

ASPIRE ACADEMY DELIGHTED ABOUT QATAR'S SUCCESS AT AFC U-19 CHAMPIONSHIP

Doha, 22 October 2014. The recent successes of Qatar's U-19 national team at the AFC U-19 Championship in Myanmar do not only raise further attention to the host of the FIFA World Cup 2022, it also reflects that the great development of Qatar's young players, which is a merit of the good partnership between QFA and Aspire Academy for Sports Excellence.

"We are here to find the footballers who will represent Qatar when they host the World Cup. These boys are now 17, 18, 19 or even younger. We are training these boys and our mission is to make sure that they are at their best when the World Cup comes to Qatar in 2022, so the team will be competitive", said Ivan Bravo, Director General of Aspire Academy and former Director of Strategy at Real Madrid. For this mission the Academy doesn't only need a sophisticated talent identification system, great facilities or an excellent staff, but, first of all, the support and trust of the boys' parents.

Trust plays an important role

When Aspire Academy started in 2004, football or sports in general did not have today's status in Qatar's society or one comparable to the USA or European countries. So it took some convincing to recruit talents for the Academy. "Therefore it was also important to guarantee the parents that their children will receive an excellent school education. We have proven to be capable of that – 68,6 % of our graduates between 2008 and 2013 went on to study at a university, while others pursued a career in sports or choose different path," said Badr Al-Hay, Director of Education and Student Care. In order to stay on top in terms of academics, Aspire Academy is currently also working on attaining the globally esteemed "CIS School Accreditation".

The good results of the Qatari U-19 team in Myanmar have not only led to the qualification for the 2015 FIFA U-20 World Championship in New Zealand - reaching Thursday's final against DPR Korea also equaled Qatar's best tournament result, a second place from the 1980 edition in Thailand, when the competition used a round-robin format. "The cooperation with the QFA is very productive and, of course, we are happy about these positive results, but the work never stops and we have to keep pushing our players to get better", said Roberto Olabe, Director of Football at Aspire Academy. In order to do so, Aspire Academy regularly invites to best youth teams from all over to world to Doha to compete against their teams in a tournament format called "Tri-Series".

Well-prepared graduates bring a strong output

Since there is a strong focus on the individual and personal development of players, the Academy has also started a special program called "HOPE" (Holistic Overseas Player Experience) in 2012, which is a season or year-long foreign exchange program for the most gifted football players with the objective that they experience and adapt to the standard training, competition and football culture within leading European clubs. Since the start 25 players have been involved in this program, including the majority of the players of the U-19 team in Myanmar.

The success at the AFC U-19 Championship proves that the philosophy of Aspire Academy works. All 24 players of Qatar's current U-19 football national team in Myanmar have been with Aspire Academy, most of them have already graduated, while some are still student athletes at the Academy. As a matter of fact, the penetration of Aspire players in Qatari national teams has also increased this year to 100% also for the U-17 national team that also qualified for AFC Championship like the U-19. On senior level 18 % of the players in Qatar's FIFA World Cup 2014 qualification squad were graduates from Aspire Academy, which is a remarkable output taking into account that Aspire Academy was established only in 2004.