for our domestic league," said Nafit Al Wasat coach Haitham Abbas.

"In the last championship we finished in

fourth position and now we are in second. It is my dream to win this competition."

Earlier, Chonburi had bounced back from their 4-1 extra-time loss to Nafit Al Wasat in the semifinals to claim third place by drubbing Dibba Al Hissin 6-1. Nafit Al Wasat's Farhad Tavakoli, meanwhile, was named MVP of the tournament while Chonburi star Jirawat Sornwichian claimed the top scorer honour after netting seven goals.

"I'm happy to win this award, but the trophy is for all the players, not just me," said Tavakoli, who was part of the Iran side that won the AFC Futsal Championship in Uzbekistan earlier in the year.

"This is the first time we have been in the final and we had less experience than them. I think their experience helped them but that we were the better team."



Penalty Shootout Win Seals Maiden U-16 Title For Iraq

MOHAMMED DAWOOD SCORED THE DECISIVE SPOT KICK AS IRAQ CLAIMED A FIRST-EVER AFC U-16 CHAMPIONSHIP TITLE IN A 4-3 PENALTY SHOOTOUT VICTORY OVER IR IRAN IN OCTOBER'S FINAL.

Iraq claimed their first-ever AFC U-16 Championship after recording a 4-3 win on penalties over Islamic Republic of Iran in October's final.

A goalless 90 minutes saw neither team break the deadlock with Iran looking to add to their 2008 title and Qahtan Chitheer's Iraq looking to better their third-place finish from the 1985 tournament in style. Striker Mohammed Dawood hit the woodwork in the second half for Iraq but that was as close as the tie came to a goal from open play, with the tournament climax needing to be resolved from the penalty spot.

Trailing 3-2, Taha Shariati's penalty was saved by reserve goalkeeper Mundher Najm, but after Muntadher Mohammed had passed up the opportunity to win it for Iraq, Dawood made no mistake in converting the 10th and final spot kick to seal victory for Chitheer's

side.

"Overall we were very good in this match but it went to penalties because we didn't take our chances," said Iraq coach Chitheer. "But in the end we won and I want to congratulate my team and all the Iraqi people."

Iraq and runners-up Iran as well as fellow semi-finalists DPR Korea and Japan had already secured qualification to represent Asia at the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup, along with hosts India.

"I said before the tournament that we wanted to qualify for the World Cup. We did that and have been very successful here," said Iran coach Abbas Chamanian.

"I have to congratulate Iraq. We knew they were strong before the tournament and they showed that in the final. I told the players that penalties are lucky and that they have done

very well in this tournament. I thanked them for their effort from the first day up until now."

Dawood, meanwhile, claimed both individual accolades after being named tournament MVP and top scorer having netted six times.

"I want to congratulate the whole Iraqi team for this success," said Dawood. "Our coach has done very well to solve many problems in this tournament."

"I was very calm when walking up to take the penalty and I wanted to score it for our coach. I feel great to have won both these individual awards and I hope they can help me improve my ability as a player."

Coach Chitheer added: "He's a very good player and studies the opponents very well. The coaching team all work hard together to try and help him improve as a player and improve his performances on the pitch."



IR Iran Claim First-Ever Third Place In FIFA Futsal World Cup

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN EARNED ASIA'S BEST-EVER FINISH AT A FIFA FUTSAL WORLD CUP WITH PENALTY SHOOTOUT WIN OVER PORTUGAL AT THE START OF OCTOBER IN COLOMBIA.

Islamic Republic of Iran claimed Asia's best-ever finish at the FIFA Futsal World Cup Colombia 2016 as they secured third place after a 4-3 penalty shootout win over Portugal following a 2-2 draw in early October.

It required six rounds of penalties to decide the encounter. Iran's back-up goalkeeper Sepehr Mohammadi made a pair of big saves, but his teammates twice hit the woodwork with their spot-kick efforts.

Then after Portugal's Joao Matos hit the post with his sixth-round penalty, Mahdi Javid stepped up to convert his spot-kick and ensure Iran's best-ever finish to a Futsal World Cup, surpassing their fourth-place accomplishment at Hong Kong 1992.

"On behalf of the Asian football family, I would like to congratulate the Islamic Republic of Iran for their spectacular displays,

commendable resolve and consistency throughout the competition," said AFC President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa.

"As articulated in our Vision and Mission, IR Iran have proven that Asian teams can not only compete but dominate the world's biggest stages. I hope that IR Iran's achievement will inspire more Asian teams to scale new heights in world futsal.

"IR Iran are now a dominant force in world futsal and their success in the FIFA Futsal World Cup Colombia 2016 is a testament to the culmination of years of hard work and commitment of everyone at the Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran."

In the Round of 16, Iran produced one of the biggest upsets after eliminating defending champions Brazil, 3-2 on

penalties, after a hard-fought 4-4 draw in extra time before they became the first Asian team since 1992 to reach the semi-finals of the FIFA Futsal World Cup when they bested Paraguay 4-3 in the quarter-final.

Iran were edged out by eventual runners-up Russia in the semi-final after a 4-3 defeat but bounced back to defeat Portugal and claim third place. Vietnam and Thailand also reached the Round of 16, while Australia and Uzbekistan were eliminated at the group stage.

Iran's Ahmad Esmailpour was named the bronze ball winner, Thailand's Suphawut Thueanklang earned goal of the tournament for the second tournament in succession for his splendid strike against Cuba, and Vietnam were awarded the FIFA Fair Play Trophy.



Bhutan Make History As Line-Up Confirmed

BHUTAN, TIMOR-LESTE AND CHINESE TAIPEI SECURED THEIR PLACES IN THE FINAL ROUND OF QUALIFIERS FOR THE 2019 AFC ASIAN CUP AHEAD OF MARCH'S DRAW TO DETERMINE THE DESTINY OF 24 NATIONS.

Bhutan secured a historic place in the final round of qualifiers for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup after recording a 3-1 win over Bangladesh in October 10's play-off second leg meaning they join fellow play-off winners

Chinese Taipei who bested Timor-Leste and the Maldives, winners over Laos, in the draw which will take place in March.

Afghanistan, Bahrain, Guam, Hong Kong, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Myanmar, DPR Korea, Oman, Palestine, the Philippines, Singapore, Turkmenistan and Vietnam qualified for March's draw directly following the second round qualifiers, while Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Tajikistan and Yemen qualified following June's play-offs.

The 24 nations will be facing off for the

12 remaining places at the 24-team 2019 AFC Asian Cup Finals after Australia, China, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Japan, Korea Republic, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Thailand and Uzbekistan qualified directly for the finals to join hosts the United Arab Emirates after the second round of qualifying.

Laos and Timor-Leste, meanwhile, will now enter the AFC Solidarity Cup, joining the five already-confirmed teams, excluding Pakistan and Bangladesh who had withdrawn from the competition.

The finalised line-up now consists of Nepal, Brunei Darussalam, Timor-Leste, Sri Lanka, Macau, Mongolia and Laos and will be held at two stadiums in Kuching, Sarawak, and will kick off on November 2, with the final match set to be held on November 15 at Sarawak Stadium.

Maldives 4 Laos 0
Laos 1 Maldives 1

Maldives win 5-1 on aggregate

Bangladesh 0 Bhutan 0
Bhutan 3 Bangladesh 1

Bhutan win 3-1 on aggregate

Timor-Leste 1 Chinese Taipei 2
Chinese Taipei 2 Timor-Leste 1

Chinese Taipei win 4-2 on aggregate

THE MAESTRO

OMAR ADULRAHMAN HAS EMERGED AS THE MOST TALKED ABOUT FOOTBALLER IN ASIA, LIGHTING UP THE CONTINENT'S CLUB AND NATIONAL SCENE AND STEERING AL AIN TO THE 2016 AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES INTO THE FINAL ROUND OF QUALIFIERS FOR THE 2018 FIFA WORLD CUP. NOW, THE PRODIGIOUS TALENT HAS SET HIS SIGHTS ON TAKING HIS SIDE AND HIS COUNTRY TO THE WORLD STAGE.

By: John McAuley Photos: Lagardère Sports

mar Abdulrahman contemplates the question briefly, but it is more out of courtesy than serious consideration.

"A footballer," he says with a broad smile, an answer to the query just posed: if he weren't a footballer, what would he be?

"A footballer," he says. "Only." Perhaps that much is expected. Captain of his club and the heartbeat of his country's national team, the Al Ain and UAE star has dreamed about forging a career in the beautiful game since he began playing street football as a child with brothers Ahmed, Mohammed and Khalid.

Much, though, has changed since. Abdulrahman has grown into a playmaker of extreme talent, constantly lauded for his performances, consistently linked with a move to a major European league, now without doubt one of the most recognisable footballers in Asia.

Unsurprisingly, with the fame has come the fanfare. Interviews are routinely requested, autograph always sought, an endless supply of selfies taken. Yet Abdulrahman is content to just take it all in his stride.

"The love of the fans is a treasure," he says relaxing into his seat at a hotel in Al Ain, on

the eve of yet another important match for his club. "And it's a treasure I should cherish. Without them, I wouldn't be here. They have every right to see me, and it's my right to see the fans who show their love. When I need to get away, I know I can go to places that I can enjoy in peace."

He has not found much refuge lately. Abdulrahman's current schedule is packed tight, with Al Ain having this month gone through to a first AFC Champions League final in 11 years and the UAE national team closer than they have been in decades to booking a spot at a second World Cup.

Last month, Mahdi Ali's men began the third and final qualification stage for Russia 2018 with a shock victory against Japan in Saitama, one of the most famous wins in UAE history. It was sealed by Ahmed Khalil's Panenka penalty, a carbon copy of Abdulrahman's spot-kick against the same opponents during the 2015 Asian Cup; the current Asian player of the year emulating whom many expect to be the next.

"Ahmed Khalil is the best player in Asia, so I expect anything from him," Abdulrahman says. "I'm never surprised with anything he does."

The shock win was followed by a narrow defeat to Australia five days later that hurt Abdulrahman and his teammates. The UAE rebounded with victory against Thailand this

month before suffering a hugely dispiriting 3-0 defeat to Gulf rivals Saudi Arabia. Almost halfway through a tightly contested Group B, they sit fourth, two points off second.

With only the top two teams guaranteed to reach Russia, Abdulrahman will need to be at his peak should the UAE realise their dream. The platinum player in what many consider to be the country's golden generation, he admits the pressure to follow on from the class of 1990 weighs heavily. But Abdulrahman counters that this emergent UAE team are ready.

"Of course, our target and our ambition is to get to the World Cup, and we had a really strong start with the win over Japan," he says. "It's a good chance, although it's still a difficult chance, too. But nothing is impossible. If we continue to work hard, we can qualify."

"There is no secret, no magic formula. There is team unity and a team cooperation, and with the work of our coaching staff and the effort of the players. God willing, we will get to the World Cup."

Abdulrahman has members of that coaching staff to draw motivation from, specifically Adnan Al Talyani, the legendary UAE striker who led the line for the team at Italia '90. He has told the players about the special atmosphere a World Cup





engenders, about playing under your national flag on the global stage, about sharing the San Siro pitch with Lothar Matthaus and West Germany, the eventual champions.

"This inspires us even more to get to the World Cup," Abdulrahman says.

Little wonder he is eager to take the next step. Abdulrahman has starred for the UAE at various high-profile tournaments: the 2012 Olympics, the 2013 Gulf Cup, the 2015 Asian Cup. At the Olympics, he impressed so much that he earned a trial with Manchester City. At the Gulf Cup, he scored a brilliant virtuoso goal in the final against Iraq as the UAE captured the title for the second time and was later voted the tournament's most valuable player.

At the Asian Cup, Abdulrahman shone throughout to help his team finish third - their best result in the competition on foreign soil. So, naturally, the World Cup constitutes a natural progression.

Abdulrahman has had to content himself with taking in previous tournaments on television. He watched avidly Brazil 2014, looking on in disappointment as Andres Iniesta, his favourite current player, exited early with Spain. It stung a little in general, since he would have wanted to be in Rio or Sao Paulo instead, competing with the UAE.

"To be honest, though I wished I was there, I can't really just dream about these things: we have to achieve them," Abdulrahman

says. "Hopefully this time we can qualify. As a professional my goal is to get to the World Cup. If I achieve that I will have realised what every footballer dreams of."

Every footballer probably has visions,

"THE LOVE OF THE FANS IS A TREASURE. AND IT'S A TREASURE I SHOULD CHERISH. WITHOUT THEM, I WOULDN'T BE HERE."

too, of stepping up in a penalty shootout in a decisive match at a major international tournament and casually floating the ball down the middle of the goal. Abdulrahman checked that box at last year's Asian Cup.

A tense and taut quarter-final between the UAE and Japan had come down to a shootout at Stadium Australia in Sydney, where Abdulrahman was charged with taking the first spot-kick for Mahdi Ali's side. He set down the ball, puffed out his cheeks, stepped back and then forward, and chipped the perfect Panenka past Eiji Kawashima in the Japan goal. Stadium Australia erupted, and the UAE went on to prevail 5-4 to reach a first semi-final in almost 20 years. Abdulrahman's effort had settled the nerves, showed his teammates that a place in the last four was theirs for the taking. The most famed moment

in this career thus far, it was a talisman's touch.

In the immediate aftermath, as Abdulrahman's penalty was beamed across the world on television and social media, manager Mahdi Ali confessed his heart had almost stopped. So, was it pre-planned? Or purely instinct?

"I actually decided on the spot, I hadn't thought about it earlier," Abdulrahman says, as coolly as that clutch contribution in Australia. "As I approached the kick, I just chose to do it."

Once was probably enough, but would he ever consider a repeat?

"I might do it again," he says with another smile. "Who knows?"

Abdulrahman was not afforded the opportunity in the semi-final. Up against hosts Australia, the UAE were beaten 2-0 in Newcastle, conceding both goals in the opening 15 minutes. They never recovered, and Abdulrahman sat slumped on the pitch at full-time, his shirt pulled over his face. Understandably, the result still rankles.

"Of course, it is my worst memory in football," he says. "At that moment I was dreaming of getting to the final and we had the ability to do that. Nobody expected us to get to that stage, and so we were all very disappointed to exit at that point.

"We had aspirations of finishing first or

at least reaching the final. But fate was not on our side that day, and we ended up getting the bronze medal."

To be fair, Abdulrahman departed with much more. A standout performer all tournament in Australia, he courted plenty of attention, both with the national media and the thousands of supporters who delighted in witnessing a rising star excel on the grand stage.

The headlines and the articles focused on the UAE's No. 10, but Abdulrahman insists he would rather shy away from the praise. It is not only him, he often repeats. It is a collective effort.

"It's a normal situation, and I'm very proud of that, but I don't pay it too much attention," he says. "I have a role to play on the pitch, and I have to focus on what the coach asks of me.

"The media can praise you today and criticise you tomorrow. I just hope I'm up to the coach's expectations. And, anyway, it's my teammates who help me reach those standards."

It conveys a wise head on still-young shoulders. Abdulrahman has come a long way since his professional debut in 2009, maturing as a player and as a person. It is evidenced at present by his captaincy of Al Ain, and more obviously by his 25th birthday last month. No longer merely a precocious talent, he is now expected to lead not only by example through his play, but in inspiring his colleagues, as well.

Top Left Gulf Cup 2013

Above AFC Champions League 2015

Left AFC Asian Cup 2015

"AS A PROFESSIONAL MY GOAL IS TO GET TO THE WORLD CUP. IF I ACHIEVE THAT I WILL HAVE REALISED WHAT EVERY FOOTBALLER DREAMS OF."

He remains fully focused on that, amid the pivotal matches for club and country, even despite the recent birthday. There were no real festivities on September 20, he says, other than cake-cutting with his teammates at Al Ain training, for celebrations were postponed until after the two-legged AFC Champions League semi-final with El Jaish and the World Cup qualifiers with Thailand and Saudi.

"The greatest gifts I received were the best wishes and messages from my family and friends," says Abdulrahman, before considering what he is now supposed to offer in return, as Al Ain captain, as the UAE's leading light.

"Giving the best to your team," he says. "Reaching the latter stages of competitions; ensuring the group gains more than the individual; loving and respecting your teammates."

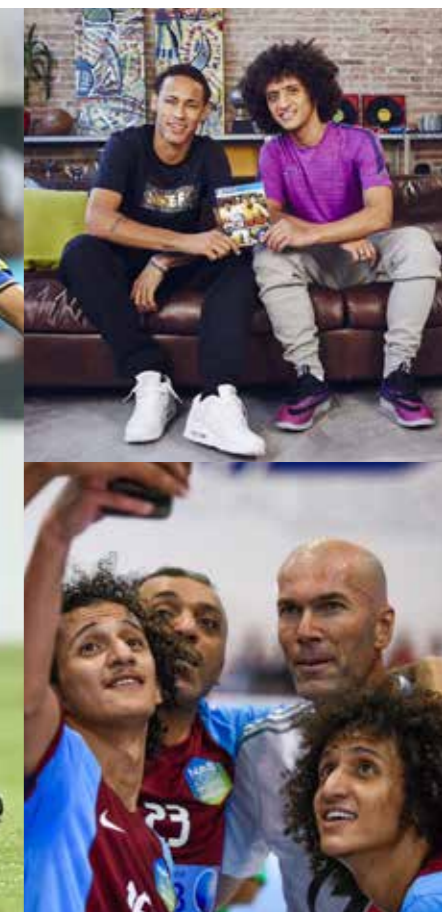
Possibly add blazing a trail for Emiratis in Europe. Abdulrahman has long been linked with a move abroad, and in the past has rejected offers from a number of prominent European clubs, including Benfica. There has also been interest from Arsenal – his favourite English team, "Mesut Ozil is one of the players I like most today" – Valencia and Hamburg, while work-permit issues prevented him from signing for Man City after impressing in 2012.

He agreed what was reported to be a new four-year deal with Al Ain last year, but there is a clamour for Abdulrahman to trade home comforts for a fresh adventure in Europe. No Emirati has ever played permanently outside the UAE, and he is the most obvious candidate to break the mould.

"Of course, I dream of that, but at the moment I have a specific target with Al Ain," Abdulrahman says. "Once I achieve that, only then can I think about playing in a professional league.

"Europe is always an ambition, but like I said, only after achieving my ambitions with my club. If the chance to turn professional is still there at that point, then it's something I would consider."

Abdulrahman does not elaborate on that exact target, but there is a glint in his eye when talking about the AFC Champions League. Al Ain remain the only UAE club to



have been crowned continental champions, back in 2003 when the competition was rebranded and they defeated Thailand's BEC Tero Sasana in the final. They returned to the showpiece two years later, but suffered defeat to Al Ittihad.

This month's semi-final victory against El Jaish means this year offers their greatest chance of clinching the trophy, of Abdulrahman finally adding the one club title not yet on his Al Ain CV. In seven years with the first team, he has won three UAE league championships, two President's Cups, one League Cup and the Super Cup three times. The AFC Champions League would therefore complete the set.

Abdulrahman is determined to win it, reflected in his role this year in which he has been voted man of the match eight times from 12 matches to carry Al Ain to next month's final. As one of the main criteria for deciding Asian player of the year, it places Abdulrahman in a strong position to this time go one better than last November, when he finished second to Khalil - the first Emirati to receive the award. Yet, true to his character, Abdulrahman maintains he is not concerned solely with individual prizes.

"I don't think of being the best player, all I'm thinking of now is going to the final and doing well with the national team," he says. "The AFC Champions League means far more to me than being Asia's best player."

Above FIFA World Cup Qualifiers 2018

Top Right With Barcelona and Brazil star Neymar Jr.

Left AFC Champions League 2016

Bottom Left With France legend Zinedine Zidane

"I hope to be number one with the whole team. I want to go to the final and win the championship. If I win the best player and we lose the championship, it doesn't mean anything - we've lost everything. It only matters if you win the final. So I hope to win both."

It portrays a player who believes there is much left to accomplish. Refreshingly, Abdulrahman cannot be accused of resting on his laurels or getting distracted as the glare of the spotlight shines more intensely than ever. In the past 18 months, his success on the pitch has brought many highlights off it: last September, he was chosen for the cover of the Middle East version of Konami's Pro Evolution Soccer 2016, alongside Brazil's Neymar. He later described it as "an honour" to appear with one of the world's best players.

It was a privilege also to spend time that summer with Zinedine Zidane, his boyhood idol, after playing a five-a-side exhibition match with the Frenchman in Dubai. Zidane singled out Abdulrahman for praise, a special moment given the former Real Madrid midfielder was the player Abdulrahman used

to pretend to be all those years ago, when he honed his skills in the street with his three brothers. Tellingly, the 2006 World Cup final, when Zidane received a red card for head-butting Italy's Marco Materazzi, forms Abdulrahman's most vivid World Cup memory.

"Zidane is one of my favourite players and he was a joy to watch at that tournament," he says. "I was quite upset that he got sent off and wasn't crowned world champion."

However, rubbing shoulders with past champions and current stars is not what drives him. It is a welcome consequence of his swift climb through the game, but trophies and titles motivate the most. When asked about the greatest reward being a footballer has provided him, Abdulrahman sits back in his seat, contemplates the question briefly, then shrugs his shoulders and smiles wide.

"It's a beautiful feeling to achieve championships with your club," he says. "Probably one of my favourites is the title we won in 2010/11. We almost went down one year, and then won the league a year later. For me that was the happiest memory, along with winning the Gulf Cup in 2013 in Bahrain."

"The championships and medals I have got with Al Ain and UAE: those are the best times."

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SUPERMAN RETURNS

VETERAN STRIKER LEE DONG-GOOK IS BACK IN THE AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL WITH JEONBUK HYUNDAI MOTORS AFTER COMING CLOSE IN 2011. HE LOOKS BACK ON AN EVENTFUL CAREER WITH BOTH CLUB AND COUNTRY BUT IS STILL NOT QUITE READY TO DISCUSS RETIREMENT.

By: Zee Ko Photos: Lagardère Sports





Normal rules don't seem to apply to Lee Dong-gook. At an age when most footballers are already enjoying the fruits of their well-earned retirement, the evergreen Korea Republic forward is still showing few signs of slowing down.

Lee burst onto the scene as a 19-year-old in 1998 for Pohang Steelers, a young talent who seemed to have the world at his feet having helped the side win the 1997-1998 Asian Club Championship and being called up to the senior national team the very same year.

Fast forward to the present day and the veteran striker is still turning out for Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors as the K League Classic club look to win their second AFC Champions League title ten years after their first.

While Lee was not a member of that victorious team, he recalls being part of the squad that narrowly missed out five years ago, as Jeonbuk lost on penalties to Al Sadd.

"I still remember that time we lost the final in 2011," Lee tells AFC Quarterly as he lounges in a chair at Jeonbuk's training ground, up in the hills and off the beaten track, more than a few kilometres away from the nearest bus terminal.

"We almost won the AFC Champions League but stumbled at the final hurdle. I cannot be sure the chance will come around again so this year will be a golden opportunity for me to lift the trophy.

Jeonbuk will face West Asian challengers Al Ain in a winner-takes-all two-legged AFC Champions League final on the 19 and 26 November.

"This might very well be my last chance to win the AFC Champions League, therefore this final is more important than anything else for me at the moment," Lee continues.

"We have to remind ourselves not to give Al Ain an away goal. The first leg of the final is at home and if we concede, we will need to score an extra goal to make up for it. That's not ideal so we will be focusing on this first match."

Despite being the oldest player on Jeonbuk's books, Lee has shown he can still teach his younger teammates a trick or two, contributing five goals en route to a new all-time Champions League goalscoring record and a place in the final.

"It is an honour for me to step on to the pitch at Jeonju World Cup Stadium," he says. "The new record does not bother me; I am just happy to hear our fans cheering us on as we attempt to give them joyful moments to remember. This is our chance to get the AFC Champions League title back after 10 years."

That quiet determination to do well for his club is one of the reasons why Lee is such a big hit with the club's supporters, but it wasn't always that way for a player whose injuries and off-field troubles always seemed to get in the way of football.

Success seemed to come easily for a young Lee in 1998, along with the Asian Club Championship final win over Dalian Wanda, he shone at the AFC U-19 Championship earning the Top Scorer and MVP awards with Korea Republic winning their ninth title.

The uncapped striker was then called up to the senior national team by the legendary Cha Bum-kun as the second youngest player on the plane to the 1998 World Cup in France (midfielder Ko Jong-soo was also 19 but already had 22 caps).

"At that time, there was no place to get any information about other football cultures since we did not have the internet," Lee recalls. "It was my first time at the World Cup and we did not have any information about other national teams.

"These things made us embarrassed at first but I could not forget the ardent fans who greeted us at games. When we arrived at France 1998, I asked for advice from my teammates on how to play in atmospheres like that."

Korea Republic would lose their first two

games, with Lee making his debut off the bench in a 5-0 drubbing to the Netherlands that resulted in Cha getting replaced by Kim Pyung-seok shortly after.

The youngster's star would continue to rise though, as he top scored for the Taeguk Warriors at the 2000 AFC Asian Cup before earning an injury-hit loan spell at German side Werder Bremen.

The World Cup came around again in 2002, as Korea Republic co-hosted a memorable tournament alongside Japan but Lee would not play a part after being overlooked by coach Guus Hiddink.

"Many Korean fans thought that I should have been in the squad in 2002 and so did I," Lee remembers with a wry smile. "In hindsight, that was the one big reason why I shouldn't have been called up.

"I tried well but I was so arrogant and I failed to get into the squad. I talked a lot to the Korean media and wandered from place to place. I was shocked by the decision and started to hate football.

"I was in Korea but I did not watch a single World Cup game. Instead, I drank a lot of alcohol in an attempt to numb the pain and remove those memories. Then I got called up to national service and Lee Dong-gook's second life began.

"I got mentally strong and humbler and to

Top Left FIFA World Cup 1998

Above AFC Champion League 2016

Bottom Left AFC Champion League 2011

Left FIFA World Cup Qualifiers 2014

this day, I think I would not be where I am if I had made the World Cup squad in 2002. Before that, I leaned on my natural talent and ability but then I realised how much hard work it took to make it at a professional level and started to redouble my efforts."

Lee's form gradually improved upon his return to Pohang after his military service but bad luck struck again before the 2006 World Cup in Germany. The striker had looked a shoo-in to Dick Advocaat's team but a knee injury sustained during the K League season ruled him out once again.

"Before the World Cup in 2006, I had a great season," Lee says. "But in April, I had to undergo knee surgery and even though I came back in October, I would play just three games after that."

"I have always dreamt of scoring in a World Cup game and actually I still do. I felt really bad when I got injured before the World Cup in 2006 because I had worked hard and never felt better. You know how it is when a striker feels like he can score against any team? I failed because of injury but I was proud of my preparation."

The striker's performances at club and international level had piqued overseas interest once again and he signed terms with English Premier League club Middlesbrough in January 2007.

"I thought it was a hasty decision to join Middlesbrough," Lee admits. "The Premier League is a hard league to play in. Even though I thought I was in the best condition, it was still not good enough for that level.

"But I did learn a lot at Middlesbrough. For example, I learnt about tactics, about a player's discipline and how to communicate with fans. These were vital lessons.

"I do regret entering the Premier League at such a young age. Maybe I would have fared better further down the road."

Lee's Boro contract expired and was not renewed at the end of the 2008 season as he returned to Korea Republic for a spell with Seongnam Chunma before transferring to current club Jeonbuk in 2009.

A brace on debut for his new club was just a taste of what would bloom into an eight-year affair with Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors.

"After I came back from the Premier League, manager Choi (Kang-hee) gave me a chance to get my career back on track," Lee says. "I believed in manager Choi and Jeonbuk Hyundai and I think I chose well."

It was a move that paid dividends for both



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At the heart of the image



club and player as Jeonbuk lifted the K League Classic title that very year. Despite winning the AFC Champions League in 2006, the team had never won a domestic league title so this was their very first championship. They would go on to repeat the feat three more times in 2011, 2014 and 2015.

"I am so proud of this team," Lee beams. "When I first got here, Jeonbuk weren't a famous team and we didn't have many fans to cheer us on. We were a losing team that were not even dreaming of the title but we turned it all around and became a winning team.

"In 2009, we became K League Classic champions. We have now won the title four times but I always think about that first win. That was such an exciting and amazing time for all of us and I am happy to be a part of that history."

After 103 caps and 33 goals for Korea Republic, Lee ended his 16-year international career in 2014, still without a World Cup goal to his name despite returning for one final hurrah in South Africa in 2010.

The 37-year-old is showing no signs of slowing down for his club though despite being in the twilight of his football career.

"I don't think about retirement," he says. "That's the reason I play well these days. If I keep thinking about it, I would probably get

*Above AFC
Champion League 2016*

both lazy and nervous about the future. I'll worry about that after I retire but for now I only think about my role at Jeonbuk."

Becoming a father of five kids has also given Lee a new outlook in life and won him even more fans outside football after appearing in the hit Korean reality-variety show "The Return of Superman", where celebrity fathers tend to



their children alone while their wives take a well-deserved break.

"Before I got married, I played football for myself," Lee says. "But then I got married and had my babies and now I feel a responsibility to them. I want to show them that their father is the best in Korea.

"Despite appearing on the show, I am not special. I'm just taking care of my children. Some of my fans didn't really like it because they thought it would affect my football but I'm just sharing my time spent with my babies. So I think it's not an issue especially since I'm coping well.

"Besides, many viewers of the show have started to recognise the K League Classic too so that is a good thing!"

Jeonbuk have a chance to make more history come November but Lee Dong-gook is taking it all in stride and with his priorities straight. Whether they win or not, the veteran is just happy to enjoy it while he can.

"When I as young, I woke up early and did weight training and running every day," he says. "But now instead of doing that, I just focus on the next game.

"I used to think that football was all I had in my life and maybe there's a still a little bit of that till this day but I have my family now and they are my everything."



EASTERN PROMISE

FROM STRUGGLING FOR SURVIVAL IN THE DOMESTIC LEAGUES IN IRAQ TO SCORING THE WINNING PENALTY IN THE 1997-1998 ASIAN CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL, FORMER NATIONAL TEAM CAPTAIN ABBAS OBEID TURNED HIS LIFE AROUND WITH A TRAILBLAZING MOVE TO KOREA REPUBLIC AND A FAMOUS SPOT-KICK THAT CEMENTED HIS NAME IN THE CONTINENT'S FOOTBALLING HISTORY.

By: Daniel Pordes Photos: Lagardère Sports





While there have been many East Asian players who have travelled West to find success on the other side of the continent, including the likes of AFC Champions League winners Kwak Tae-hwi, Lee Jung-soo and Matthew Spiranovic, few have made the journey from West to East as successfully as 1997-1998 Asian Club Championship winner Abbas Obeid.

Born to a poor family in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad in 1973, Obeid began the first steps in his career on the streets of the city as a seven-year-old before joining his first official club, Al Sinaa, in 1986 and helping them win promotion to the top-flight three years later.

Obeid then took in spells at three of Baghdad's biggest clubs with Al Talaba, Al Zawraa and Air Force Club all employing the services of the tricky midfielder with an eye for goal.

However, while his name was becoming well known in the capital, things were not well at home.

"The situation in Iraq was terrible during

the 90's from the time Iraq occupied Kuwait until I moved. It was a very hard time. We couldn't get good training because Iraq was closed then. Food was scarce and very bad," says Obeid.

"Even football boots were rare; you could not afford such luxury things on a small salary. If you gave a pair of football boots to a player back then, it was like giving him a house."

"My family especially had a hard time, as we were very poor. Even though I was at good club, I got paid maybe US\$3 each month. My father had retired from work, he was too old to continue, and my mother just sat at home cooking what we had.

"I had two brothers playing football as well, but the earnings from football were not enough to live on, and my sisters were all married and had left home, so everybody had their own family and no one cared about us. I was the main breadwinner in my family – it was a terrible time."

Obeid's life changed, though, in July 1995 when he stormed on to the international scene in the Merdeka Independence Anniversary Tournament in Kuala Lumpur.

Scoring on his Iraq debut in a 2-2 draw against Korea Republic, Obeid was also on

target against the hosts in a 2-1 win with his performance grabbing the attention of onlookers from the Korean domestic league including Anyang Cheetahs assistant coach Pak Hung-suk, who would eventually sign both Obeid and countryman Sadiq Sadoun.

And while Sadoun left Anyang, a satellite city of Seoul, after one season, Obeid flourished on the field despite the initial cultural differences off it.

"I tried to eat Korean food, but it was too difficult for me," recalls Obeid with a rueful smile.

"The language was also a big problem. I spent one and a half years learning some words to use in the games, a bit with the coach and the players, but there was no official Korean language teacher to help.

"Korean football was very fast and I was surprised at first, but I had to adapt to learn how to be like a Korean player. My teammates and coach helped me to understand the playing style, and the Korean people were always very sweet and nice to me.

"I got a lot more money, so I could send more money home – my life changed 100% and I got a very good life when

I moved to Korea. And now I speak the Korean language very well, better than English."

After two years at Anyang, Obeid signed for reigning Asian Club Championship winners Pohang Steelers in July 1997 in time to join their campaign to retain their continental title.

Comfortable double digit victories over Bangladesh's Mohammedan SC and Maldivian side Victory SC saw Pohang progress to February's East Asia group stage in Zhejiang, China, and they topped a group that included hosts Dalian Wanda, Japan's Kashima Antlers and Myanmar's Finance and Revenue, to advance to the semi-finals in Hong Kong in April.

Pohang winger Park Tae-ha's goal was then enough to secure a 1-0 win over Al Hilal's Saudi Arabia which set-up a re-match with Dalian in the final at Hong Kong Stadium.

Wang Tao and Hao Haidong both came close in a first half dominated by Dalian, who enjoyed the better support from the stands, but in a classic game of two halves, Pohang came out stronger after the break, with Park volleying just over.

But as the tie neared full time, penalties looked more and more likely, with both

Left Asian Club Championship 1997-1998

Top Right AFC Asian Cup 2000

Bottom Right AFC U-19 Championship 2014

sides looking tired in front of goal.

"What I remember from the final against Dalian is we played 120 minutes and then it came to penalty kicks – I hate penalty kicks, I didn't want it to go to penalty kicks," says Obeid, who started against Dalian.

"When you score a penalty everyone says 'Ah it's too easy' but when you don't score – the whole world is saying 'How can you miss? It's so easy!'

"Anyway, the score went to 5-5 and I turned round and the coach looked at me and said 'Hey, you are next'. I felt like the coach had killed me.

"The Dalian player went up first, and he put the ball wide. I hated the pressure. But you have to be professional, the club signed you to help them – so if you miss a penalty in a shootout it's a big problem."

Obeid did initially miss, hitting the post, but after the referee ordered the kick to be re-taken, he made no mistake a second time, sending Dalian goalkeeper Han Wenhai the wrong way to win the penalty

shootout and continental championship for Pohang.

"After scoring I took my shirt off and started running and the players ran after me, it was a very good feeling," he recalls.

"Iraqi TV came to do a one hour programme on me and we were talking about this penalty kick; that Abbas scored this penalty and helped the Korean people.

"This was a very good chance to let the people outside of Iraq really know me, as it was the first chance to play in the Asian Club Championship.

"There are many people in the continent who know Abbas from this final."

In the wake of his success overseas, Obeid became Iraq captain and led them to a perfect record in qualifying to reach the 2000 AFC Asian Cup in Lebanon, where he helped them to a quarter-final finish.

His Korean adventure ended in 2001 with a return to West Asia and a five-year spell at Bahrain SC before his retirement in 2007.

Obeid is now passing on his pan-Asian knowledge and experience to his nation's next generation and has been involved in coaching at youth level, notably as Iraq assistant coach at the 2014 AFC U-19 Championship.

FIGHTING SPIRIT

AFTER STARRING AT THIS YEAR'S AFC FUTSAL CHAMPIONSHIP WITH THAILAND AND AFC FUTSAL CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP FOR CHONBURI BLUEWAVE, SUPHAWUT THUEANKLANG SHOWED HIS TALENTS AT SEPTEMBER'S FIFA FUTSAL WORLD CUP WHERE HE HELPED HIS NATION EQUAL THEIR BEST-EVER PERFORMANCE.

By: Peter Alsop Photos: Lagardère Sports

ate winter in Tashkent is a far cry from the sunny climes of the Gulf of Thailand but the unfamiliar surroundings had little effect on Suphawut Thueanklang, the Thai futsal hotshot who ensured a year that began in the Uzbek capital would reach a climax in the Colombian city of Medellín.

Overlooked by the Chimgan Mountains' snow-capped peaks to the east and dotted with vibrant bazaars, the picturesque Central Asian city played host to the AFC Futsal Championship in February. The tournament carried extra significance as the top five teams would book their ticket to the

2016 FIFA Futsal World Cup in Colombia.

Twenty-seven-year-old Suphawut scored twice in a comfortable 6-1 quarter-final victory over Australia as Dutchman Victor Hermans' side advanced to the last four and secured their passage to South America. It was only Thailand's fourth game of the tournament, yet Suphawut had taken his tally to 10 goals, including hat-tricks against Tajikistan and Southeast Asian rivals Vietnam.

In front of a rapturous Uzbekistan Stadium two days later, Thailand were tasked with overcoming the hosts to reach a third continental final. They failed, by the narrowest of margins, as Uzbekistan scraped through on penalties following a





2-2 draw. Suphawut, who set up both goals and scored from the spot, went on to net four more in the 8-0 drubbing of Vietnam as Thailand claimed third place and the forward bagged the Top Scorer award with an outstanding 14 goals in six games.

The hosts ultimately fell just short in the final after suffering a 2-1 reversal to Iran.

"In Uzbekistan we didn't lose any games. We did very well and I'm very proud of the team but unfortunately we lost on penalties," said Suphawut five months later in the lobby of Bangkok's Grand Fourwings Convention Hotel. It was the morning after his club side, Chonburi Bluewave – a team packed with Thailand internationals – had, ironically, ousted Uzbekistan's Almalyk FC at the quarter-final stage of the AFC Futsal Club Championship.

"Back then they had the advantage of playing at home," noted Suphawut, who scored one in a 4-1 victory played out in front of more than 10,500 spectators at Bangkok Arena. "Just like they were, we were inspired by the full stadium. The fans are like a sixth player and give us confidence and a fighting spirit. The players at Almalyk are nearly all in the Uzbekistan team so obviously we wanted revenge."

Unfortunately for Suphawut and his team,

who had previously swept aside all challengers with relative ease, their run came to a shuddering halt in the semi-finals when Iraq's Nafit Al Wasat secured a 4-1 victory after extra time in a game that saw two Chonburi players dismissed.

A 6-1 scoreline over Dibba Al Hissin of the United Arab Emirates meant the forward, once more, had to settle for third place. This time Suphawut had netted a respectable four times, but teammate Jirawat Sornwichian took home the Top Scorer accolade with seven goals. Japan's Nagoya Oceans, who Chonburi had eased to a 3-1 victory over in the group stage, went on to win a third title after defeating Nafit Al Wasat on penalties following a 4-4 draw.

But, as with Asia's premier international futsal competition in Tashkent, the continent's number one club tournament had proved a resounding success with the home side drawing in record numbers. Chonburi's semi-final at Bangkok Arena was witnessed by more than 11,000 fans – a new high for a venue more than an hour's drive from the city centre.

"Ever since the Futsal World Cup was held in Thailand [in 2012], people in the country started to know about the sport," explained the prolific marksman. "Now more people recognise me around the country too.

"Before the national team didn't get

much exposure but over the past few years competitions have been shown on television and there is a growing futsal community in Thailand who love the game. The skill and ability of the players is at a very high level and this is why I believe it has grown in popularity."

Born in the western province of Ratchaburi – home to Thailand's renowned floating market – Suphawut first played football as a youngster before taking up futsal at 13. He idolised David Beckham in the 11-a-side game and, of course, Brazilian legend Falcao in the sport he chose as his career path after deciding his attributes were better suited to five-a-side.

The number 9 moved to Chonburi, an industrial city around 100 kilometres southeast of Bangkok, in 2007 to team up with his current club side. But it's a brief spell away from his motherland that he classes as pivotal to making him the player he is today.

"When I was 20 I went to Santiago Futsal in Spain for a training camp and it was a huge part of my development," he noted. "It was a shortcut for me to get experience as I was training with many great players who play in the top leagues in the world.

"This taught me how to play futsal at the highest level, and I brought this experience back to Chonburi and the national team."

Honing his skills overseas proved invaluable

as Thailand's star on the futsal court scored thrice, including the stunning Goal of the Tournament against Costa Rica, in the 2012 World Cup as the Southeast Asians qualified for the last 16 for the first time before elimination to Spain. Just a few months earlier Thailand had finished runners-up to Japan in the AFC Futsal Championship with Suphawut finishing joint top scorer on seven goals.

A year later he spearheaded Chonburi's march to a first AFC Futsal Club Championship. Again his side's top marksman, with four goals, Suphawut netted a last-minute equaliser against Iran's Giti Pasand Isfahan to take the final to penalties. He scored, naturally, and his side won the shootout 4-1 as their main man was named Most Valuable Player.

Ahead of the World Cup, which the Southeast Asians went to without the departed Hermans, the goal-machine was bullish about his side's chances and confident they could improve on their performance as hosts.

Paired in Group B with Russia, Egypt and Cuba and with a number of players – including captain Kritsada Wongkaeo, Jirawat and Jetsada Chudech – reaching their peak years, Colombia represented a genuine chance for new coach Miguel Rodrigo's team.

Left AFC Futsal Championship 2016

Right AFC Futsal Club Championship 2016

The group proved to be tough, though, and Thailand lost their opener 6-4 to Russia, who eventually finished as runners-up to Argentina after knocking out Iran in the semi-finals.

Suphawut opened his side's account against the Russians before going on to net a hat-trick in an 8-5 win over Cuba to give Thailand a chance of progressing to the last 16. A 2-1 victory against Egypt ensured a second successive knockout phase.

Unfortunately for Thailand they came up against an ever improving Azerbaijan – thanks in part to an influx of naturalised Brazilians – and went down 13-8 after extra time. The influential Suphawut added two more to his tally but Spaniard Rodrigo's side had been unable to withstand their opponents' five-goal extra-time blitz.

Nonetheless, Suphawut returned to Southeast Asia satisfied with Thailand's showing on the world stage at a tournament in which Asia's heightened futsal stature was evident. Iran claimed a stunning penalty shootout victory over defending champions Brazil on route to the semi-finals while debutants Vietnam also progressed to the knockout stage.

Suphawut, meanwhile, finished as the continent's top scorer with six goals and, for the second World Cup in succession, claimed the Goal of the Tournament after his quick footwork bewildered Cuba goalkeeper Brenieht Suarez before rounding off the scoring against the Caribbean nation.

"This was my second World Cup and overall I'm happy with my performance. Thailand have shown the world that we are a team to fear and that we can compete at the top level," he reflected upon returning to his homeland.

"Unfortunately we were unlucky not to get to the quarter-finals but we will learn from our mistakes and improve for the next event."

At 27, Suphawut has time on his side and has every intention of returning to the World Cup in four years' time.

"We have a very bright future as a team and an organisation, as the association is trying to improve the structure and develop a new generation of players.

"But this team will definitely be around for the next World Cup. I think we will improve further and be a difficult team to beat; I'm already looking forward to it. Personally, I'd also like to play in Japan one day."

Whatever the future holds, the name Suphawut Thueanklang is sure to be heard ringing around futsal arenas for years to come.

AGAINST ALL ODDS

YEMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN AFC COMPETITIONS SUCH AS THE RECENT AFC U-16 CHAMPIONSHIP IN GOA IS ITSELF A MINOR MIRACLE FOR THE CONFLICT-RAVAGED NATION AND AT THE HELM IS COACH AMIN AL SUNAINI, A MAN WHO IS WORKING FOR A BETTER FUTURE AMID TURBULENT TIMES.

By: Peter Alsop Photos: Lagardère Sports

Stood hand on heart and facing the country's red, white and black flag, Yemen's U-16 players blasted out a passionate rendition of United Republic, the national anthem adopted in 1990 after unification between North and South Yemen. It was mid-September in Goa and Amin Al Sunaini's side were about to kick off their AFC U-16 Championship campaign against defending champions DPR Korea.

Fifteen months earlier the country's senior team hit global headlines after travelling by boat to Djibouti – a route frequently taken by refugees – before flying

to Doha to play a World Cup qualifier against the Koreans on neutral ground. Sanaa's airport had been bombarded in the conflict and the roads to neighbouring Saudi Arabia were deemed too risky, but the players were unwilling to forfeit the game. They lost 1-0 and ultimately finished bottom of their qualifying group.

On the coaching staff during that most inconceivable of preparations was Al Sunaini, a former Yemeni international goalkeeper and captain who has since worked with the Gulf nation's senior team as well as those at U-23, U-19 and U-16 level. Having been an integral part of the set-up since making his international debut in 1979, and as the man who





Left AFC U-23
Championship Qatar 2016

Right AFC U-16
Championship India 2016

steered his country to its first and only FIFA tournament, Al Sunaini knows more than most about what it takes to succeed as the underdog.

Back in 2002 the ex-goalkeeper helmed what is now looked upon as Yemen's golden generation, a team that advanced all the way to the final of the AFC U-17 Championship in the United Arab Emirates, before suffering penalty shootout heartbreak against Korea Republic following a 1-1 draw.

Nonetheless, this was unprecedented success as the nation ensured its passage to the 2003 FIFA U-17 World Cup in Finland. Paired in a group with Portugal, Cameroon and Brazil, Al Sunaini's side acquitted themselves well. They suffered a narrow defeat to the Portuguese, claimed a point against the West Africans and went down 3-0 to the Brazilians as they exited, with heads held high, at the group stage. This was a tournament at which Cesc Fabregas first made a name for himself and one-time American soccer prodigy Freddy Adu shone brightly, and it was Yemeni football's biggest achievement to date.

"2002 was a very good experience, not only for me but for all of Yemen because everyone was happy with the performance in the Emirates and, even though we lost

the final, we qualified for the World Cup," said 51-year-old Al Sunaini, sat amid the tranquil surroundings of Heritage Village Club Goa's picturesque gardens. "That team was an inspiration to future generations – some of them went on to play abroad and most became full internationals."

Fourteen years on from the UAE, the highly respected coach had come full circle and was back in charge of Yemen's most promising youths at the AFC U-16 Championship in India. But things were very different. The ongoing war back home meant the selection policy was flawed, preparation almost non-existent and travel – as with the senior team last year – arduous.

Yet the competition along Goa's palm-fringed Malabar Coast offered Al Sunaini and his young squad the chance to repeat the feat of those that had gone before them and book a return ticket to India, against all odds, for the next year's FIFA U-17 World Cup.

"We only started to prepare for the tournament in June after the decision to ban Kuwait gave us the chance to come here," explained Al Sunaini. "But then there was Ramadan in July so day-to-day training and eating is not normal.

"Then, of course, there is the war. All sporting activities stopped a year and a half

ago – there are no leagues and no clubs. When the players got together for this tournament they had not played or practiced properly for almost a year, they have just been at home facing all the difficulties the war brings."

The last time Al Sunaini's side competed competitively was September 2015 in Palestine in the qualification campaign for the Goa tournament. Wins over the hosts and the Maldives before defeat to table-toppers Uzbekistan saw Yemen finish second in their group and seemingly ended any chance of progression to India.

Yet the absence of Kuwait offered the West Asians a passage through the back door and, just like the senior team who sailed to Djibouti, the players refused to pass it up.

The selection process saw around 100 candidates, from all over the country, brought to Sanaa upon the recommendations of coaches entrusted by Al Sunaini to deliver the finest talent after viewing local matches of makeshift teams. From then the coach was tasked with whittling that number down to the 23 he deemed most capable of representing the country on the continental stage. And that was not the end of the hard work.

"We spent four long days travelling to India," added Al Sunaini. "We had to travel by bus from Sanaa to Jeddah, through four different states in Yemen and along roads where there is sometimes bombing. It took us more than 24 hours to get to the airport in Saudi Arabia, then we flew to India via Malaysia.

"Some families were not keen to release their sons because of the risks, but it showed the ambitions and goals of my players that they wanted to come. They all dreamt about qualifying and they weren't afraid to travel. Now I'm the father figure and together we are a family."

Ironically for Al Sunaini he found himself – on the back of another gruelling journey – again preparing a side for the challenge of DPR Korea, after the West Asians were drawn in Group D alongside the holders, Uzbekistan and Thailand.

The players fought valiantly, keeping the East Asians at bay for a little over an hour as the chances of the most unlikely of results increased.

But their defence finally cracked when, following a period of intense Korean pressure, the opening goal arrived on 61 minutes courtesy of captain Kim Pom-hyok, who went on to notch another with quarter of

an hour remaining.

The final whistle brought the Yemen players to their knees, some of them to tears. The small pocket of Yemeni fans at GMC Stadium, many of them students in Goa, had witnessed a team who gave it their all for their troubled country.

"At half-time they were dreaming that something special could happen, but there was a mistake for the first goal and we couldn't come back," reflected Al Sunaini the following day. "But we are not like DPR Korea and Uzbekistan, or Japan and Korea Republic, we don't have the facilities we need at the moment to become stronger.

"You have to spend to improve and this is our problem. Before the war we were starting to spend on infrastructure and providing better facilities. But now a lot of stadiums have been destroyed – even last week the biggest stadium in the country, in Sanaa, was bombed. Nobody is happy – everybody is losing."

Yemen went on to lose another tightly contested encounter 1-0 to Uzbekistan as they exited the competition with a game to spare. But a 1-1 draw with Thailand ensured

they returned to the Gulf of Aden with at least something to show for their efforts.

And after the players surprised many with their undoubted qualities, Al Sunaini is acutely aware that peace in his homeland could, one day, lead to the development of a team capable of challenging at continental level.

Prior to the conflict, a league that fell under the AFC banner and regular participation in the Gulf Cup of Nations had heightened interest in Yemeni football. Television networks were paying to broadcast matches and an increasing number of companies were becoming involved in sponsorship. Everything pointed towards a brighter future.

"The standard is much, much better than it was in my day," he noted. "We used to play on sand, there was no grass. More recently clubs were supported better financially, players were on contracted salaries for the first time and the level was higher. Now that has stopped again.

"But we have coaches – good coaches, young coaches who are trying to continue. They keep fighting against the situation, we are all fighting and want to show people that even if there is war we will play football. We still hope – you cannot surrender, you have to keep going."

BIG DREAMS

JAPAN FORWARD TAKEFUSA KUBO ANNOUNCED HIMSELF ON THE CONTINENTAL STAGE AT THE AFC U-16 CHAMPIONSHIP IN SEPTEMBER BUT THE AMBITIOUS STARLET HAS ALREADY SET HIS SIGHTS ON THE VERY HIGHEST LEVEL

By: Daniel Pordes Photo: Lagardère Sports

Takefusa Kubo knows exactly what advice to give any aspiring youngsters when it comes to starting a career in football.

"If you want to be a professional footballer, you have to want and believe

you can be better than anyone else. You have to have big dreams, the biggest dreams possible, and really believe in them. If you have only small dreams, it stands to reason you'll never achieve anything big."

Wise words but even more so when one considers Kubo himself, at the time of writing, is just five months removed from celebrating his 15th birthday. He is, of course, no ordinary teenager having become the first Japanese player on the books of Barcelona at just 10 years of age, lit up various youth tournaments, been emblazoned on the covers of the biggest football magazine in his homeland, and already heralded as one of the faces of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

In September's AFC U-16 Championship the diminutive forward stood out with his silky skills on the ball, dynamic dribbling, set-piece ability and accurate shooting as he netted four times to help the young Samurai Blue finish amongst the top four sides, and by doing so secure a place at the FIFA U-17 World Cup India 2017.

Much of the raw talent was in evidence before he joined Barcelona's famed La Masia academy in 2011. Tutored in the ways of the beautiful game by his football-mad father as a toddler, at seven years old Kubo joined his first team, FC Persimmon, in his home town of Kawasaki City. Consecutive MVP awards in the Barcelona school camps in Yokohama and Belgium then caught the eye, and interest, of the Catalan club and soon after Kubo, along with his mother and brother, was on the way to Spain.

"Because I was so young I didn't really have any fears or nerves about going," says Kubo, speaking in fluent Spanish from the plush surrounds of the Bogmallo

Beach Resort Hotel in Goa, India two days after the quarter-final of the AFC U-16 Championship.

"There were and are many differences between Barcelona and Japan, so at the beginning it did take me a while to adapt. Before I arrived I only used chopsticks to eat, but now I can use knives and forks very well!"

As well as the classes in cutlery, Kubo's footballing education in Barcelona took in everything from skills and streetwise smarts to morals.

"There were many lessons I learnt from my time in Barcelona," says Kubo. "When I was young I liked dribbling, but when I came to Spain I learnt when to dribble and when to release the ball. I also look towards goal more in terms of playing positively. It doesn't have to be scoring a goal, it could be looking to create an assist or a good play, that's what I'm always thinking about or looking for."

"I also learnt that there is not a big difference between Japanese and Spanish players, no one is better than the other, but Spanish players are clever. If you're listening to the coach talking to you by the time he's blown his whistle to get the game restarted the ball has already gone – my opponent would take it off me while the coach was still talking!"

"The best advice I received, though was from the head of La Masia. He said: 'Before being a footballer you have to be a person.' I always think about that."

Having returned to Japan and FC Tokyo last summer due to the Spanish club's violation of transfer regulations, Kubo is now mixing it with the J.League side's U-23 team, coming up against bigger and stronger opponents than those he was facing in Barcelona.

"I am smaller than the others so when they challenge me for the ball they push me and I fall sometimes – it's just something I've gotten used to."

"After training they go to the gym and work on their body-building and there are many who are like this," says Kubo, raising

his arms and flexing his biceps.

"When I see them like that each day, I want to be like that as soon as possible, because it's better to be bigger than not, right? I can't work out with a lot of weight yet, I have to go with small amounts and steadily build myself up."

It's evident when he speaks that Kubo has an insatiable hunger to improve his game be it physically or technically. He is constantly learning from team-mates, opponents and his coaches.

"Each team I've played with or against or training I've taken part in has their own system, so you look to take the best elements from each experience and mix it into your own style to become better," he says.

"For example, there are many here in the Japan U-16 team who take great set-pieces, so I study my team-mates' technique and I learn from them."

"I have had many coaches and each one has taught me something different and my father watches every game I play and he gives me advice and helps me work on things."

His rate of progress has been so rapid that many in the Japanese sports world believed he would break Takayuki Morimoto's record and become the youngest Japanese player to make his professional J.League debut, although Kubo himself dismisses this. He does, though, have other targets in mind.

"Having the Olympics in your country happens once in your lifetime or maybe not at all, so if I can participate in the 2020 Summer Games in Tokyo it would be really important for me," he says.

"I try to improve every day with the hope I can take part. There are many good players and I'm not at that level yet, so I do need to get better."

"I would also like to go back to Europe in the future, but first I need to get a lot better because it's not easy to play in Europe."

"I still want to be better than others; I want to be the best. And if I can, I want to win the World Cup – this is what everyone in every country wants, right?"





IR Iran And Saudi Arabia Lead The Way

Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia lead the way after the conclusion of the fourth Matchday in the final round of qualifiers for the 2018 FIFA World Cup, with Australia joining the pair as the three nations yet to taste defeat after four games.

In Group A, Iran picked up a pair of 1-0 victories after they defeated Uzbekistan in Tashkent courtesy of Jalal Hosseini's first-half header before Sardar Azmoun's goal helped narrowly edge Korea Republic on home soil as Carlos Queiroz's side occupy pole position for Russia 2018.

"We earned a win against one of the best teams in Asia," said Iran coach Queiroz.

"We are happy to earn three points as a win against a team like Korea is worth so much.

"We analysed the Korean team well so their playing strategy during the opening stages did not surprise our players. We proved that games are decided on the field.

"We have earned two good wins against Korea and Uzbekistan and this is part of the road to the World Cup. But there are six more games left and there could be wins and losses ahead. It is now important to continue this run and try even harder to prepare for the next matches as these players deserve to qualify for the World Cup."

After their defeat to Iran, Uzbekistan bounced back to claim a 2-0 win over China that keeps them in contention in second place in Group A.

Two points behind the Uzbeks are Korea Republic who came back from 2-1 down to defeat Qatar 3-2 in Suwon thanks to goals from Ki Sung-yueng, Ji Dong-won and Son Heung-min before their unbeaten streak was ended in Tehran.

The narrow loss in Korea Republic was disappointing for Jorge Fossati's Qatar side,

but they recovered to beat Syria 1-0 five days later in Doha courtesy of captain Hassan Al Haydos' successfully converted penalty, a positive result considering their visitors had beaten China 1-0 in Xian on Matchday Three.

"We came back into the competition at such a critical time because we had to win and the players were determined to get the victory," said coach Fossati after the win over Syria.

"We only had a short time to organise ourselves but the players helped me and I'm proud of them. We now need to focus on the 90 minutes of the next game and not all the rest of the matches.

"The win tonight will give us big



motivation and I hope we can use this to our advantage in the next matches."

In Group B, Saudi Arabia put on arguably the most impressive performance as they thrashed the United Arab Emirates 3-0 in Jeddah on Matchday Four with Fahad Al Muwallad, Nawaf Al Abed and Yahya Al Shehri all getting on the scoresheet at the King Abdullah Sports City. The comprehensive win over their regional rivals came on the back of an equally impressive 2-2 draw with

Asian champions Australia at the same venue with Taisir Al Jassim and Nassir Al Shamrani scoring or the hosts to cancel out goals from Trent Sainsbury and Tomi Juric.

"I'm very happy with the result and the performance tonight was great as it improved in the second half," said Saudi Arabia coach Bert van Marwijk after the victory against the UAE.

"We sealed the match in the second half as we managed to score from the chances we create. Our performance was not good in the first half but our players showed great determination to win and get the three points.

"The result of the match between Australia and Japan was good for us and the win tonight made things great for us in the group."

The Socceroos followed up that stalemate with another in Melbourne after sharing the points with Japan in a 1-1 scoreline. Five days earlier, the Samurai Blue defeated Iraq 2-1 in Saitama thanks to Hotaru Yamaguchi's late winner.

Iraq did rebound from their narrow defeat in Japan as striker Mohanad Abdulraheem scored all four goals in an impressive 4-0 drubbing of Thailand with the Southeast Asians having a round of fixtures to forget having earlier lost 3-1 in the UAE.

"It was a crucial match against Thailand, the win is very important for the Iraqi team," said Iraq coach Radhi Shenaishi.

"If we look at the three matches we have had so far, all the teams were very close to each other.

"Now this match becomes part of the past, we have to look to upcoming matches against other teams and we hope to continue in this way."



Group A

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
IR Iran	4	3	1	0	4	0	4	10
Uzbekistan	4	3	0	1	4	1	3	9
Korea Republic	4	2	1	1	6	5	1	7
Syria	4	1	1	2	1	2	-1	4
Qatar	4	1	0	3	3	6	-3	3
China	4	0	1	3	2	6	-4	1

01/09/16
Korea Republic 3 (Zheng Zhi Og 20, Lee Chung-Yong 62, Koo Ja-Cheol 66) China 2 (Yu Hai 73, Hao Junmin 76)

Uzbekistan 1 (Alexander Geymrkh 74) Syria 0
IR Iran 2 (Reza Ghoochannejhad 90+4, Alireza Jahanbakhsh 90+11) Qatar 0

06/09/16
China 0 IR Iran 0
Syria 0 Korea Republic 0
Qatar 0 Uzbekistan 1 (Egor Krimets 86)

06/10/16
Korea Republic 3 (Ki Sung-Yueng 11, Ji Dong-Won 56, Son Heung-Min 58) Qatar 2 (Ki Sung-Yueng 11, Ji Dong-Won 56, Son Heung-Min 58) (Hassan Al Haydos 16, Sebastian Sorria 45)
China 0 Syria 1 (Mahmoud Al Mawas 54)
Uzbekistan 0 IR Iran 1 (Jalal Hosseini 27)

11/10/16
Uzbekistan 2 (Marat Bikmaev 50, Otabek Shukurov 85) China 0
IR Iran 1 (Sardar Azmoun 25) Korea Republic 0
Qatar 1 (Hassan Al Haydos 37) Syria 0

Group B

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
Saudi Arabia	4	3	1	0	8	3	5	10
Australia	4	2	2	0	6	3	3	8
Japan	4	2	1	1	6	4	2	7
United Arab Emirates	4	2	0	2	5	6	-1	6
Iraq	4	1	0	3	6	6	0	3
Thailand	4	0	0	4	1	10	-9	0

01/09/16
Australia 2 (Massimo Luongo 58, Tomi Juric 64) Iraq 0
Japan 1 (Keisuke Honda 11) United Arab Emirates 2 (Ahmed Khalil 20, 54)
Saudi Arabia 1 (Nawaf Al Abed 84) Thailand 0

06/09/16
Iraq 1 (Mohanad Abdulraheem 18) Saudi Arabia 2 (Nawaf Al Abed 81, 88)
Thailand 0 Japan 2 (Genki Haraguchi 17, Takuma Asano 75)
United Arab Emirates 0 Australia 1 (Tim Cahill 75)

06/10/16
Japan 2 (Genki Haraguchi 26, Hotaru Yamaguchi 90+5) Iraq 1 (Saad Abdulamir 60)
United Arab Emirates 3 (Ali Mabkhout 14, 47, Ahmed Khalil 90+3) Thailand 1 (Tana Chanabut 65)

Saudi Arabia 2 (Taisir Al Jassim 5, Nassir Al Shamrani 79) Australia 2 (Trent Sainsbury 45, Tomi Juric 71)

11/10/16
Australia 1 (Mile Jedinak 52) Japan 1 (Genki Haraguchi 5)
Iraq 4 (Mohanad Abdulraheem 7, 25, 87, 90+2) Thailand 0
Saudi Arabia 3 (Fahad Al Muwallad 73, Nawaf Al Abed 79, Yahya Al Shehri 90+2) United Arab Emirates 0



Former Champions To Meet In Final



Former winners Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors will face Al Ain from the United Arab Emirates in the final of the AFC Champions League after the K-League Classic side defeated countrymen FC Seoul

5-3 on aggregate in October's semi-final. Leading 4-1 from September's semi-final first leg after goals from Leonardo, Ricardo Lopes and Kim Shin-wook had given Jeonbuk a three-goal cushion, with Ju Se-jong's strike the only reply from FC Seoul in Jeonju, Choi Kang hee's side were in a strong position ahead of the return meeting at Seoul World Cup Stadium.

Adriano's tournament record-equaling 13th goal did give FC Seoul hope of an unlikely turnaround, but Lopes' second half leveler meant the aggregate deficit proved too much for the capital city club to overcome, in spite of Ko Kwang-min's injury-time winner on the night.

And after Al Ain shared an action-packed 2-2 draw away at Qatar's El Jaish the night

before to win their semi-final 5-3, Jeonbuk will host the Emiratis at Jeonju World Cup Stadium on November 19 before the travel to Al Ain's Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium and the crucial second leg a week later.

After winning the continental crown in 2006, coach Choi Kang-hee is keen to banish bad memories of a penalty shootout defeat at the hands of Qatar's Al Sadd in the 2011 final.

"We still feel the pain of five years ago," said Choi. "These are painful memories and we are delighted to have the chance to play in another final".

"The final of this kind of competition is a big game and failing to win is hard. You can try to forget about it but it stays in your mind for a long time".

"When we gathered for pre-season in January, I told the players that our target was to win the AFC Champions League. To get to the final is a big deal for us".

Al Ain had earlier secured UAE representation in the final for the second year running and will have a chance to replicate their success in the inaugural edition of the revamped AFC Champions League in 2003.

Zlatko Dalic's side were in a strong position at the start of the second leg encounter in Doha after goals from Douglas, Omar Abdulrahman and Caio saw them claim a 3-1 first-leg victory in Al Ain.

After a goalless first half at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium, Omar Abdulrahman opened the scoring as the hour approached but El

Jaish's Brazilian striker Romarinho bagged a double to ensure a nervy finish before Mohamed Abdulrahman scored deep into stoppage time to ensure Al Ain returned to a first continental final since 2005.

"We played a great match and were able to fight and compete with El Jaish," said Al Ain's Croatian coach Dalic. "We ended the first half scoreless and this helped us go into the second period with a lot of confidence and determination.

"Our opening goal then increased our enthusiasm and determination and put more pressure on El Jaish. The match was then very exciting in the final 30 minutes when the two sides went forward and created scoring chances."

Dalic's side previously experienced semi-final heartbreak two years ago when Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal ousted them 4-2 on aggregate to deny Al Ain a shot at a second title but there was to be no repeat of that disappointment for the club from the Garden City.

"El Jaish played very well tonight and I've said previously that they have some excellent players," added Dalic.

"But qualifying for the final is a big achievement for us and is the fruit of the great effort that we have put in during the entire year.

"The team was determined to reach the final and despite facing several difficulties we have made it through to the final of the competition and can now hopefully make it over the last hurdle."

SEMI-FINALS	
 Al Ain win 5-3 on aggregate	
Al Ain vs El Jaish	
 27/09/16 Al Ain 3-1 El Jaish <i>(Douglas 17, Omar Abdulrahman 22, Caio 90+1)</i> <i>(Sardor Rashidov 52)</i>	 18/10/16 El Jaish 2-2 Al Ain <i>(Romarinho 67, 81) (Omar Abdulrahman 57, Mohamed Abdulrahman 90+3)</i>
 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors win 5-3 on aggregate	
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors vs FC Seoul	
 28/09/16 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 4-1 FC Seoul <i>(Leonardo 22, 40, Ricardo Lopes 26, Kim Shin-wook 84) (Ju Se-jong 46)</i>	 19/10/16 FC Seoul 2-1 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors <i>(Adriano 38, Ko Kwang-min 90+2)</i> <i>(Ricardo Lopes 59)</i>



JSW Bengaluru Claim Historic Final Berth



JSW Bengaluru became the first Indian side to reach the AFC Cup final after recording an eye-catching 4-2 aggregate victory over defending champions Johor Darul Ta'zim in October's semi-finals.

Having drawn 1-1 in September's semi-final first leg in Johor Baru after Jorge Pereyra Diaz's opener was cancelled out by Eugeneson Lyngdoh, the tie was delicately poised in the return leg in Bangalore.

The 2015 winners did open the scoring through captain Safiq Rahim to edge the Malaysians in front on aggregate but they were pegged back by Sunil Chhetri's header four minutes before half-time.

The Bengaluru captain then added a stunning second on 67 minutes before Spanish defender wrapped up the tie for the I-League champions and send the side into an historic first-ever continental final, and spark frenzied celebrations amongst the majority of the 21,379 fans in attendance.

And after Air Force Club shared an action

packed 3-2 win away at Lebanon's Al Ahed the night before to win their semi-final 4-3, Albert Roca's Bengaluru will now face the Iraqis in the AFC Cup final on November 5.

"As the captain, Sunil Chhetri sets the right example for everyone here," said Roca. "From the first day, he was really dedicated and focused. He's a big part of what we have achieved."

"We focused on defending well as we knew that if Johor had scored a second goal, it would be really difficult for us to win the game and reach the final."

"We have the players capable of winning the game in the second half. We had been training a lot in our set-pieces, made the right decisions on the pitch and did well with the set-plays."

"To win the title would be incredible for all of us, but we still have to work hard, with the same mentality that has worked well for us so far. If we do that, we fancy our chances."

Al Ain had earlier secured UAE representation in the final for the second year running and will have a chance to replicate their success in the inaugural edition of the revamped AFC Champions League in 2003.

Air Force Club had earlier secured Iraqi representation in the final for the second time in three years after goals from Hammdi Ahmed, Basher Resan and an own-goal from Nour Mansour saw them secured a come-back win against hosts Al Ahed.

The tie was delicately poised ahead of

the encounter at Beirut's Sport City Stadium following the 1-1 draw in the first meeting in September where Zaher Midani's opener for Air Force Club had been cancelled out by Hussein Dakik.

In an eventful second leg, the Iraqi Premier League side found themselves behind twice in swift succession courtesy of first-half goals from Nour Mansour and Hassan Chaito but they hauled themselves back on level terms each time through first Hammadi Ahmed and then an own-goal from Mansour.

Basher Resan then scored the vital third for the visitors on 77 minutes, although his fine performance was spoiled by his dismissal shortly after as Air Force Club finished the tie triumphant, albeit with just ten men on the field.

"The match was a very open one for the two teams and although we conceded a goal from a penalty, we pulled ourselves together and scored the equaliser. However, we unfortunately conceded a second goal before the break which made things harder for us in the second period," said Air Force coach Basim Qasim.

"Nevertheless, we had a big will to win, especially in the final third of the match, and we showed that by playing with five players in the frontline. We proved that we are a strong team and we managed to get an important victory against a strong side who have had an excellent performance in this competition."

SEMI-FINALS	
Air Force Club win 4-3 on aggregate	
Air Force Club vs Al Ahed	
27/09/16 Air Force Club 1-1 Al Ahed <i>(DZaher Midani 24) (Hussein Dakik)</i>	18/10/16 Al Ahed 2-3 Air Force Club <i>(Nour Mansour 14, Hassan Chaito 36) (Hammadi Ahmed 28, Nour Mansour OG 70, Basher Resan 76)</i>
JSW Bengaluru win 4-2 on aggregate	
Johor Darul Ta'zim vs JSW Bengaluru	
28/09/16 Johor Darul Ta'zim 1-1 JSW Bengaluru <i>(Jorge Pereyra Diaz 52) (Eugeneson Lyngdoh 56)</i>	19/10/16 JSW Bengaluru 3-1 Johor Darul Ta'zim <i>(Sunil Chhetri 41, 67, Juanan 76) (Safiq Rahim 11)</i>



Iraq Win First-Ever AFC U-16 Championship

Iraq won the AFC U-16 Championship for the first time as Mohammed Dawood scored the decisive spot kick in a 4-3 penalty shootout victory over Islamic Republic of Iran after the sides had played out a goalless draw in 90 minutes at Goa's Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium.

The West Asians had previously achieved a best ever third-place finish back in 1985 while Iran were looking to add to the continental title won in 2008.

Qahtan Chitheer's Iraq were the better side as Dawood twice came close in the first half before hitting the woodwork after the interval. But after 90 minutes failed to produce a goal, and with no extra time at the AFC youth event, the game was decided from the spot.

With the scores tied at 3-3 Dawood kept his composure to fire home the winning penalty as Iraq marked their debut appearance in the final with a win over their neighbours.

"We controlled the game for long periods, improved in the second half and had many chances. In the end the best team won," said Chitheer.

"We played under huge pressure today but overall we were very good in this match. We gradually got better as the tournament went

on and I want to congratulate my team."

And with the tournament's top four teams also qualifying for the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup in India, both finalists – along with DPR Korea and Japan – booked their return tickets to the South Asian country.

Abbas Chamanian's Iran had earlier topped Group A after picking up two wins and a draw from encounters with Saudi Arabia, hosts India and United Arab Emirates respectively. They were joined in the last eight by UAE, who also advanced on seven points.

Japan began the tournament on fire, scoring 21 and conceding none in resounding Group B wins over Vietnam, debutants Kyrgyzstan and Australia to progress on maximum points. Vietnam claimed second position after defeating the Kyrgyz 3-1 on Matchday Three.

Iraq enjoyed a 2-1 opening-day win over 2014 runners-up Korea Republic but draws against Malaysia and Oman saw the West Asians progress to the quarter-finals as Group C runners-up behind Oman on goal difference.

Defending champions DPR Korea and Uzbekistan each picked up six points from Group D fixtures with Yemen and Thailand to advance with a game to spare. The Central Asians' 3-1 win over the Koreans then sealed top spot for the 2010 champions.

Iran turned on the style to oust Vietnam 5-0 in the last eight while Japan also secured their passage to the semi-final with a 1-0 victory over UAE and DPR Korea squeezed past Oman on penalties following a 1-1 draw.

Dawood, who later picked up the tournament's Most Valuable Player and Top Scorer awards, bagged a brace as an ever improving Iraq returned to the semi-finals for the first time since 2012 and joined Iran, Japan and DPR Korea as Asia's representatives at the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup.

Mohammed Sharifi scored as Iran took a one-goal lead into interval in their last-four clash with DPR Korea only for Kye Tam's spot kick to take the tie to penalties.

And this time the East Asians were not so fortunate as Iran goalkeeper Ali Gholam Zadeh scored to make it 6-5 before returning to his line to save from Kim Kwong-sok to seal the Iranians' place in the final.

Dawood's opener against Japan, meanwhile, was cancelled out by Hiroto Yamada's double, before Muntadher Abdulsada and a pair of late penalties from Dawood saw Iraq advance 4-2 as the tournament's MVP took his tally to six goals.



Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
IR Iran	3	2	1	0	7	3	4	7
UAE	3	2	1	0	7	4	3	7
Saudi Arabia	3	0	1	2	6	9	-3	1
India	3	0	1	2	5	9	-4	1

15/09/2016
 Saudi Arabia 2 (Mansor Al Beshe 4, Dhari Al Anazi 42) IR Iran 3 (Allahyar Sayyad 47, Mohammad Ghaderi 69, Alireza Asadabadi 70)
 India 2 (Sanjeev Stalin 11, Boris Thangjam 36)
 UAE 3 (Manea Aydh 34, Majid Rashid 53, Ahmad Fawzi 74)
 18/09/2016
 IR Iran 1 (Alireza Asadabadi 49) UAE 1 (Abed Alazeez Dawood 51)
 India 3 (Aniket Jadhav 6, Aman Chetri 22, Suresh Wangjam 90+5 pen) Saudi Arabia 3 (Sulaiman Al Dhuwayhi 34, Feras Al Brikani 82, 83)
 21/09/2015
 India 0 IR Iran 3 (Mohammad Ghaderi 23, Mohammad Sharifi 81 pen 90+1 pen)
 Saudi Arabia 1 (Nawaf Al Duraywish 65) UAE 3 (Ahmad Fawzi 42, Mohmed Ali Khamis 74, Abdulla Al Naqbi 81)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Japan	3	3	0	0	21	0	21	9
Vietnam	3	2	0	1	6	10	-4	6
Kyrgyzstan	3	1	0	2	2	11	-9	3
Australia	3	0	0	3	2	10	-8	0

16/09/2016
 Australia 0 Kyrgyzstan 1 (Adilet Kanybekov 76 pen)
 Japan 7 (Takefusa Kubo 16, 64, Shimpei Fukuoka 24, 51, Taisei Miyashiro 40, Takumu Kemmotsu 79)
 Vietnam 0
 19/09/2016
 Kyrgyzstan 0 Japan 8 (Akito Tanahashi 34, 54 pen, 80, Takefusa Kubo 42 90+2, Keito Nakamura 43, 52, Toichi Suzuki 56 pen)
 Vietnam 3 (Nguyen Huu Thang 51, 61 Nguyen Duy Khiem 86) Australia 2 (John Roberts 18, 28)
 22/09/2016
 Australia 0 Japan 6 (Soichiro Kozuki 4, 82, Taisei Miyashiro 54, Gijo Sehata 56, Nagi Matsumoto 64, Akito Tanahashi 86)
 Vietnam 3 (Nguyen Khac Khiem 20 Maksat Dzhakyaliev 81 OG, Nguyen Tran Viet Cuong 88)
 Kyrgyzstan 1 (Gulzhigit Alykulov 6)

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Oman	3	1	2	0	4	1	3	5
Iraq	3	1	2	0	4	3	1	5
Korea Republic	3	1	2	0	4	2	2	4
Malaysia	3	0	1	2	1	7	-6	1

16/09/2016
 Korea Republic 1 (Jeong Chan-young 43) Iraq 2 (Muntadher Mohammed 45+2 pen, 50 pen)

Malaysia 0 Oman 3 (Arshad Al Alawi 20 pen, 78, Yousuf Al Malki 63 pen)
 19/09/2016
 Iraq 1 (Mohammed Ridha 43) Malaysia 1 (Aliff Haiqal 84)
 Oman 0 Korea Republic 0
 22/09/2016
 Korea Republic 3 (Park Jeong-in 4, Cheon Seong-hoon 14 pen, Ko Jun-hee 84) Malaysia 0
 Oman 1 (Arshad Al Alawi 90) Iraq 1 (Mohammed Dawood 37)

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Uzbekistan	3	3	0	0	9	4	5	9
DPR Korea	3	2	0	1	7	4	3	6
Yemen	3	0	1	2	1	4	-3	1
Thailand	3	0	1	2	5	19	-5	1

17/09/2016
 DPR Korea 2 (Kim Pom-hyok 61, 75) Yemen 0
 Uzbekistan 5 (Abubakir Muydinov 24 pen, Rasul Yuldoshov 45+2 pen, 89, Wudtichai Kumkeam 57 OG, Mardon Abdullaev 82) Thailand 3 (Jinnawat Russamee 2, Arnon Prasongporn 58, 90+4)
 20/09/2016
 Yemen 0 Uzbekistan 1 (Asadbek Sobirjonov 69)
 Thailand 1 (Hassawat Nopnate 69) DPR Korea 4 (Kye Tam 41 pen, 63, 67, Ri Kang-guk 79)
 23/09/2016
 DPR Korea 1 (Ri Kang-guk 75) Uzbekistan 3 (Jasurbek Umrzakov 49, Rasul Yuldoshov 62, Ibrokhim Ganikhonov 68)
 Thailand 1 (Natthaphon Srisawat 47) Yemen 1 (Hassawat Nopnate 27 OG)

Quarter-Finals

25/09/2016
 IR Iran 5 (Allahyar Sayyad 30, 72, Mohammad Ghaderi 47, Alireza Asadabadi 62, Amir Khodamoradi 69) Vietnam 0
 Japan 1 (Ayumu Seko 31) UAE 0
 26/09/2016
 Oman 1 (Muadh Al Jahdhami 80) DPR Korea 1 (Kim Pom-hyok 84)
 DPR Korea win 4-2 on penalties
 Uzbekistan 0 Iraq 2 (Mohammed Dawood 7, 79)

Semi-Finals

29/09/2016
 Japan 2 (Hiroto Yamada 29, 42) Iraq 4 (Mohammed Dawood 18, 81 pen, 90+4 pen, Muntadher Abdulsada 67)
 IR Iran 1 (Mohammad Sharifi 19) DPR Korea 1 (Kye Tam 80 pen)
 Iran won 6-5 on penalties

Final

2/10/2016
 IR Iran 0 Iraq 0
 Iraq won 4-3 on penalties





Third Futsal Title for Nagoya Oceans

Japan's Nagoya Oceans claimed an unprecedented third AFC Futsal Club Championship in July when they defeated Iraq's Nafit Al Wasat 6-5 in a dramatic penalty shootout after the sides had played out a thrilling 4-4 draw in the final at Bangkok Arena.

Nagoya went in front early on through Tomoki Yoshikawa, before Ghodrat Bahadori levelled for Nafit Al Wasat, who were making their first appearance in the final. Koichi Saito restored the Japanese side's lead only for the tournament's Most Valuable Player Farhad Tavakoli to make things all square at the interval.

Hasan Dakheel tapped home with eight minutes remaining to leave Nafit Al Wasat on the brink of glory, but Yoshio Sakai struck late to force extra time. Nagoya's Ryuta Hoshi then scored from distance at the death to cancel out Serginho's deflected own goal to mean the seventh AFC Futsal Club Championship would be decided from the spot.

After the first ten penalties were scored, goalkeeper Yushi Sekiguchi produced a composed finished before returning to more familiar territory to deny Saif Abdulmalek as Nagoya added to their titles in 2011 and 2014.

"I'm very proud. I don't have words to describe how I'm feeling," said Nagoya's Portuguese coach Pedro Costa. "It's because of things like this that we work day after day. "All of them worked very hard, we are a real team. A player can decide a game, but only a real team can win a championship."

Nagoya had earlier scraped through to the quarter-finals on goal difference after a 2-2 draw with Australia's Vic Vipers was followed by a 3-1 reversal to hosts Chonburi Bluewave, who topped Group A on maximum points.

Holders Tasisat Daryaei also claimed back-to-back wins to advance to the last eight as Group B winners. The runner-up spot was again decided by goal difference as Uzbekistan's Almalyk FC joined the Iranians in the knockout phase by edging fellow debutants Al Mayadeen of Lebanon after the teams had each finished with a point apiece.

2015 semi-finalists Nafit Al Wasat began their campaign with a 2-2 draw against Dibba Al Hissin of the United Arab Emirates, before securing a resounding 5-1 scoreline over China's Dalian Yuan Dynasty to advance as table-toppers. Dibba also progressed after picking up two points from two games in an impressive start to their debut on the continental stage.

Successive wins saw another debutant,

Sanna Khanh Hoa FC of Vietnam, top Group D ahead of second-placed Al Sadd of Qatar, while Chinese Taipei's Taipower FC were the only team to exit the tournament without picking up a point.

The clash of the quarter-finals saw Nagoya eliminate Tasisat 3-2 on penalties after a 2-2 draw over 50 minutes, while hosts Chonburi continued their good run by seeing off Almalyk 4-1.

Nafit Al Wasat brought the curtains down on Al Sadd's tournament with a 2-1 scoreline, and Dibba goalkeeper Hassan Ali scored an audacious goal as the Emiratis comfortably progressed to the semi-finals with a 6-2 victory over Sanna.

Nagoya finally won their first game of the tournament in normal time by ending Dibba's brave run with a 3-1 win to book their place in a record third final.

And Nafit Al Wasat upset the odds, as well as a packed Bangkok Arena, by coming from behind to claim a 4-1 victory over the hosts after extra time.

Chonburi's Jirawat Sornwichian scored a brace in the third-place playoff with Dibba to bag the Top Scorer award with seven goals and maintain his record of having netted in every game as the Thai side ended their campaign on a high with a 6-1 win.



Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Chonburi Bluewave	2	2	0	0	9	4	5	6
Nagoya Oceans	2	0	1	1	3	5	-2	1
Vic Vipers FC	2	0	1	1	5	8	-3	1

15/07/2016
Chonburi Bluewave 6 (Jirawat Sornwichian 16, 17, Suphawut Thueanklang 23, Sarawat Jaipetch 32, Jonathan Barrientos 35 OG, Sorasak Phoonjungreed 38)
Vic Vipers 3 (Shayan Alinejad 9, Jonathan Barrientos 24, Jirawat Sornwichian 28 OG)
16/07/2016
Nagoya Oceans 2 (Tomoki Yoshikawa 16, Yoshio Sakai 33)
Vic Vipers 2 (Shayan Alinejad 30, Adam Cooper 32)
17/07/2016
Chonburi Bluewave 3 (Jirawat Sornwichian 2, Suphawut Thueanklang 27, Jetsada Chedeck 35)
Nagoya Oceans 1 (Ryohei Ando 26)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Tasisat Daryaei FSC	2	2	0	0	10	5	5	6
Almalyk FC	2	0	1	1	5	6	-1	1
Al Mayadeen FC	2	0	1	1	4	8	-4	1

15/07/2016
Tasisat Daryaei 4 (Hossein Tayebi 4, 38, Saeid Abbasi 17, 32)
Almalyk FC 3 (Farkhod Abdumavlyanov 12, 13, Javlon Anarov 39)
16/07/2016
Al Mayadeen 2 (Khaled Takaji 4, 20)
Almalyk FC 2 (Jamoliddin Sharipov 3, Konstantin Sviridov 31)
17/07/2016
Tasisat Daryaei 6 (Hossein Tayebi 20, 21, 24, Alireza Vafaei 36, 38, Vahid Shamsaei 38)
Al Mayadeen 2 (Dragan Tomic 24, Mohamed Kobeissy 25)

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Nafit Al Wasat	2	1	1	0	7	3	4	4
Dibba Al Hissin SCC	2	0	2	0	3	3	0	2
Dalian Yuan Dynasty FC	2	0	1	1	2	6	-4	1

15/07/2016
Nafit Al Wasat 2 (Ghodrat Bahadori 18, 29)
Dibba Al Hissin SCC 2 (Mario Claudio 6, Abdalla Mohamed 14)
16/07/2016
Dalian Yuan Dynasty 1 (Diogo 35)
Dibba Al Hissin SCC 1 (Ahmed Abdalla 15)
17/07/2016
Nafit Al Wasat 5 (Mustafa Bachay 11, 22, Hasan Ali 21, Ghodrat Bahadori 23, Farhad Tavakoli 36)
Dalian Yuan Dynasty 1 (Mustafa Bachay 28 OG)

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Sanna Khanh HOA FC	2	2	0	0	6	2	4	6
Al Sadd SC	2	1	0	1	6	3	3	3
Taipower FC	2	0	0	2	0	7	-7	0

15/07/2016
Sanna Khanh HOA FC 3 (Nguyen Trung Nam 20, Phan Khac Chi 30, Tran Van Thanh 38)
Taipower 0
16/07/2016
Al Sadd 4 (Abdullah Salem 15, 28, Mohamed Ali 29, 32)
Taipower 0
17/07/2016
Sanna Khanh HOA FC 3 (Tran Van Thanh 7, Phan Khac Chi 16, Nguyen Quac Bao39)
Al Sadd 2 (Abdullah Salem 16, Mohamed Ismail 38)

Quarter-Finals

19/07/2016
Sanna Khanh HOA FC 2 (Nguyen Trung Nam 22, Le Anh Tuan 34)
Dibba Al Hissin SCC 6 (Abdalla Salim 26, 32, Hamad Mohamed 28, Abdalla Mohamed 36, Hassan Ali 40, Mario Claudio 40)
Nafit Al Wasat 2 (Mustafa Bachay 17, Hasan Ali 20)
Al Sadd 1 (Saad Bilal 10)
Tasisat Daryaei 2 (Hossein Tayebi 5, Vahid Shamsaei 49)
Nagoya Oceans 2 (Yoshio Sakai 16, Koichi Saito 42)

Nagoya win 3-2 on penalties AET
Chonburi Bluewave 4 (Jetsada Chudech 12, Suphawut Thueanklang 14, Jirawat Sornwichian 17, Xapa 36)
Almalyk FC 1 (Jamoliddin Sharipov 1)

Semi-Finals

21/07/2016
Dibba Al Hissin SCC 1 (Karim Abou Zeid 4)
Nagoya Oceans 3 (Yoshio Sakai 11, Ryohei Ando 13, Tomoki Yoshikawa 19)
Nafit Al Wasat 4 (Ghodrat Bahadori 40, 43, Farhad Tavakoli 48, Waleed Khalid 50)
Chonburi Bluewave 1 (Jirawat Sornwichian 16)
Abdullelah 36)

Third Place Play-off

23/07/2016
Dibba Al Hissin SCC 1 (Mario Claudio 5)
Chonburi Bluewave 6 (Thanatorn Santanaprasit 15, Sorasak Phoonjungreed 19, Jirawat Sornwichian 32, 37, Suphawut Thueanklang 34, Ampol Srirageaw 39)

Final

23/07/2016
Nagoya Oceans 4 (Tomoki Yoshikawa 4, Koichi Saito 14, Yoshio Sakai 39, Ryuta Hoshi 49)
Nafit Al Wasat 4 (Ghodrat Bahadori 8, Farhad Tavakoli 16, Hasan Dakheel 33, Serginho 43 OG)
Nagoya win 6-5 on penalties AET

KEEPING AN EYE ON ASIA AND JAPAN



The Asahi Shimbun AJW (Asia & Japan Watch)

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The site features quality content unique to The Asahi Shimbun, including analysis and investigative articles, opinion pieces by Asahi reporters and outside experts, and other reports aimed at a global readership.

The Asahi Shimbun has a circulation of nearly 8 million. The newspaper prides itself on its investigative reporting and analyses of business and political coverage, as well as insightful stories on Japan's fascinating subculture.

AJW offers unparalleled coverage of the Fukushima nuclear plant accident. The coverage has received positive feedback from many experts around the world.

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Subscription Plans

To commemorate the site's launch, a special discount rate of \$11.96 (one month) is available. For further inquiries, email Customer Support (customer-support@asahi.com).

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Thailand	4	4	0	0	13	3	10	12
Laos	4	3	0	1	23	8	15	9
Myanmar	4	2	0	2	17	9	8	6
Jordan	4	1	0	3	7	9	-2	3
Guam	4	0	0	4	2	33	-31	0

27/08/16	Jordan 1 Thailand 2	03/09/16	Guam 1 Laos 14
29/08/16	Myanmar 2 Laos 5	05/09/16	Myanmar 4 Jordan 2
31/08/16	Thailand 5 Laos 2	05/09/16	Jordan 4 Guam 1
03/09/16	Myanmar 11 Guam 0	05/09/16	Thailand 2 Myanmar 0
03/09/16	Laos 2 Jordan 0	05/09/16	Myanmar 4 Jordan 2
03/09/16	Thailand 4 Guam 0	05/09/16	Jordan 4 Guam 1
03/09/16	Guam 1 Laos 14	05/09/16	Thailand 2 Myanmar 0
03/09/16	Myanmar 4 Jordan 2		

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Korea Republic	4	4	0	0	38	0	38	12
Philippines	4	3	0	1	20	7	13	9
India	4	2	0	2	9	11	-2	6
Malaysia	4	1	0	3	3	24	-21	3
Northern Mariana Islands	4	0	0	4	2	30	-28	0

28/08/16	Philippines 2 India 0
30/08/16	Northern Mariana Islands 1 Malaysia 2
01/09/16	Malaysia 0 Korea Republic 13
03/09/16	Northern Mariana Islands 0 Philippines 13
03/09/16	Korea Republic 11 Northern Mariana Islands 0
03/09/16	India 5 Malaysia 1
05/09/16	India 4 Northern Mariana Islands 1
05/09/16	Philippines 0 Korea Republic 7
05/09/16	Malaysia 0 Philippines 5
05/09/16	Korea Republic 7 India 0

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Bangladesh	5	5	0	0	26	2	24	15
Chinese Taipei	5	4	0	1	29	8	21	12
IR Iran	5	3	0	2	28	9	19	9
United Arab Emirates	5	1	1	3	5	18	-13	4
Kyrgyzstan	5	1	0	4	5	30	-25	3
Singapore	5	0	1	4	3	29	-26	1

27/08/16	Bangladesh 3 IR Iran 0	05/09/16	Chinese Taipei 2
29/08/16	UAE 2 Singapore 2	05/09/16	Bangladesh 4
29/08/16	Chinese Taipei 7 Kyrgyzstan 0	05/09/16	Kyrgyzstan 2 Singapore 1
31/08/16	IR Iran 9 Kyrgyzstan 0	05/09/16	Bangladesh 4 UAE 0
31/08/16	Chinese Taipei 5 UAE 0	05/09/16	IR Iran 3 Chinese Taipei 6
31/08/16	Bangladesh 5 Singapore 0		
31/08/16	Kyrgyzstan 0 Bangladesh 10		
03/09/16	Singapore 0 Chinese Taipei 9		
03/09/16	IR Iran 5 UAE 0		
03/09/16	UAE 3 Kyrgyzstan 2		
03/09/16	Singapore 0 IR Iran 11		

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Australia	5	5	0	0	65	1	64	15
Vietnam	5	4	0	1	19	7	12	12
Uzbekistan	5	2	1	2	9	12	-3	7
Hong Kong	5	1	1	3	4	24	-20	4
Iraq	5	1	0	4	2	17	-15	3
Palestine	5	0	2	3	3	41	-38	2

25/08/16	Vietnam 2 Uzbekistan 1	01/09/16	Uzbekistan 2 Hong Kong 0
27/08/16	Hong Kong 2 Iraq 1	01/09/16	Hong Kong 2 Palestine 2
27/08/16	Australia 28 Palestine 0	01/09/16	Iraq 0 Uzbekistan 4
27/08/16	Uzbekistan 1 Palestine 1	03/09/16	Australia 6 Vietnam 0
29/08/16	Australia 14 Hong Kong 0	03/09/16	Palestine 0 Iraq 1
29/08/16	Vietnam 3 Iraq 0	03/09/16	Vietnam 5 Hong Kong 0
29/08/16	Palestine 0 Vietnam 9	03/09/16	Uzbekistan 1 Australia 9
29/08/16	Iraq 0 Australia 8		



AFC U-16 Line-Up Finalised

Group winners Korea Republic, Bangladesh and Australia joined hosts Thailand as well as runners-up Laos in completing the line-up for the 2017 AFC Women's U-16 Championship next September.

With defending champions DPR Korea, 2015 runners-up Japan and China, who finished in third place at the previous edition, all earning automatic qualification for the tournament along with Thailand, the four remaining places were secured in the qualifiers which were played in four venues across the continent.

Korea Republic won Group B ahead of the Philippines with a 100% record and scoring 38 goals and conceding none in the process. Bangladesh were equally dominant in Group C as they posted five wins out of five to finish ahead of Chinese Taipei, Islamic Republic of Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Kyrgyzstan and Singapore.

In Group D, Australia were even more dominant as they tallied an astonishing 65 goals in their five group stage games. Forward Courtney Nevin plundered nine of those in a 28-0 drubbing of Palestine which was followed by a 14-0 win over Hong Kong. The young Matildas posted three more wins to finish the group in pole position with a perfect record.

With Thailand hosting and participating in Group A, regional rivals Laos, the top team from Thailand's group, earned their place in the 2017 finals. Victories over Myanmar, Jordan and Guam proved sufficient to secure the Southeast Asians their maiden appearance at an AFC U-16 Women's Championship finals, irrespective of the defeat to Group A winners Thailand.

The eight team 2017 AFC Women's U-16 Championship is set to take place in Thailand from 9 – 23 September with the top three teams of the tournament qualifying for the 2018 FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup in Uruguay as the AFC representatives.

AFC CUP 2017
PLAYOFF
QUALIFIERS

Trio Advance to AFC Cup Play-offs



Kyrgyzstan's Dordoi FC, Three Star Club of Nepal and Bhutan's FC Tertons advanced to the 2017 AFC Cup Play-offs following the completion of the nine-team play-off qualifying round in August.

Dordoi FC became the first side to secure their passage out of the 2017 AFC Cup Play-off Qualifiers and into the tournament's next phase after defeating Casa Benfica 2-1.

The win helped Dordoi, who were forced to come from behind to seal the victory against their opponents from Macau, make it two wins out of two and finish top of Group A ahead of runners-up Casa Benfica who were some three points adrift. Guam's Rovers FC finished at the foot of the table after failing to register a point.

Despite their eventual capitulation, it was Casa Benfica who took the lead in the third minute, midfielder Jose Felipe firing home from close range after Dordoi had failed to clear a corner.

A fine looping header from David Tetteh restored parity seven minutes later, before Mirbek Akhmataliev's thunderbolt of a free-kick on 77

minutes sealed the win for Dordoi and progress for head coach Murat Dzhumakeev's impressive side.

In Group C, FC Tertons survived a late rally from Bangladesh's Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra to record a 4-3 win and ensure their passage through to the next stage of qualifying for the 2017 AFC Cup.

Needing a win to guarantee pole position in the group, Tertons followed up their opening 0-0 draw against Chinese Taipei's Tatung FC, with a



narrow victory over Sheikh Russel thanks to a brace from Chencho Gyeltshen and strikes from Tenzin Dorji and Tshering Wangdi. Meanwhile, in

Ulaanbaatar, Three Star Club sealed top spot in Group B of the 2017 AFC Cup Play-off Qualifiers without kicking a ball after

a late second half goal helped Erchim FC record a 1-0 win over Nagaworld FC.

Thanks to their opening day 2-0 defeat of Erchim and a subsequent 1-1 draw with Nagaworld, the Nepali outfit had amassed four points from their two games ahead of the clash between Mongolia's Erchim and Nagaworld from Cambodia.

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Dordoi FC	2	2	0	0	4	1	3	6
Casa Benfica	2	1	0	1	5	4	1	3
Rovers FC	2	0	0	2	2	6	-4	0

19/08/16
Rovers FC 0 Dordoi FC 2
21/08/16
Casa Benfica 4 Rovers FC 2
23/08/16
Dordoi FC 2 Casa Benfica 1

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Three Star Club	2	1	1	0	3	1	2	4
Erchim FC	2	1	0	1	1	2	-1	3
Nagaworld FC	2	0	1	1	1	2	-1	1

21/08/16
Three Star Club 2 Erchim FC 0
23/08/16
Nagaworld FC 1 Three Star Club 1
25/08/16
Erchim FC 1 Nagaworld FC 0

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
FC Tertons	2	1	1	0	4	3	1	4
Tatung FC	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	2
Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra Ltd.	2	0	1	1	4	5	-1	1

21/08/16
Tatung FC 0 FC Tertons 0
23/08/16
Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra Ltd. 1 Tatung FC 1
25/08/16
FC Tertons 4 Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra Ltd. 3

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AFC Women's Asian Cup 2018 To Be Hosted By Jordan

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Women's Football Committee met in early September in Chonburi, Thailand, coinciding with the qualifying round for the AFC U-16 Women's Championship 2017 taking place in the country.

Key decisions were made relating to the host nations of upcoming AFC women's competitions: Jordan were chosen to host the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2018 finals; the AFC U-19 Women's Championship 2017 finals were awarded to China PR (Nanjing) and Thailand (Bangkok) were announced as the hosts of the AFC U-16 Women's Championship 2017 finals.

AFC Women's Football Committee Chairwoman Moya Dodd said: "Jordan have proved they are worthy hosts of the next edition of the AFC Women's Asia Cup Finals and I would like to congratulate the Jordan Football Association

on submitting such a professional and thorough bid.

"This decision marks a geographical landmark, being the first time a Member Association from the West Zone will have hosted a senior AFC women's tournament. We look forward to seeing them in the spotlight and wish them well later this month, too, as they host the FIFA Women's U-17 World Cup.

"This is an exciting time for women's football in Asia as the AFC has pledged recently, as part of its Vision and Mission statement, to further invest in the women's game in the continent and build on recent progress and success. The information shared and discussed today highlights the great steps that are being made in terms of development, coaching, technical ability and competitiveness, as well as administrative expertise at all levels of the women's game in Asia."



Match Commissioners' Workshop Held In Amman

Two-day Match Commissioners' Workshop was held at the end of September in Amman, Jordan under the AFC League Development Programme.

The workshop aimed to identify individuals who potentially can represent the Member Association at local league and cup matches as Match Commissioners.

The workshop was attended by 40 Jordan Football Association (JFA) staff-members, former players and referees, security officers and other potential Match Commissioners.

The workshop covered various topics related to matchdays and key elements in match operations. It also included case studies and best practices, with the roles and functions of the Match Commissioners also explained.

The participants were then tested on what they had

learned during the workshop.

Match Commissioners Rashid Al Dosari of Qatar and Kemel Tokabaev from Kyrgyzstan were the instructors of the workshop.



Abu Dhabi Airports Signs With AFC As Official Sponsor

Abu Dhabi Airports Company has become the latest global brand to partner with the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) after agreeing a new deal to support the AFC's national teams and club competitions.

The agreement was formally signed by H.E. Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa, the AFC President, and Abu Dhabi Airports Company Chairman, H.E. Ali Majed Al Mansoori, at an official ceremony at Al Bateen Executive Airport in the United Arab Emirates capital on September 19.

Abu Dhabi Airports Company will now be the official sponsor of the 2018 FIFA World Cup – Asian Qualifiers, Final Round and will be a partner at other national team competitions including the AFC Asian Cup 2019, to be held in the United Arab Emirates, as well as the AFC Champions League and the AFC Cup.

Shaikh Salman said: "The Asian Football Confederation is pleased to welcome Abu Dhabi Airports Company as an official sponsor for our national team and club competitions. The AFC competitions are growing rapidly in terms of audiences, excitement and fixtures. More

people are watching live in stadia and on television than ever before.

"For global brands such as Abu Dhabi Airports Company, the AFC competitions provide an opportunity to promote - and share - the game's strength and popularity in Asia. In the AFC Vision and Mission, we set the target

of engaging with more and more fans to reinforce our position as the number one sport in Asia. This sort of cooperation helps with that objective. We look forward to a fruitful and mutually beneficial partnership with Abu Dhabi Airports Company."

Abu Dhabi Airports Company Chairman, H.E. Ali Majed Al Mansoori, added: "Abu Dhabi Airports' sponsorship of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) will enhance our growing international

profile as a world-class global travel hub, connecting the vibrant nations of Asia with the rest of the world, via our home in Abu Dhabi, while supporting the increasing popularity of football in Asia. We look forward to working with the AFC and the benefits that this new partnership will bring to both entities."



AFC Strategy To Combat Age-Cheating Bears Fruit

Conclusive scientific testing carried out on players competing at the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) U-16 Championship India 2016 has found no age-cheating at the tournament. The AFC carries out age-testing using MRI scan technology and testing takes place both during qualifying and at the final tournament.

AFC Medical Committee Chairman Dato' Dr Gurcharan Singh said: "The AFC takes age-cheating very seriously and has a comprehensive strategy in place to combat it through close monitoring, on-site screening, sanctions, and importantly, education.

"The AFC protocol for MRI scanning was devised by a panel of international experts and is also used by FIFA for the FIFA U-17 tournaments. And thanks to our consistent strategy we are seeing great progress, as witnessed at the ongoing AFC U-16 Championship."

A total of 98 players from 11 qualifying

groups were tested during the U-16 Championship qualification round in 2015. As a result of a failed MRI scan, Nepal was excluded from the championship. Nepal's matches in the qualifying competition were forfeited and the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA) was fined.

At the final competition in India, 20 players who had not taken part in the qualifying round were tested. The MRI tests found no age-cheating.

The established method of medical age testing in sport is the use of MRI scans in order to determine the state of fusion of the radial (wrist) bone. According to medical scientists, the radial bone is usually completely fused by the age of 16.

The AFC regulations stipulate that a player with a completely fused radial bone is not eligible to participate in the AFC U-16 Championship. In much the same way as doping controls, the AFC conducts checks on players prior and during tournaments.





AFC-AIFF Taskforce Meets In Goa

Goa: The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and the All India Football Federation (AIFF) held their initial taskforce meeting in Goa, India at the end of September. The meeting was described as 'extremely positive.'

Dato' Windsor John, the AFC General Secretary, and Kushal Das, the AIFF General Secretary, led the delegations who agreed the scope of the taskforce's remit, in addition to discussing issues such as development, club licensing, competitions, encompassing rankings, and the development of officials such as referees.

"The taskforce meeting was extremely positive and the AFC identified areas in which we can assist the development of football in India – which is a key to the AFC's vision of increasing engagement in the sport", said Dato' Windsor.



He added: "We had fruitful discussions on the status of league football in India. The AIFF's plans for the proposed league structure were again discussed but the AFC is extremely clear on this matter. Any decisions on the structure of the game in India are for the AIFF Executive Committee – not the AFC."

"The AFC are happy to give support and advice but the important decisions on the format of the proposed new league is purely the domain of the AIFF."

During the previous day, following the AFC Extraordinary Congress, the AIFF had also given a presentation on their plans for football development in

the country to both the AFC President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa and the FIFA President Gianni Infantino, as well as AIFF Executive Committee Vice Presidents.

AFC-Funded Mini-Pitches Launched In Tajikistan

Grassroots players in Tajikistan will be playing on four new, state-of-the-art mini-pitches funded under the AFC President's Initiatives for football development in Asia.

The pitches, two of them built in Kurgan-Tube, a city in the south west, and two in Dangara, a town in the Khatlon Province in the western part of the country, were inaugurated at the end of September.

The President of the Tajikistan Football Federation (TFF), Emomali Rustam, took part in the opening, together with the First Vice-President of the FFT Hurshed Fayzullozoda and Akhtam Abdullozoda, Minister of Sports and Tourism of Tajikistan.

"I would like to thank the AFC for the fruitful cooperation in the development of the Tajik football and for these artificial mini-pitches," said TFF President Rustam Emomali.

"The pitches will give a huge boost to the development of football in the region where we have talented young players who will benefit a lot from the new facilities."

Construction of the pitches began in April. The surface is durable artificial turf and the facilities are equipped with lighting masts, allowing for training and matches in the evenings, as well as all-year-round use.

The AFC President's Initiatives is a development programme for football across Asia which was launched

in June 2014. The mini-pitch scheme funded under the programme has seen mini-pitches built in Afghanistan, Bhutan DPR Korea, Guam, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia.

"I am delighted that the AFC can concretely support grassroots and community football through the AFC Mini-Pitch Scheme. Proper facilities and access to them is a challenge in many Member Associations and these pitches will bring the joy of football to children and adults across Asia," said AFC President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa.



Project Bhutan Stadium Security Workshop A Success

Thimphu: The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has organised a stadium and security workshop in Bhutan capital Thimphu to familiarise its participants with the roles and responsibilities of security managers at the football clubs.

Security officers from clubs in the Bhutan National League, A Division and Bhutan Football Federation together with stakeholders such as police officers and heads of stewards attended the October 4 workshop.

The workshop was another educational course carried out under the AFC League Development Programme - Project Bhutan following previous media and marketing workshops.

"The AFC League Development Program - Project Bhutan Stadium Security Workshop was very informative for our local clubs, security officers and stewards. We gained a lot of knowledge about stadium security and systematic security procedures and their proceedings," said Ugyen Wangchuk, General Secretary of the Bhutan Football Federation.



Bhutan has just started implementing the club licensing regulations under the AFC League Development Programme and therefore one of requirements for each club is to appoint a security officer.

To support the club licensing project in Bhutan and to assist the clubs to adopt new practices, the stadium and security workshop introduced them the club duties in this area and roles and responsibilities of the security officers in the future.

The main objective of the workshop was to inform the participants about stadium and safety requirements under AFC club licensing and their role in ensuring safety at football matches.

The issues discussed included structure of the security unit in the club and its cooperation with the other involved parties such as police, local authorities and stewards.

Specific security situations in club and national team matches in Asia and around the world were also reviewed in detail through videos and case studies. Planning, risk assessment, documentation, monitoring as well as ticketing and access control were also discussed in the workshop.

AFC Ultra-Durable Balls Project Wins Gold

The Asian Football Confederation's (AFC) social responsibility project – the ultra-durable balls – won gold in the 'Best Sports CSR Initiative' category at the prestigious Asia Sports Industry Awards (SPIA) on October 4 in Bangkok, Thailand.

The ultra-durable balls project which is based on the One World Futbol created by One World Play Project, is part of the AFC's partnership with One World Play Project to leverage on the beautiful game as a platform to enrich lives and bring about positive social outcomes. The One World Futbols are recognised as a breakthrough in ball technology—the ultra-durable balls never need a pump and never go flat.

AFC Social Responsibility Committee Member Ms. Nin Siriwat who received the award in a glittering ceremony at the Centara World Convention Center in Bangkok, Thailand, said, "The AFC is deeply honoured to receive this award and we are very proud of the wonderful work undertaken by the Member Associations to improve and inspire communities through football.

"Under the banner of One Asia, One Goal, the AFC has set a clear Vision and Mission to use football as

tool for social development. This award exemplifies the power of football to bring joy, empower our youth and bridge communities across the continent."

The ultra-durable balls project was awarded the gold award amongst a competitive field of 208 entries from 17 countries across 19 categories. Since its partnership with One World Play Project in 2013, the AFC has donated more than 175,000 ultra-durable balls to 28 Member Associations, reaching close to three million children across Asia.



Changlimithang Stadium

Thimphu, Bhutan

The iconic Changlimithang Stadium finished construction in 1974 ahead of the coronation of the fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck, but was completely refurbished in 2007 with the capacity expanded to its current 25,000. Located in the Bhutan capital and

comprising 11 hectares that includes the main stadium, the football ground, a cricket field and archery range, Changlimithang is built on the site of a decisive battle in Bhutan's history, fought in 1885, that led to the unification of the nation.

As well as home to the Bhutan national football team and a number of Thimphu-based sides, the 11-hectare venue also regularly hosts national archery competitions and provides

facilities for table tennis and shooting, as well as wider public occasions such as royal weddings and holiday celebrations.

Changlimithang has in recent times hosted Bhutan to memorable victories over Sri Lanka to qualify for the joint qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup 2018 and AFC Asian Cup 2019 in March last year, before the recent play-off win over Bangladesh to progress to the final round of AFC Asian Cup qualifying.



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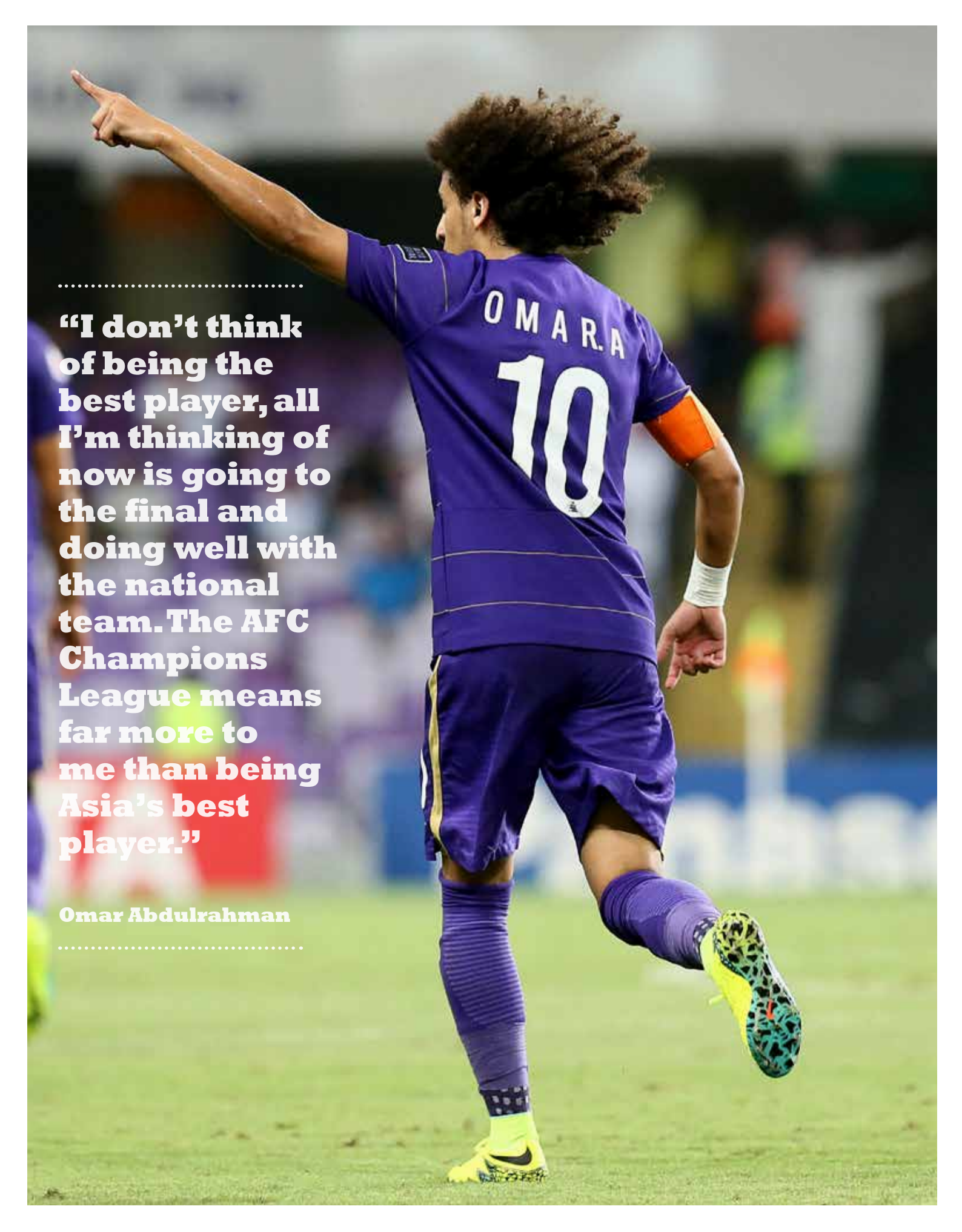


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