

CHAMP



ASPIRE ACADEMY SPORTS AND EDUCATION MAGAZINE



CHAMPIONS OF BASRA

The triumph at the “International Friendship Tournament” shows that Qatar’s senior football national team is heading in the right direction.

RISE OF THE VIKINGS

Two years ago Iceland was the sensation in France, now the smallest nation qualified for the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia is ready for more.

Qatar National Team
Bronze medal winners
 at 2018 AFC U-23 Championship

**Top 4 finish
 in 3 consecutive**

Asian Championships (2014, 2016, 2018)
 out of 47 participating nations.

**Proud of our
 Aspire Academy Graduates**

**The only
 unbeaten team**

in regulation time
 throughout the competition



ASPIRE
 ACADEMY

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BIRTHPLACE OF SUPERSTARS

IF YOU PICK ANY LONG-DISTANCE RACE SINCE THE LATE 1980S, YOU MIGHT FIND OUT ABOUT 70 OR 80 PERCENT OF ITS WINNERS HAVE BEEN FROM KENYA. DURING THE LAST OLYMPICS IN RIO 2016, ALL 13 OF THEIR MEDALS CAME FROM ATHLETICS, 9 FROM LONG- AND MIDDLE DISTANCE RUNNING EVENTS, OF WHICH FIVE WERE GOLD. IN TOTAL, 67 OF THE 102 MEDALS THEY HAVE WON AT THE OLYMPICS SINCE THEIR FIRST PARTICIPATION IN MELBOURNE IN 1965 CAME FROM RUNNING. DURING A TRAINING CAMP FROM JANUARY 17 TO FEBRUARY 3 IN THE KENYAN RIFT VALLEY, EIGHT STUDENT-ATHLETES FROM ASPIRE ACADEMY FOUND THEMSELVES IN A UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT THAT IS KNOWN FOR PRODUCING SOME OF THE WORLD'S BEST RUNNERS. A TRIP THAT SHOWED THEM A NEW SIDE OF THEIR SPORT.



For many, the small town of Iten in the highlands of Kenya is known under a different name. They call it the "Town of Runners." Situated in the Rift Valley province, at approximately 35 kilometers from the city Eldoret, Iten lies at an altitude of 2,400 meters and is the centre of Kenyan middle- and long distance running. Here you find hundreds of the fastest Kenyans living and training side by side including big names, such as former marathon world record holder and London marathon winner Wilson Kipsang, Olympic 1,500m champion Asbel Kiprop, world record holder and Olympic 800m champion David Rudisha and many more. Runners from all over the world go there to train – regardless of their target being to go to Olympics or just run for leisure.

Britain's most successful distance runner Mo Farah revealed in his biography that moving into a house full of Kenyan runners changed his whole attitude to training and racing. The Olympic champion witnessed that they would start their first run before 7am, they would cook

simple food like ugali, a maize flour mix rolled into a doughy lump. After resting, they would train again in the afternoon, eat, rest and go to bed early. For entertainment they would play chess and watch videos of old Olympic races. "Repetition, the right food, recovery, sleeping well and a good environment are the necessary ingredients for success. Kenya offers all of that," says Aspire Academy Head Strength & Conditioning Coach Barry Shillabeer.

"It's quite different from Doha, there is no AC and the internet is very slow. But, on the bright side, that makes it easier to focus on training, recovery and sleep. I did not like the local food that much, but I know I had to eat it, because it was part of the experience and it has proven to be the food of champions," 15-year-old Obaid remembers the settling-in phase of the camp. "This place is the perfect place for our boys to learn more about their sport, because here they are surrounded by runners from all over the world, they have the opportunity to interact with some of the world's best and learn from them," explains Shillabeer and confirms that all boys returned to Qatar leaner and with stronger minds and bodies.

"I remember talking to Olympic champion Asbel Kiprop. He told us about the place and gave us the advice to take it easy on the first days in order to get used to the altitude." Mohammad Assad recalls one of the golden rules for training in such a high-altitude environment as Iten: "Live high, train low." Training at 2,400 meters above sea level, athletes draw in less oxygen per breath than they would at lower altitudes. That means each breath will deliver less oxygen to the muscles and living in higher altitudes and getting used to breathing "thinner" air can enhance elite athletes' performance in competitions at lower altitude.

During workouts at high altitudes, athletes feel like they're putting forth more effort to perform as well as they do closer to sea level. The increased rate of perceived exertion is caused by altitude-induced hypoxia, which is a decrease in the amount of oxygen being delivered to the muscles to burn fuel and create energy. As elite athletes acclimate to high altitude, they acquire more red blood cells which allows their blood to carry more oxygen. When they compete at lower altitudes, they get a natural boost to the muscles when additional oxygen is available. "Training at high altitude was another stimulus for the boys and we prepared them well for it. The opportunity to experience training at altitude was not the main reason we went there. We wanted to expose the boys to this unique running culture and experience running as a group activity," explains Matt Cullen, Sports Psychology and Personal Development Facilitator at Aspire Academy. "Our Kenyan pacer Emmanuel, a 2:06 marathon runner, also provided invaluable insights into the running culture and landscape to our student-athletes."

The boys from Qatar enjoyed being surrounded by athletes from all over the world. Between November and March, the weather in Iten is perfect to get a taste of the extraordinary running culture. The High Altitude Training Centre (HATC), where the Aspire delegation stayed, opened its doors in the 1999 and was founded by multiple world champion Lornah Kiplagat, who held world records over 5 kilometers, 10 miles, 20 kilometers and Half Marathon and competed for the Netherlands in the Olympics in Athens 2004, Beijing 2008, and London 2012. She also won the World Championships Cross Country in Mombasa in 2007 and competed in the 2003 World Championships track. Her training centre is surrounded by miles of dirt roads, perfect



for running, the HATC has a 25 m swimming pool, a fully equipped gym, a 400m all-weather tartan track. There is also a 400-meter-long dirt track and plenty of hills.

The boys just needed to step out of their accommodation to choose from a variety of trails ranging from hard ground to soft dirt on the surface, inhale the fresh air filtered by a green wall of trees and engage with fellow runners in



a conversation along the way or chat with school children on the way to class, who kept asking them "How are you?" with a big smile on their faces, proud to practice their English skills. Salim acknowledged the pros of Kenya and it did not take long until the Aspire athletes felt at home in Iten. They could not get enough of running and when the opportunity came up to participate in a 4 kilometer cross country race, Abdulla found himself among 400 fellow athletes. His motivation? "I wanted to run faster than the Kenyan runners," he admitted in the most serious voice.

Like his teammates he was eager to discover the source of Kenya's dominance when it comes to long and middle distance running. Their investigation took them to the local St. Patrick's High School. This is where the running hype started many years ago, when an Irish Patrician Brother, Colm O'Connel, who came to Iten in 1976 and later became the principal of the high school, discovered that many of his students had a talent for running. He started coaching the school's track and field team and used the school holidays to organize running camps, both for his own student-runners and for talented runners from the rest of the country.

Later the school decided to plant a tree for every student that had succeeded at international level. Within a few

years the school compound was full of trees. No other high school in the world has raised and educated so many international top athletes and the alumni includes Ibrahim Hussein, World Record holder in marathon, Wilson Kipketer, who holds multiple world records at 800 and 1000 meters or David Rudisha, the current world record holder and Olympic champion at 800 meters. "It's just amazing to be in a place with such a great history. You can feel that everyone here is passionate about running. This environment is the best motivation you can imagine and it also encouraged me to find out more and more about the people and about the country," remembers 15-year-old Hafez, who like some of his teammates managed to acquire some basic Swahili language skills during the camp.



Who knows? It might not be the last time they go to Iten. Coming back to Doha, a number of personal bests were improved immediately, which is an indicator that the training camp was a success. But only time will tell how influential these 18 days have

really been for them. "They learnt a lot in Kenya about what it takes to become a successful athlete. We help them and guide them along the way, but when they leave Aspire Academy at 18, they are still very young. But by then we aim that they know their sport well enough to be able to guide themselves and become masters of their own destinies," Shillabeer explains. If Kenya had taught them something it is that it does not take much to become successful as long as you stick to the basics. What they make with this knowledge is up to them.

QATAR U-23 FOOTBALL TEAM HEAD COACH FELIX SANCHEZ:
'THIS TEAM IS DESTINED TO GO FAR'



2018 STARTED OFF WITH A BANG FOR QATARI FOOTBALL. THE COUNTRY'S U-23 NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAM FINISHED IN THIRD PLACE AT THE 2018 AFC U-23 CHAMPIONSHIP IN CHINA. THIS RESULT MEANT THAT THE TEAM HAS SUCCESSFULLY MANAGED TO FINISH IN THE TOP FOUR OUT OF 47 NATIONS FOR THE THIRD CONSECUTIVE AFC CHAMPIONSHIP (2014, 2016 AND 2018). NONE OF ASIA'S FOOTBALL POWERHOUSES INCLUDING THE LIKES OF JAPAN, SOUTH KOREA, IRAN, IRAQ, AUSTRALIA, CHINA OR ANY OF THE GCC COUNTRIES HAVE ACHIEVED THIS RESULT BEFORE.

Made up of Aspire Academy's graduates and current student-athletes, the Qatar U-23 team was the second youngest team in the tournament. Their player, Hashim Ali, became the youngest ever scorer in the championship's history at the age of 17, and forward Almoez Ali's six

net busters earned him the Golden Boot award for the tournament's top goal scorer.

The Qatari team was also the only one to not lose a single match in regular time throughout the tournament. The team's only loss came from post-match penalties in their semi-final match against Vietnam.

The youth football team was coached by Spaniard Felix Sanchez, who also coached Qatar's youth team at the 2016 AFC U-23 Championship in Qatar and led the U-19 team to triumph at the 2014 AFC U-19 Championship in Myanmar.

In an interview with CHAMP, Sanchez opened up about his coaching experience with Qatar's exemplary generation of young players, and discussed his personal highlights and thoughts on the team's future.



FELIX SANCHEZ ON...

BRINGING HOME THE BRONZE IN CHINA

"The boys had a great tournament. They showcased some strong performances and a high level of professionalism. To be third in Asia is a big achievement, and shows that we are able to compete against any team in the region. Knowing this gives players the confidence that they are able to compete with any of the 47 Asian teams in their age-group."

THE YOUNG QATARI TEAM

"I have been working with this group of players for a long time. Many of whom were with me when they were still studying at Aspire Academy. The players form a very competitive group, they work as one family and have a strong mentality. They were looking forward to playing at the finals in China, but we knew it would be a challenging task from the start, so we sought to win one match at a time. The first win gave the boys' that confidence boost and we knew at that point that we would go far in the tournament."



THE PLAYERS' STRENGTH

"These are the same boys that won the 2014 AFC U-19 Championship, and finished in the top four two years later at the 2016 U-23 AFC Championship. They are a very strong group and good friends who work well together. Their generation is determined to reach the very top and compete against anyone. The team functions cohesively. They pull together and encourage each other to be the best they can be, which is very important. At the finals, small mishaps enabled Vietnam to make a comeback in the game with a few minutes to spare, causing us to lose on penalties and miss out on the final. Forty-eight hours later, the team faced South Korea, one of Asia's most powerful football teams. Despite the loss against Vietnam, Qatar went on to beat them. That was a clear sign of how mentally strong the team is."

LESSONS LEARNED

"Our loss against Vietnam taught us how costly a brief lack of concentration can be. We led 2-1 for most of the match, until we lost focus towards the end of the match and let our defending slip which allowed Vietnam to equalise. Despite the disappointing outcome, this was a learning experience. We'll learn from it how to manage this kind of situation in the best possible way. I can't fault the boys' commitment, they gave it their all and had an excellent championship, but we had bad luck with penalties and need to work on our concentration over 90 minutes. Sometimes football is like that. They boys knew this. They did well and I'm sure they'll continue to perform strongly in the years to come. They will put Qatar on the global map of football."

THE IMPORTANCE OF ASPIRE ACADEMY

"The programmes run by Aspire Academy and the Qatar Football Association formed a vital part in the boys' football development and laid the groundwork for them. These initiatives gave the boys the opportunity to play many friendly matches against top European clubs and national teams from all over the world. The same players often featured in major tournaments such as the Al Kass International Cup in Qatar. They also took part in the qualifications for the AFC U-16, U-18 and U-23 Asian Championships and some players went on to play in three AFC Championship finals, while others played in four AFC Championship finals. These enabled the players to accumulate a wealth of experience which helped them reach the high-level they now possess. Every part of the journey has been worthwhile, and a good number of these players will one day be part of the Qatar national squad for the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar."



REACTIONS TO THE BRONZE MEDAL



H.E. Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Bin Ahmad Al Thani
Qatar Football Association
President

"We wanted to win the title, but our team did their best, and worked hard to earn third place in the Championship. The bronze medal is the beginning of the road and not the end of it. There is a large number of players in the Olympic team who we will depend on in the future. If the youth team wins the next AFC-U23 Championship, they might potentially qualify for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, which would be another significant milestone. The outcome achieved in China was the result of the hard work and effort of the technical and administrative staff, as well as players. Their performance was even more outstanding because many of them had taken part in the 2018 Gulf Cup in Kuwait the preceding week, where the team faced tremendous pressure to perform well. Therefore, they deserve a lot of credit. These youngsters will form the basis of Qatar's national team that will play for the country in the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar."



Ivan Bravo
Aspire Academy
Director General

"The support of the QFA under the leadership of H.E. Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Bin Ahmad Al Thani is one of the reasons for this success. Congratulations to the entire team and technical crew, they have done an amazing job after many months of hard work. The players' mindset contributed to this result because they believed in each other. I hope they continue in this stead, because it is the way for the country and it will help the team achieve more. I implore the players to remain committed to Qatar and continue making the country proud at the continental and international level."

CHAMPIONS OF BASRA



QATAR EMERGED VICTORIOUS IN THE TRI-NATION "INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP TOURNAMENT" PLAYED IN THE CITY OF BASRA, IRAQ FROM MARCH 22 TO 27. THE TOURNAMENT, INVOLVING HOSTS IRAQ, QATAR AND SYRIA, WAS HELD TO CELEBRATE THE RESULT OF FIFA LIFTING THE BAN ON THREE IRAQI CITIES - NAMELY BASRA, ERBIL AND KARBALA AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS OF STRENUOUS EFFORT PUT IN BY QATAR. IT ALSO MARKED THE FIRST TIME IRAQ WAS HOSTING AN INTERNATIONAL FIFA APPROVED TOURNAMENT IN SEVERAL YEARS.

Qatar's senior national team, coached by Felix Sanchez, travelled with 21 players to Iraq and the team was largely comprised of Aspire Academy graduates that were also part of the third place-winning team at the Asian Under-23 Championship in China this January.

Qatar opened the tournament with a 3-2 win over Iraq. Aspire graduate Akram Afif scored twice with Ismail Mohamed adding another one. In their second game, Qatar played out a 2-2 draw with Syria with Afif getting his third goal of the tournament.

On the final tournament day hosts Iraq and Syria could only draw 1-1 leaving Qatar as the tournament winners and Akram Afif scooping the top goal scorer award. QFA President HE Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Bin Ahmad Al Thani was present at the presentation as Qatar team captain Hassan Al Haydos received the winner's trophy and celebrated their victory alongside former Aspire Academy student-athletes such as Abdulkarim Hassan, Ahmed Moein, Assim Madibo and Ali Almoez.





FOOTBALL SENSATION ICELAND: RISE OF THE VIKINGS

THEIR PERFORMANCE WAS A SENSATION AT THE 2016 UEFA EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS WHERE THEY TOOK ON AND DEFEATED WELL-KNOWN FOOTBALLING NATIONS, INCLUDING ENGLAND, ON THEIR WAY TO THE QUARTER-FINALS. AGAIN IN 2017, THEY MADE HISTORY BECOMING THE SMALLEST COUNTRY TO QUALIFY FOR THE 2018 FIFA WORLD CUP RUSSIA™. BUT HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE VIKINGS' BIG SUCCESS? DURING A VISIT TO ASPIRE ACADEMY, ICELAND'S NATIONAL TEAM HEAD COACH HEIMIR HALLGRÍMSSON SHARED EXCLUSIVE INSIGHTS INTO THE TEAM'S INSPIRING SPIRIT, GRITTY REALISM AND EXEMPLARY BELIEF IN THEIR OWN STRENGTHS.

Their story sounds almost like a fairy tale. After hitting a low-point and slumping to 131st place in the FIFA World Rankings in October 2012, through a combination of hard work and a run of good performances, the team achieved a meteoric rise in their global world rankings, reaching 19th place in July 2017.

Iceland missed out on qualifying for the 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil™ after losing against Croatia during the second round of qualifiers. But the team soon recovered and appeared at their first major football tournament in 2016. Who would ever forget the historic day at the 2016 UEFA European Championship in France when Iceland defeated England 2-1? Not only did the win lead to the immediate resignation of 'Three Lions' Head Coach Roy Hodgson, it also secured Iceland's spot in the quarter-finals.

Their awe-inspiring wins led to a surge in interest in the team. Experts have been trying to decipher the code of Iceland's success. Small football nations intend to learn from the system they employ. What is the secret behind this incredible story? How could a country with a population of about 330,000 people, of which 21,500 are registered football players, successfully defeat some of the biggest nations in world football?

Meet Heimir Hallgrímsson, a 50-year-old dentist from Vestmannaeyjar and manager of the Iceland national team. Back in 2016, he split his coaching responsibilities with the experienced figure Lars Lagerbäck, who had

previously coached the Swedish and Nigerian national teams. After the team's enormous success in 2016, he took over as the sole head coach. He added another chapter to the team's success story by navigating Iceland towards the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia™, after finishing top of their group during the qualification phase and achieving better results than the likes of Ukraine, Croatia, Turkey, Finland and Kosovo along the way.

The team also triumphed against a number of sides that appeared stronger on paper at least and which featured well-known players with experience competing in major international leagues on a weekly basis for clubs such as FC Barcelona, Real Madrid, Juventus or Borussia Dortmund.

"I think in our case, the quality of the teamwork is higher than the individual quality of each player. And in order to make this work, you need to find the right characters in your side, which is tough. As a coach, one tends to praise players that are skilled, have technical capabilities or fast. Sometimes one forgets that the team spirit and character are more important than raw talent," Hallgrímsson explained.

HUMBLENESS AND CONTINUITY

As a matter of fact, Iceland have always looked like a cohesive unit on the pitch. The players keep their feet firmly fixed on the ground even when exposed to the spotlight. The team is bigger and more important than any individual.

"Of course we like talent in our team, but if a talent would damage our team spirit, then he is not a good player for Iceland and everybody knows that. Our highest profile player Gylfi Sigurðsson, who is playing for Everton in the English Premier League, is a great example. He is our hardest working player on the pitch. So if your player with the highest profile is also the hardest working player, who has the right to be lazy on the pitch? Every coach in the world is looking for players, that are willing to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the team and I think Iceland is really lucky, because every single player of the squad is like that."

In fact, this team almost qualified for their first big competition two years before the 2016 UEFA European Championship. Their hopes were cut short after the team lost to Croatia 2 - 0, away from home during the play-offs. Unfortunately, they were unable to capitalise on the home advantage during the second leg which finished in a 0-0 draw.

Two years later, they booked their place in France however thanks in part to a continuous scouting and development process that started long before they broke into the top 100 FIFA rankings.

"A couple of years ago, we were not doing well with the senior national team, and the coach at the time decided to give younger players a chance. Soon, the senior national team was comprised of almost the whole U21 squad. Now these players have represented their country in more than 70 games by the age of 27." These players were dubbed the 'golden generation' after first making their mark in Europe in 2007 when Iceland successfully qualified for the UEFA European Under-17 Championship, held in Belgium. The championship marked the team's first UEFA finals in ten years.





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REALISM IS IN ICELAND'S FOOTBALLING DNA

This talented group of U17's then progressed to the U19 and U21 side before making the senior national team. Their consistent performance and success can be attributed to the team's very realistic approach.

Football in Iceland was largely played at the semi-professional level and there weren't any youth academies like in other countries. "We also realised that Iceland will never have the best individually skilled players in the world. We have a lot of players playing in Scandinavian countries like Norway, Denmark and Sweden, while our opponents play for Real Madrid or FC Barcelona in 'La Liga', or else for clubs in 'Serie A'. There's a big difference and we know that."

That brought the coaches to the realisation that their game had to focus more on defending than attacking. They didn't focus as much on keeping possession compared to other teams, and they're aware that there are other teams much better at passing the ball. However, it was not the team's goal to change that. Instead, they focused squarely on those aspects of the game that



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could help them become one of the top teams in the world.

"Now we are probably one of the most organised teams amongst the best defenders in the world. We have to be good at defending, because we defend 70 percent of the time. Set pieces are another area of the game where we want to be among the best in the world. We invest time in these areas to improve how we organise ourselves, as well as paying close attention to both our defensive and offensive set pieces."

Will these qualities be enough to repeat the success of the 2016 UEFA European Championship on an even bigger scale, when Iceland faces Argentina, Croatia and Nigeria in Group D of the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia™?

"I like to believe we have some of the hardest working players in the world. If we come together and play as one, we're capable of winning even against some of the best footballing nations in the world. In spite of our optimism, we are also realistic and we know that we can have the best games in our lives and still lose to nations like England, Germany or Spain. The only thing we can do is try our best and make Iceland proud."

SMART INVESTMENTS AND PROUD HERITAGE

Another key factor in Iceland's football success was the country's investment in artificial grass pitches and a focus on training and educating young coaches. The former enabled to play football all year round despite the harsh climate, and the latter helped build a solid foundation for the people responsible for the team's development.

"In Iceland, it doesn't matter if you come from a village made up of 500 people. We made sure there was a UEFA A or a UEFA B licensed coach for the kids. So everyone is able to access the facilities and coaching, wherever they are in the country. I think that is probably the most unique thing about the coaching methodology in Iceland."

These coaching techniques have paid off – as evidenced by the performance of the youth men's and women's national teams. In fact, Iceland's senior women's national football team is ranked in the top 20 teams in the world, and has previously qualified for the UEFA European Women's Championships in 2009, 2013 and 2017.

The Olympic games is another area where Iceland has achieved impressive success. The men's handball team secured a silver medal at the Beijing Olympics in 2008, and a bronze medal at the European Championship in 2010. In basketball, the national team qualified for the FIBA EuroBasket 2017 for the second consecutive year. By winning four medals at the 2016 Summer Olympics, the



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small country achieved success as on a par with countries with much larger populations like Vietnam with 92 million inhabitants.

These outstanding sporting achievements can be attributed to Iceland's social programme initiative, introduced during the 2000s, which encourages children to play organised sports and maintain healthy lifestyles in exchange for incentives.

For Heimir Hallgrímsson, another unique factor also comes into play. One that, according to him, other nationals will never be able to copy. That is their unique spirit of togetherness that is found in every Icelandic team and which is something that can be traced back to their Viking ancestors. "They went to war against opponents despite being vastly outnumbered. In the past, life in Iceland was tough. It was isolated, cold and poor. We are located in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, and we had to work hard to get out from there. Hard work is something all Icelanders value. Our national team has five key values: Hard work, joy, the ambition to take on and win battles, focus and discipline. I think if we represent these values on the pitch, our supporters will be happy, no matter if we win or lose a game."

The team's inspiring performances have won them fans all over the world and many of whom would love nothing more than to see the revival of the iconic 'Thunderclap' celebration seen in France at the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia™.



AL KASS INTERNATIONAL CUP:

LAUNCHPAD FOR THE STARS OF TOMORROW

FC Bayern star Kingsley Coman playing for PSG at the 2013 Al Kass International Cup

THE 7TH EDITION OF THE PRESTIGIOUS U-17 TOURNAMENT “AL KASS INTERNATIONAL CUP” PROVED TO BE ANOTHER SPECTACULAR OCCASION, BRINGING SOME OF THE WORLD’S BEST YOUNG FOOTBALLERS TOGETHER ON ASPIRE ACADEMY’S STATE-OF-THE-ART OUTDOOR PITCHES. THIS YEAR, PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN BECAME THE FIRST THREE-TIME U-17 AL KASS INTERNATIONAL CUP TOURNAMENT WINNER AFTER AN IMPRESSIVE 2-1 WIN IN THE FINAL AGAINST KASHIWA REYSOL.

During the previous seven years, this international tournament has helped launch the careers of number of today’s international stars, including:

Adrien Rabiot

Born in 1995, the French player participated in the 2012 edition of the Al Kass International Cup aged 17 in the Paris Saint-Germain FC side – a club that he still plays. Since making his debut with the club’s first team in 2012, Rabiot has won 14 major honours, including four consecutive French ‘Ligue 1’ titles and the treble won in 2015-16 season. His talent and strong performances earned him a place in the French national side in 2016, when he made his first international appearance against Ivory Coast on 15 November.

Robert ‘Kenedy’ Nunes

Born in 1996, the Brazilian player participated in the 2013 edition of the tournament with Fluminense FC at 16 years old. He made his professional debut for the first team the

same year. In 2015, Chelsea signed the winger in a £6.3 million transfer deal. Shortly after signing with the club, Nunes scored his first English Premier League goal just 39 seconds into their match against Norwich City, which ended in a 2-1 win for the Blues. His goal was the fastest recorded during the 2015-16 English Premier League season. On the international stage, Nunes played for Brazil U17’s, where he scored six goals in eight games at the 2013 South American Championship in Argentina, earning them third place. His impressive performance with the U17 youth team secured him a place in Brazil’s U20 line-up.

Kingsley Coman

Born in 1996, and dubbed one of the most promising young players in Europe, the Frenchman participated in the 2013 edition at 17 years old with Paris Saint-Germain FC. After graduating



from the acclaimed PSG youth academy, Coman went on to become the youngest member of PSG’s senior team at the age of 16 years and 8 months. In 2014, Coman joined Juventus FC before signing with Bayern Munich following a two-year loan. After representing his country on multiple occasions with the U16 and U20 youth teams, Coman made his debut with the senior “Les Blues” team in November 2015.

Jordan Ashley Ibe

Born in 1995, the English player participated in the 2013 edition with Liverpool FC at the age of 17. He made his debut with Liverpool’s first team a few months after taking part in the Al Kass International Cup, making him the 5th youngest Liverpool player on the occasions of their Premier League appearance after Jack Robinson, Ben Woodburn, Raheem Sterling and Michael Owen. In July 2016, Ibe transferred to AFC Bournemouth for what was then a club record of £15 million. On the international stage, Ibe represented England as part of the U18-U21 youth teams.

Patrick Cutrone

Born in 1998, Italian striker Patrick Cutrone played at the 2014 Al Kass International Cup with AC Milan where he is now a first team member. The current U21 international made his first appearance for the club’s first team in May 2017, and has scored in both the Serie A and the UEFA Europa League. Since joining the ranks of his national U15-U19 youth teams, Cutrone has made 57 appearances and scored 27 goals.

Achraf Hakimi

Spanish born Moroccan footballer Achraf Hakimi played for Real Madrid in the 2014 and 2015 Al Kass International Cup. After progressing through Real Madrid’s “La Fábrica” sports academy, Achraf was promoted to the reserves in June 2016. He made his first team and La Liga appearance on 1 October 2017 at the Santiago Bernabéu stadium against RCD Espanyol, which ended in a 2-0 win for Madrid. After representing Morocco at youth level, he made his full international debut in October 2016 against Canada.



PLAYERS TO LOOK OUT FOR

The 2018 Al Kass International Cup was every bit as thrilling as previous years, once again showcasing a number of talented footballers who showed real potential. Some of the most promising young footballers to look out for in the future according to CHAMP include:

Tanguy Coulibaly (PSG)

PSG's left footed winger possess pace and silky dribbling skills. He made an immense contribution to the team, weighing in with a number of crucial goals

including a number in the final and helping PSG win their third tournament Cup.

Eneko Gines (Real Madrid)

A creative and tireless midfielder with fabulous technique both on and off the ball. A playmaker who possesses a good midfielder's eye and is a set piece specialist.

Zied Berrima (Esperance Sportive de Tunis)

Light-footed and tireless playmaker with excellent ball passing abilities and a knack for scoring goals.

He orchestrated most of Esperance's exceptional play, making him the driving force behind their great performances at the tournament.

Leo Brian Kokubo (Kashiwa Reysol)

Agile goalkeeper with fantastic reflexes and a great command of his goal area. A natural born shot stopper who made his third tournament appearance at the 2018 Al Kass International Cup. His goalkeeping abilities played a major part in preventing SL Benfica progressing beyond the semi-final.

Jair Tavares (SL Benfica)

Flamboyant utility wing player with abundant talent and skill to unlock defences at will. He impressed the crowds during the 2018 Al Kass International Cup with his fancy footwork and fine dribbling skills.

Goncalo Ramos (SL Benfica)

Imposing forward with lightning quick pace and a good eye for goal. He finished top goal scorer at 2018 Al Kass International Cup with half a dozen well taken strikes.

ASPIRE ACADEMY'S FIRST TABLE-TENNIS PRO AIMS FOR 2020 OLYMPICS



It is generally said by scribes and authorities in the sports world that it takes 10 000 hours of practice and hard work for an athlete to become distinguished from the rest. This concept was first formulated in a 1993 paper by Anders Ericsson, professor at the University of Colorado, and Aspire Academy graduate, Mohammed Abdul Wahab has embarked on that same 10K pathway after choosing to take a break from his university studies at Qatar University to practice as a professional at top table-tennis academy in Denmark.

In early January 2018, nineteen-year-old Aspire Academy graduate, Abdul Wahab joined J.N Meat Table Tennis Academy in the town of Slagelse which is about an hour's drive away from Copenhagen. The Centre is run by former China national team coach He Keyi and along with his coaching staff, he oversees the full time engagement of around sixteen international young male table-tennis players with big goals and dreams for their careers.

Abdul Wahab's stay at the training Centre in Denmark is for several years and his major target will be seeking to qualify for the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, Japan. The West Asia Olympic qualification takes place in March and April 2020 and its envisaged Abdul Wahab will summon up all the hard work of training and living as a professional table-tennis player in Europe in an attempt to qualify for Tokyo.

The arrangement is also the result of the good working relationship between Aspire Academy table-tennis head coach Peter Karlsson and J.N Table Tennis Academy head



coach He Keyi. This enabled Abdul Wahab to enroll at the Danish academy the and become the first Aspire Academy graduate to go abroad and practice as a professional in table -tennis.

"It's the perfect environment for Abdul Wahab. Living and training with fellow players from all over the world will provide him with unrivaled opportunity to work on his game and improve. As a professional almost all of his time will now be occupied by training and competitions. This is intensive work and at this level we are talking about five to seven hours of practice every day and there will not be time left for anything else other than eat and rest in the day. This establishes a rhythm and is generally what most of the players in Europe who graduate from high school, do. They

turn professional and defer their university studies and all they do is just play table -tennis, entering competitions and playing in leagues and this is what Abdul Wahab is doing."

Abdul Wahab becomes the first Aspire Academy graduate to turn professional in table tennis on a full scholarship program. This set-up was made possible thanks to key players in Abdul's table-tennis career so far, right from Qatar Table-Tennis Association (QTTA) under the guidance of president Khalil Al Mohannadi who have offered Abdul Wahab a signed contract; to Qatar Sports Club, where he has always played on club level and club manager Khaled Al Kuwari; and, of course, Aspire Academy where his skills have been honed and polished. Between these organisations along with other partnering bodies sponsorship and required support for Abdul Wahab is being provided enabling him to fulfill his goal of playing professionally.

Coach Karlsson added: "I am thrilled for Abdul Wahab because he has worked hard and has shown tremendous desire to dream big with regards to his table -tennis career. His going to Denmark and turning professional is very important for the future of the sport at Aspire and in

Qatar; firstly, in order to show young, Aspire students that after graduation there is also a future if you have dreams and are prepared and ready to work hard. I tell the players in my group that I am here to support, guide and teach you but in the end it's you who has to do the work and this is very important for them to understand, they cannot sit and wait for something to happen but need to act upon your dreams".

As a trail blazer, Mohammed Abdul Wahab will hope his raw ability, keen enthusiasm and desire to give his table-tennis career a fair crack of professional whip will be the launch pad of many similar arrangements for other graduates from Aspire. "We have hopes that is the beginning of a partnership that will elevate the level and standard of our table -tennis while chartering a new frontier for our players and we couldn't have had better pioneer than Abdul Wahab," concluded head coach Peter Karlsson.



Q&A WITH MOHAMMED ABDUL WAHAB

THE 19-YEAR-OLD QATARI ON HIS MOVE TO DENMARK, THE CHALLENGES HE FACED ALONG THE NAME AND HIS NEXT BIG GOALS.

Mohammed, tell us about your beginnings in your new environment?

Going to Denmark was a huge step for me, since it has been the first time that I am far away from my family. The biggest challenge at the beginning was to adapt to the weather, the culture, the people or the food. I haven't cooked for myself before, but I am getting better every day.

What helped you in this transition?

It definitely helped me that I moved into a house, where a lot of other table tennis players from countries like Brazil, China or New Zealand are staying. We share similar interests, do a lot of things together in our spare time, such as watching TV-shows on Netflix or UEFA Champions League.

Would you say, your move to Denmark has already paid off?

Definitely. My coach at Aspire, Peter Karlsson, chose the place carefully, because he knew the people there and was convinced I was going to benefit from the high level of training and sparing. My days are intense, I train five to seven hours a day, but I am really glad I made this step.

What are your overall expectations from joining the J.N. Meat Table Tennis Academy and what are the goals for 2018?

Well, Denmark is for me a long term project that aims to prepare me well for the qualifications for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. For this year I want to maintain playing on a good level, I am going to play international tournaments and, of course, I want to defend my title at the Arab Championships in Cairo in August.

A LEAP INTO MUTAZ BARSHIM'S 2017 STELLAR YEAR

THE 2017 ATHLETICS SEASON COULDN'T HAVE GONE ANY BETTER FOR QATAR'S ATHLETE AND HIGH-JUMP STAR, MUTAZ ESSA BARSHIM, WHOSE LIST OF ACHIEVEMENTS CULMINATED WITH AN INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ATHLETICS FEDERATIONS (IAAF) 2017 ATHLETE OF THE YEAR AWARD, WHICH HE RECEIVED ON FRIDAY, 24 NOVEMBER IN MONACO.

"The 2017 season was the only year clear of injury for me so far. I'm happy I didn't have any problems. I felt I was really able to push one hundred percent and use my full capacity. I was able to return to my full run-up and was keen, willing and ready to give it a real go without hesitation. For me, that is very important. Nothing holds me back when I'm in that mindset," said Barshim in an interview with CHAMP, summing up his stellar 2017 season.

Barshim became the first high jumper to claim the IAAF's 'Athlete of the Year' trophy, after he dominated the 2017 athletics season in which Barshim won gold at the 2017 IAAF World Championships in London, after clearing 2.35m, became the first-ever high jumper to leap 2.40m or higher for five consecutive years, and produced nine of the year's 11 highest jumps in an undefeated series of competitions.



Doha, 14th December

The Qatar Athletics Federation (QAF) celebrated Mutaz Barshim's achievements in a ceremony held at the Aspire Outdoor Athletics Track. The QAF and Aspire Academy invited some of the world's top athletes, who were in Doha either for training or rehabilitation, to join the celebrations.



Monaco 24th November

Mutaz Barshim is named the IAAF Male Athlete of the Year, beating fellow nominees, the world record holder, world champion and Olympic champion in the 400 metres, Wayde van Niekerk and Olympic, World and European champion in the 5000-10,000 metres, Mo Farrah.



Prague, 2nd November

Mutaz Barshim named the 2017 Best Male Athlete from Asia by the National Olympic Committee (ANOC) in an awards ceremony held in Prague.



Zurich, 24th August

Mutaz Barshim wins the 2017 Diamond League high-jump title after clinching another victory in the season's last meet in Zurich. Barshim cleared 2.36m to win and finished with an accumulated total of 40 points throughout the season, 17 points ahead of second-place British high-jumper, Robbie Grabarz.



Birmingham, 21st August

Mutaz sets a new meeting record with a jump of 2.40m, making him the second highest jumper of all time, and the first-ever to clear 2.40 or higher for five consecutive years. His jump marked the first 2.40m leap on British soil since 2000. This of course ensured his win at the Diamond League meeting in Birmingham.



London, 13th August

Mutaz Barshim becomes world champion after winning the gold medal at the IAAF World Championships in London after clearing 2.35m, beating Russian opponent Danil Lysenko (2.32m) and Syrian opponent, Majed Aldin Ghazal (2.29m).



Shanghai, 14th May

Mutaz Barshim clinches his second consecutive Diamond League win with another fine performance at the Shanghai Diamond League meeting after clearing 2.33m.



Doha, 5th May 2017

Mutaz Barshim kicks off the 2017 Athletics season with his first IAAF Diamond League win on home soil, held at the Qatar Sports Club. Barshim made a successful 2.36m jump, beating fellow high-jumpers Robbie Grabarz (2.31m) and Donald Thomas (2.29m).



Abubaker Haydar's sensational comeback story:

QATAR'S MIDDLE DISTANCE PRODIGY RETURNS



No one was surprised to learn that Qatari high-jumper Mutaz Essa Barshim won the title at the 8th Asian Indoor Athletics Championships in Tehran in February 2018. But it was a beautiful surprise when his fellow Aspire Academy student-athlete, Qatari long and middle-distance runner Abubaker Haydar, was first to cross the 800m race finish line. Haydar himself couldn't contain his surprise.

An injury had left the young Aspire Academy graduate out of competition for almost a year and a half, and he was doubtful of his performance. To finish first meant that the 21-year-old was back on track and ready to prepare for and compete in the 2019 IAAF World Championships in Doha.

Prior to his injury, Abubaker Haydar's career had gone in one direction only: forwards! The young star caught the attention of the Qatar Athletics Federation (QAF) after winning a 2km cross-country race. Shortly afterwards, Haydar joined Aspire Academy after passing his assessment tests.

"I was proud to join Aspire Academy. It felt like fate because I had just started to show an interest in track and field. The assessments I had to undergo in Aspire made me realise that I didn't just enjoy it, I actually had a talent for it."

His career took off soon after he joined Aspire Academy. "Coming here was definitely a key factor in my athletic development," Haydar added. "The coaches and teachers were incredibly supportive and were dedicated in getting the best out of me year after year."

In 2013, Haydar won gold in the 1,500m at the Gymnasiade, an international multi-sport event organised by the International School Sport Federation (ISF), in Brazil 2013. In 2014, he won silver in the 1,500m race at the 2014 Asian Junior Championships in Taipei.

With belief in the future of the promising Qatari athlete growing, Aspire Academy decided to invest in his talent and offer him a graduate scholarship upon finishing school at Aspire Academy in 2015.

A day after his graduation from the Academy, Haydar traveled with the Qatar national team to a training camp in Spain. While in Barcelona, he recorded his best ever time of 1:47.06 in the 800m, placing him in the top 10 U-20 runners in the world.

"Accolade" at the 2016 Diamond League

Haydar's breakthrough at senior level followed a few months later. After winning a gold medal with Qatar's 4x400m relay team at the 2016 Asian Indoor Championships, which took place in the Aspire Dome, he again shone on home turf at the IAAF Diamond League meeting in Doha that same year. The then 19-year-old ran 1:45.28 in the 800m, the 7th best time of the year, earning him first place and securing his qualification to the 2016 Rio Olympic Games.

Securing his first-ever Olympic qualification, particularly on home soil, was a major milestone in his blooming athletic career, confirming his Olympic status and representing another step towards the world's track and field elite.

The next step was getting on the plane to Rio de Janeiro. "Going to the Olympics was a dream come true," Abubaker Haydar said. "The opportunity to be part of such a big event, live in the Olympic village, and interact with the world's best athletes on a daily basis was an amazing experience and a real motivation booster. My priority in Rio was to represent Qatar and Aspire Academy in the best way I could. Since this was my first Olympic Games, I was also looking to gain experience."

Haydar finished in fifth place in Heat 6 of Round 1 in Rio, scoring a time of 1:47.81 and placing his name on the Olympic score sheet for the first time. Haydar expected to build on this achievement, but a stress fracture put him out of action for a long time. Speaking about his injury, Haydar said: "This was the first time I got a serious injury in my career as an athlete. It was tough. I saw others training and improving and I didn't want to fall too much behind. But I did other things to help keep my fitness level high and my coaches helped me a lot. I also tried to keep my mind busy with various day-to-day activities, because thinking too much would make you worried and stressed."

Settling the score in Tehran

A year and a half passed until he could think about competing again. "I was fortunate to get a lot of support during this challenging time. Many people at Aspire Academy, Aspetar, the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), the Qatar Athletic Federation (QAF), and the International

Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) had my back. They were very encouraging and helped me make my comeback."

Forced to stay away from running, Haydar focused on engaging other muscles in his training scheme. "I was doing some cross training, like swimming at the pool, hitting the gym, and cycling, to avoid putting weight on my injured bone and give it time to heal. I steadily progressed and everything went well."

The first steps back on the track felt strange for the 21-year-old. "After such a long time away from racing, you lose the feeling a bit. That stressed me at first, but soon it was as if I had never stopped. Training outcomes became better and better."

After performing well in training, the coaches decided that the 2018 Asian Indoor Athletics Championships in Tehran would offer the best environment for Abubaker's return to competitive running. Of that experience, Haydar said: "I wanted to represent Qatar in a good way at the race, and I ended up winning. But when I first got into the race, I wasn't thinking about coming in first, second or fifth. I just wanted to mark my comeback and do my best."

Winning the 800m race in Tehran was not only a testament to his status as one of Qatar's best track-and-field athletes, it also proved that he had learnt from past competitions. Perhaps the 'I'll do

my best regardless of the outcome' mentality was what contributed to his win. Maybe he remembered how it felt two years ago at the Indoor Asian Championship in Doha, when he was put under tremendous pressure to perform well on home soil, in front of his family and friends, where he finished in fourth place in despite being ahead of everyone else for the most part of the race.

Speaking about his Tehran win, Haydar said: "Winning the gold medal after missing out so closely on winning a medal in 2016 gave me a real confidence boost and motivated me to work even harder in the future."

That future will see Haydar represent Qatar at the 2019 IAAF World Championships in Doha. Maybe this time, Khalifa International Stadium will provide the perfect setting for Qatar's endurance prodigy to earn his next title.



DETERMINED TO GIVE IT ALL

SEVERAL WEEKS HAVE PASSED SINCE FC BAYERN MUNICH LEFT DOHA FOLLOWING THEIR EIGHTH CONSECUTIVE ANNUAL TRAINING CAMP IN ASPIRE IN JANUARY. INSPIRED BY THEIR TRIP, THE CLUB'S WOMEN TEAM FOLLOWED SUIT, MARKING ITS FIRST-EVER VISIT TO QATAR. IN THEIR WEEK-LONG VISIT, WHICH RAN FROM 27 JANUARY UNTIL 03 FEBRUARY, SOME OF THE WORLD'S BEST FEMALE FOOTBALL PLAYERS MADE ASPIRE ACADEMY THEIR TEMPORARY HOME AND TRAINING GROUND. NOT ONLY DID THE TRAINING CAMP GET THE TEAM IN SHAPE FOR THE SECOND PART OF THE "ALLIANZ WOMEN'S BUNDESLIGA" SEASON, IT ALSO ALLOWED THE PLAYERS AND STAFF TO LEARN MORE ABOUT QATAR'S PEOPLE AND CULTURE WHILST PROMOTING WOMEN'S FOOTBALL THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.



Qatar and FC Bayern Munich have enjoyed an ongoing success story for almost a decade. The men's team, one of the most successful clubs in the history of German football, having won record-breaking titles with more than 27 Bundesliga Championships and 18 Cups, has been utilising the facilities of Aspire Academy for more than eight consecutive years. In January 2016, Doha's state-of-the-art Hamad International Airport (HIA), currently ranked the sixth Best Airport in the World according to the 2017 Skytrax World Airport Awards, became the official sponsor of the Bavarian team.

Looking forward to women's team's trip to Doha, Thomas Wörle, who succeeded his father, Günther Wörle as the women team's head coach in 2010 at 28 years old, said: "Like in any other training camp, one of the most important things to achieve is to bring the team closer together. In football, we focus heavily on tactics practice such as set pieces. The weather conditions here were ideal for us to work on the small aspects of our game that might otherwise be difficult to do in Germany's harsh winter climate with snow and rain."

AMBASSADORS FOR GERMANY AND WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

"When we saw pictures and videos from the men's training camps, we were excited to come here," said German midfielder Melanie Leupolz, who was part of the German national team squad that triumphed at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio. Describing their first steps on Qatari soil, American defender, Gina Lewandowski, said their team was met with hordes of enthusiastic FCB fans upon arriving to the Hamad International Airport: "When they saw the Bayern Munich logo, people at the airport approached and talked to us. It's great to see that the club is becoming more popular in this part of the world and to get in touch with the locals."

The fans at the airport were not the only ones eager to meet the German team. On the sidelines of their training camp in Qatar, team captain and 2007 FIFA Women's World Cup winner, German midfielder Melanie Behringer, paid a visit to the German International School in Doha. More than 70 students asked the Olympic gold medallist questions that

focused on women's football. Behringer, accompanied by Aspire Academy's Football Operations Manager and fellow countryman Stephan Hildebrandt, FC Bayern's women team manager, Bianca Rech and Christopher Keil, the club's Head of Public Affairs & Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) met Germany's Ambassador to Qatar, Hans-Udo Muzel, who's been employed at his role since September 2015.

In an initiative by the Qatar Women's Sports Committee's (QWSC) meant to inspire Qatar's local female players, FC Bayern Munich played a 60-minute friendly match against a local team made up of Qatari female players between the ages of 14-19 in front of more than 400 excited spectators.



Commenting on the sidelines of the friendly match, Lulwa Al Marri, Chairperson of the Qatar Women's Sports Committee's (QWSC) emphasised the importance of such exposure, saying: "Events like this help us promote and enhance our efforts in building a strong local women's football national team. Thanks to the vision and leadership of Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser, women's sports have witnessed remarkable growth in popularity in recent years."

A QUESTION OF DETERMINATION

When asked the common question, "What does it take to become a professional women's football player?", coach Wörle highlighted the importance of practice, saying: "Every athlete who can give extraordinary performances has been able to reach that level through hard training. Practice makes perfect. Girls should become friends with football, playing with it as much as possible from as young as five to nine years old, because building a good technical foundation is very important."



Viktoria Schnaderbeck, the 27-year-old midfielder from Austria, whose cousin Sebastian Prödl plays for FC Watford in the English Premier League, added: "First of all, it's important to have fun at what you do. It's OK to dream big, but in order to make it to the top, you need focus and persistence."

Spotted by the FC Bayern scouts at the age of 15 when she was playing with football club, LUV Graz at the top-ranked Austrian League, Schnaderbeck is an example of what sheer determination and dedication can help achieve. Reminiscing about her decision to join FC Bayern a year later, Schnaderbeck said: "It was like a dream come true."

A dream that required a lot of hard work. First, the teenager had to leave her family behind and move to Munich, settle in her new environment and continue her academic education, whilst taking further steps towards her football development at FC Bayern.

But not everything was smooth sailing. Shortly after joining the team, Schnaderbeck tore her Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL). She returned to the pitch after months of recovery and rehabilitation, only to tear it down again shortly afterwards.



After suffering multiple injuries and undergoing five medical surgeries that cost three years of her football career, Schnaderbeck fought her way back. "Giving up was never an option. Injured or not, I train with the mentality to get better every day. My inner spirit drives me forward. I set goals for myself and work hard to reach them. When I'm injured, I do everything to get fit as soon as possible to get back and help my team again. It's part of the game."

Her efforts eventually paid off. After winning the German Championship with FC Bayern in 2015 and 2016, she led the Austrian national football team to the UEFA Women's Euro 2017 held in Netherlands at the time, coming third in the country's UEFA Women's Euro debut.

Her achievements and leadership earned her Austria's 'Footballer of the Year' award in January 2018. "I'm really happy for her," fellow Austrian and FC Bayern defender David Alaba remarked. "She has come a long way to get to where she is now. If someone deserves this award, it's her," Alaba added. He joined FC Bayern Munich's team a year after Schnaderbeck, and both have enjoyed a good relationship since, and still keep in touch whenever they meet at the "Säbener Straße".



CHALLENGING ROAD AHEAD

Unlike their male counterparts, who reign German football, the women's team faces a more challenging situation. After having won the Frauen-Bundesliga in 1976, the team went on a dry spell for 36 years until it finally won its next title in women's football, the Frauen DFB-Pokal (German Cup) in 2012. In the following years, FC Bayern Munich was able to win the Frauen-Bundesliga 2015 and 2016 championships. With these recent wins, FC Bayern Munich, along with German club VfL Wolfsburg, ended 1. FFC Frankfurt's and 1. FFC Turbine Potsdam's long Frauen-Bundesliga championship dominance.

Currently, FC Bayern Munich finished the first half of the Frauen-Bundesliga season in third place, three points behind leaders Wolfsburg and one point behind SC Freiburg. As such, the mid-season break and preparations will be to boost the team's morale and recharge their batteries ahead of the second half of the season. So, whilst the team enjoyed their gala dinner at the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA), a desert safari trip, or watching some games of the "Al Kass International Cup 2018", much of their focus remained on their preparations in Aspire Academy.

Anything but a top-two finish for the team at the end of the season will be a disappointment. "Winning the League would be great, but our main objective is to qualify for the UEFA Women's Champions League, so we need to finish in second place at least" explained Melanie Leupolz.

While German clubs have bagged more than nine UEFA Women's Champions League trophies so far, FC Bayern Munich is still looking to make their mark, as the team hasn't had the fortune of making it beyond the quarter-final. In their latest quarter-final appearance in 2017, the German team lost to French club, Paris Saint-Germain.

However, Coach Wörle remains optimistic and expects an exciting second half at the 2017-18 season, and said it'll be a tough fight to the end, as the teams aim to finish the year in the top spots. "We also want to do well in the Frauen DFB-Pokal this year. We have successfully moved to the quarter-finals with a few matches to go to get to the finals."

To boost their line-up, the German team has secured three

key signings in this winter's transfer-window: Chinese national team goalkeeper and former Dalian Quanjian F.C. player, Fei Wang; English forward Leah Galton, who spent her last two seasons playing with Sky Blue FC in the North American National Women's Soccer League (NWSL); and French international, Laura Georges, who joins the club from Paris Saint-Germain.

Two-time UEFA Women's Champions League winner with her former club, Olympique Lyonnais, who has participated in three different World Cup participations and represented the French national football team in more than 180 appearances, Georges is expected to add valuable experience to the team. She's expressed that ending the season with two titles would be a great achievement. "But before we start talking about winning titles, we have to lay the foundation. That's what training camps, like this one in Doha, are perfect for. We need to work hard to develop the team further."

For FC Bayern Munich's men's team, coming to Doha to train at Aspire Academy has proven to be an integral piece of their puzzle when it comes to defining a successful season. Fingers crossed that Behringer, Leupolz, Schnaderbeck, Georges and the rest of the club's women's team will benefit in a similar way from their trip to Qatar. And some experiences such as their encounters with Qatar's culture and female youth football talents might even have touched them on a personal level.



“GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD” WINNER JEHAN:

DESPITE ALL OBSTACLES

IF YOU HAVE EVER BEEN TO SRI LANKA, YOU MIGHT HAVE NOTICED THAT PEOPLE THERE ARE CRAZY ABOUT CRICKET. IT'S NOT SURPRISING THEREFORE, THAT THE ISLAND WHICH GAINED ITS INDEPENDENCE IN 1972, IS ONE OF THE BEST CRICKET NATIONS IN THE WORLD. ITS CHILDREN GROW UP DREAMING ABOUT FOLLOWING THE FOOTSTEPS OF STAR PLAYERS SUCH AS MUTTIAH MURALITHARAN OR MAHELA JAYAWARDENE. BUT YOUNG 15-YEAR-OLD JEHAN JOSEPH CRISHANTHA ATAPATTU HAS A DIFFERENT DREAM - HE WANTS TO BECOME A SUCCESSFUL FOOTBALL PLAYER.

Introduced by the British in the 1800s, cricket has since become deeply rooted in Sri Lankan tradition. The team's series of remarkable achievements after 1990; having won the 1996 Cricket World Cup, the 2014 ICC World Twenty20 in Bangladesh, the Asia Cup in 1986, 1997, 2004, 2008 and 2014, made it one of the best in the world. The men's national team is consistently found in the top 10 of the ICC rankings, and was the number one spot in the ICC ODI Championship and ICC T20I Championship categories on multiple occasions.

The football national team of Sri Lanka, on the other hand, is ranked number 200, according to the 2018 FIFA World Ranking. Sugathadasa Stadium, where they usually play their games in Colombo, is a multi-purpose arena that they share with rugby, American football or athletics. Sri Lanka became a member of FIFA in 1952, but they are yet to qualify for a major event like the FIFA World Cup. Their closest shot at qualifying for their first AFC Asian Championship came when they finished in second place at the 2006 AFC Challenge Cup. Winning it would have granted them an automatic qualification for the Asian Championship.

Jehan was only three years old when Sri Lanka lost 4-0 in the final against Tajikistan - too young to follow the game.

The older he got, the bigger grew his interest in football, until he started dreaming of becoming the “first Sri Lankan who plays international football”. When other kids played cricket with their friends, he would kick the ball in the backyard. He was serious about his goals. To that end, he followed the games of his favourite club FC Barcelona and started to imitate the moves and techniques of its former Brazilian star and Jehan's idol, Ronaldinho. Speaking about his idol, Jehan said: “What he did on the pitch was unique.



He reminded me of Pete... both were humble people.”

Humility was something that accompanied him from early childhood on. When his father told him to stop playing football, because he thought his son had a better future in cricket, he did. But the then 13-year-old still did not give up on his dream. He played cricket, but his heart still belonged to football. And this did not go unnoticed. Encouraged by his mum, Jehan returned to the football pitch a few months later - more determined to continue in this path than ever before. His determination paid off. A few years later, Jehan would be handpicked from thousands of candidates to join 48 teenagers who were representing eight countries including China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Laos, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Sri Lanka, at the Asian edition of the 2017 “Allianz Junior Football Camp (AJFC)” which took place in Bali, Indonesia.

The AJFC programme launched in 2009 by German insurance company Allianz in partnership with the German powerhouse, FC Bayern Munich, as part of their commitment to youth development. In Indonesia it was all or nothing for the 15-year-old: he had hoped to impress the coaching team and FC Bayern Munich legend Klaus Augenthaler and be asked for the ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ opportunity to train at the facilities of the German champions in Munich.

So Jehan fought as if his life depended on it, and sought to develop on his skills and teamwork during this stressful time for the benefit of his team. His high regard for the game and his teammates encouraged him to push his way through. “You win as team and you lose as a team,” he said. “Football is a game based on team work. You have to pick your teammates up when they are down.”

As a matter of fact, those were specific skills that the organizers were looking for as well, because in the end, one of the 49 participants would be receive the “Good Sportsmanship Award”. This award, that stands for exemplary behavior on and off the pitch, is the result of a partnership between Aspire Academy and Allianz to provide the winner with the chance to experience one week of football training at Aspire Academy in Doha. A great opportunity to benchmark oneself against the best Qatari talents and to witness first-hand Qatar's youth development efforts in a unique and professional environment, that has repeatedly been the home for Bayern Munich's winter training camps, looks like.

And so, just a few months after Bali, Jehan boarded a plan

to Qatar's capital Doha. And he was not alone. Throughout his time in Qatar, former Brazilian footballer and Bayern Munich striker Giovane Elber, who was also present at the Allianz Junior Football Camp in Bali, acted as his mentor. He told Jehan about his beginnings in Brazil, where he played football with his friends on the streets and that he, like other great Brazilian football stars such as Ronaldo or Ronaldinho, initially used to play indoor football before joining a football club that played on a real pitch.





Jehan took his advice. From day one at Aspire Academy, Jehan sampled the elite footballer training programme and was exposed to various training techniques during his four-day stay, sampling innovative training techniques such as the 'Footbonaut' – a football training machine powered by a smart phone and used in elite clubs such as Borussia Dortmund. After stepping inside the "Footbonaut", one ball from each of the eight different machines is thrown towards the player, who'll then need to shoot the ball towards the green light that appears in various locations. Thanks to Aspire Academy's gym instructors and renowned trainers, Jehan underwent an extensive fitness regime and training schedule at Aspire Academy's state-of-the-art facilities.

Apart from the rigorous training drills and fitness sessions,



"Shortly after that I was called up for Brazil's U17 national team, I signed a contract with AC Milan, which was a huge step for me." The young Brazilian was aware he would not get the chance to play for the main squad right away. Italian football rules only allowed a maximum of three foreign players during games, and these positions went to his more experienced teammates, Marco Van Basten, Ruud Gullit and Frank Rijkaard. Instead, the teenager was sent on loan to Swiss team Grasshopper Club Zürich.

The move to Switzerland posed a bigger challenge than Elber had anticipated. "It was cold, the sun set in the afternoon, the food was different, I was so homesick that I wanted to quit. But my mum set me straight. She said



level. Maybe he will one day be able to join a club abroad," said Edorta Murua, Technical Director of Aspire Academy's Football Department.

Whilst getting more and more tired towards the end of his training week in Aspire, Jehan was still very happy about the various training experiences he had over the past few days. He was granted an opportunity that many other teenagers back home would love to have. Speaking on the sidelines of his training camp, Jehan said: "The level of training was really tough compared to the level in Sri Lanka, but I like to be challenged to play harder and better, because that's the best way to improve."

Soon it was time to say goodbye to his new-found friend and mentor Giovane Elber, who wished him all the best. "I know it's not easy, because where you come from, it's more about cricket. But your heart is beating for football and I hope that you are going to find a club and will be able to have fun playing the game. That is my wish for you."



As soon as the plane took off from Hamad International Airport, Jehan started to reflect on his latest adventure whilst overlooking Aspire Zone's buildings which were still visible from the window. After having experienced what football was like in a professional setting, he became more convinced than ever of his chosen career path. He knew it would not become any easier and that he would need to work even harder in the future, but he was ready for it. He had managed to convince his parents that football was his passion, he had managed to convince the coaches of FC Bayern Munich in Bali what the sport meant to him.

And as the image of Doha slowly faded away, he told himself that the next time he came back to this place it would be as a professional football player.



the Academy also focused on developing Jehan's mental strength. The Sri Lankan was taught the importance of eating the right foods and giving his body the nutrients it requires to help him build and maintain his footballer physique.

Everyone involved in Jehan's training was impressed by his level of commitment. He seemed to take in as much as he could and, as expected, he gave his best on and off the pitch. "You could easily see how passionate he is about football. He showed great determination during his time at Aspire Academy. Combined with his skills on the pitch, I am sure that he has the potential to develop into a good footballer who will represent his country at the highest



that I had given up a good job in Brazil in order to fulfill my dream of becoming a professional footballer and that coming back was not an option. After that I pulled myself together, started learning German and that helped me a lot, because I could not only communicate better with my coach and my teammates, I also earned their respect, which was very important for my integration in the team."

Elber, who went on to play very successfully for VfB Stuttgart and FC Bayern Munich in Germany during his days as a footballer, winning multiple championships, cups and the UEFA Champions League along the way, had an important piece of advice for the young Sri Lankan: "Talent alone is never enough. It's the hard work that you put in every day that eventually pays off. But being a professional footballer is tough and demands a lot from you. You have to be focused and mentally strong in order to get to the top."



CLAUDE MAKELELE:

“SUCCESS IS A RESULT OF MANY THINGS”



FORMER FRENCH INTERNATIONAL CLAUDE MAKELELE TOOK ON A CHALLENGING MISSION WHEN HE ACCEPTED THE OFFER TO COACH ASPIRE OWNED CLUB KAS EUPEN IN NOVEMBER 2017. DURING EUPEN'S TRAINING CAMP AT ASPIRE ACADEMY, CHAMP CAUGHT UP WITH THE FRENCHMAN TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HIS COACHING PHILOSOPHY AND WORKING WITH YOUNG PLAYERS.

CHAMP: You were one of the star speakers at the 2017 Aspire Academy Global Summit in London. Now you are coaching KAS Eupen, a club owned by Aspire Zone Foundation. How influential was your first encounter with Aspire at Stamford Bridge?

Claude Makélélé: It is true that an opportunity to work on some Qatari projects enabled me to have an encounter with board members of KAS Eupen. They explained to me the details of their relationship with Aspire and that pleased me, because it's a project with young players. I like passing on my experience to youngsters, so they can learn from it and improve on the pitch. Joining Eupen as head coach was a decision I made very quickly, because it was a very interesting opportunity for me.

The squad of KAS Eupen is a mixture of players from all over the world, some of them graduates of Aspire Academy and Aspire Football Dreams, and, like you said, the players are quite young. What are some of the challenges of working with such a team?

Claude Makélélé: It's a very delicate project. They players are young, they lack experience and are still developing. Nonetheless they need to deliver results. That is very difficult and takes time. First of all, we need to make them understand what professional football demands. It's a process and you need to be patient with them, but step by step I was able to put the right things in the right place. The players are fast learners and they have started to realize that what we do in training also works in the games. Of



course, our current situation and position in the league table does not leaves us a lot of time, but if everything falls into the right place at the right time, we are going to achieve our mission to stay in the first league.

How important is mental strength in this process?

Claude Makélélé: There is nothing more important than hard work and the belief that everything is possible. That's what I tell them every day in training. Success is a result of many things and the players need to understand the importance of work ethic, positive mentality, tactical discipline and team work. Sometimes it's a problem that players expect success to happen overnight, but football is not an exact science. Therefore, they have to learn to be patient and keep the focus. When the reward comes, it helps to develop the players a lot faster, because with increased self-confidence and less anxiety to deliver results, they feel more comfortable to express themselves on the pitch in a competitive way.



KAS Eupen can be seen as one piece of the puzzle, when it comes to the development of Qatari football players for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. What role do you think Qatar's national team is going to play in four years?

Claude Makélélé: I think it's important that Qatari players have the opportunity to play abroad. That will allow them to acquire experience and to carry that to the national team.



That will allow them to survive at the World Cup which is a competition above all other competitions. When it comes to the demands of a World Cup, you can multiply them by a thousand, because it's going to feature the biggest nations in football. They need to be prepared for that on many levels, because the world will be watching what Qatar's national team is capable of doing at the World Cup.

CAPTION: Claude Makélélé Sinda, born in Kinshasa, Zaire on 18 February 1973, is a former French footballer and current head coach at KAS Eupen. In his playing career, which ended at Paris Saint-Germain, Makélélé also played for Nantes, Marseille, Celta de Vigo, Real Madrid and Chelsea. He won league titles in France, Spain and England, as well as the 2001–02 UEFA Champions League with Real Madrid. Makélélé was a French international for 13 years and part of the France national team which reached the final of the 2006 FIFA World Cup. He also represented his nation at the 2002 World Cup, two UEFA European Football Championships and the 1996 Summer Olympics. Before joining KAS Eupen, he worked as assistant coach at Swansea City and Paris Saint-Germain and as head coach at Bastia.

***Newsflash:** K.A.S Eupen will retain their status in Belgium's top league after a 4-0 convincing win against Royal Excel Mouscron in the last match of the 2017-18 season.

KEVIN KEEGAN:

“QATAR 2022 WORLD CUP WILL BE EXCELLENT, DIFFERENT AND COMPACT”



FORMER ENGLAND PLAYER AND MANAGER KEVIN KEEGAN HAS SPENT SOME TIME IN QATAR ON VARIOUS MEDIA ENGAGEMENTS AND FOOTBALL RELATED ASSIGNMENTS WHICH TOOK HIM TO, AMONGST OTHER PLACES, ASPIRE ACADEMY. THE LEGENDARY FORMER LIVERPOOL FC PLAYER, WHO WON THE UEFA CUP AND EUROPEAN CUP WITH THE ENGLISH CLUB, REACQUAINTED WITH CHAMP AT AN ASPIRE ACADEMY EVENT FOR YOUTH FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT AND SHARED SOME NUGGETS FROM HIS LONG ILLUSTRIOUS CAREER THAT SAW HIM CROWNED “EUROPEAN FOOTBALLER OF THE YEAR” TWICE IN SUCCESSION WHILE WITH HAMBURGER SV IN GERMANY AS WELL AS PLAY AND MANAGE NEWCASTLE UNITED.

CHAMP: Kevin, looking back at your long and successful career, who had the most influence on your playing career?

Kevin Keegan: There were a few who inspired me, but obviously my father was a massive influence to me, he was a miner and didn't want me to go down the mines. At a very early age I was a Catholic, so I was taught by a nun and she sent my report at the end of the year saying, “Kevin is not very good with his English and his Maths but is very good at football, so she was like a talent scout at the age of about

11. Then my life changed really when I met a guy called Bill Shankly, my first coach at Liverpool, and because he believed in me. After two training days, having come from a small club in the fourth division as a small signing, Bill Shankly put his arm around me and said, “Son, you will play for England. There is no doubt about that.” And I knew I would. So of all the people and there are many and its never down to one person, but if I single out one, it's Bill Shankly, because he made me believe I was better than I was and I found out I could achieve that and that was a massive lift up for me as a 19-year-old.

What stood out about Bill Shankly?

He had everything a manager should have, he had fantastic skills to communicate with people, he was very patient, but had his breaking point. So you knew where you stood with him, which is what you want as a player with your manager, you want to know where you stand, you want the truth, and if you need to train harder let your manager tell you that you don't sort of find out some other way. He was inspirational. He was a man, who honestly believed and rightly so that football was about the team, you don't score goals unless someone crosses for you and every player does his part and that's what he taught me more than anything. That's why that Liverpool side was so successful, we were not the best side in England at the time, there were better teams but we played as a team.

How can talented young players develop and cope with playing at high level?

When you bring in young players to play at a higher level firstly they have to be good enough and I have found that when you put them in with experienced players it makes a difference. You cannot underestimate the value of an experienced player helping a young one when you put them together. In Qatar as they move young players quickly I urge them not to forget the value of an experienced player helping a younger player. As a young player you look and learn from senior players, how they train and why they are good at what they do and the dedication they have. Although you can do so much coaching the best place I found to learn

was from was from other players as well and in my case at Liverpool, Tommy Smith helped me, so did Emlyn Hughes and Ian Callaghan and I learnt from them and became better due to playing with them. When I started playing with better players and getting better coaching it took my game to a higher level. The professionalism, determination and dedication of experienced players rubs onto young ones but of course young players can learn bad things from them too, everybody teaches you something.

From your experience, what makes Aspire Academy unique?

If you want to judge people or places, you have to look at what is happening around them. If you take Aspire and their sports hospital Aspetar you will realise that top teams in the world including clubs from here in England are increasingly going to Qatar to use these facilities. These are all the things that when you go there you don't expect, but I think Qatar will surprise a lot of people with the World Cup because if you have never been there you'll think “Ah well, it's going to be okay”, but I can tell you it will be better than okay, excellent in fact, it will be a different World Cup and it will be a very good one and there are things only this World Cup will bring. It will be compact and stadiums are close and one can literally watch a good number of matches unlike any other World Cup before. This one will be in November and December and it will suit England, because we are always playing in June after a long and hard season but during Qatar 2022 we will be fresh.”



ASPIRE TODAY,
ASPIRE TODAY,
INSPIRE TOMORROW.
INSPIRE TOMORROW.



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