



Japan Professional Football League

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Gala Performance *by J-West*



The J. League players of Western Japan won their first JOMO All-Star Soccer match in five years at the annual showdown between J-East and J-West. The All-Star tradition is strong in Japanese sport and over 33,500 supporters packed Oita Trinita's Big Eye World Cup stadium for this year's event. Zico, too, gave precedence to the supporters' All-Star

votes in choosing which players not to take on the national team's tour of Latvia and Ukraine. Oita's Brazilian striker Magno Alves was MVP, and other individual prizes went to Yokohama F • Marinos defender Yuji Nakazawa and Júbilo Iwata striker Masashi Nakayama, who became the oldest ever player (at 38!) to score in the All-Star series.

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The Asahi Shimbun

All-Star Honours for J-West



This year's JOMO All-Star Soccer was played on October 9 at Oita in Kyushu, in the J. League's deep west, and the result was a crowd-pleasing 3-2 victory for the home side led by Albirex Niigata manager Yasuharu Sorimachi. JEF United Chiba striker Seiichiro Maki gave the East the early lead but the West stormed back with goals from Takashi Fukunishi (Iwata), Daiki Takamatsu (Oita) and Masashi Nakayama (Iwata). J-East had to be satisfied with a late consolation goal by Yuji Nakazawa (Yokohama F·Marinos). J-West now lead 6-4 overall in the series, which has also had one drawn match.

Sorimachi was delighted by the atmosphere. "The big crowds in Niigata last year and Oita today

show how far football has come nationwide," he said. "The wonderful thing is that we have shown so many people the attraction of the game."

J-East manager Ivica Osim (Chiba) smilingly complained that all of his players had tried too hard to be MVP, but happily agreed that "the most important point is that the supporters enjoyed the spectacle."

The players and managers were chosen by fan vote from July 5 to September 3, with regular announcements along the way of how the poll was going. Over 1.9 million valid votes were cast. Each 16-member team consisted of the top 11 choices of the fans and 5 players recommended by the J. League. Tsuneyasu Miyamoto (280,301 votes) of Gamba Osaka and Yuki Abe (294,260 votes) of Chiba became the captains by both finishing top of their respective lists for the second year in a row.



J. League Yamazaki Nabisco Cup

The 2005 J. League Yamazaki Nabisco Cup final on November 5 will be a historic occasion whichever team wins. JEF United Chiba and Gamba Osaka took part in the inaugural League Cup competition in 1992 as founding J. League members and both are still hunting for their first senior J. League trophy. Gamba hold the pole position in this year's Division One as well and may be on the verge of a famous double.

JEF United Chiba's previous final appearance was in 1998, when they lost to Júbilo Iwata. They edged Iwata 5-4 on aggregate in this year's quarter-final and faced Urawa Reds, winners in 2003 and seeking to reach their fourth final in a row, in a nail-biting semi-final. Chiba won 3-1 away but were 2-0 down at half-time in the home leg before clambering back to the safety of 2-2.

Gamba Osaka advanced 5-2 on aggregate against Cerezo Osaka in a crowd-pleasing Osaka quarter-final derby and then defeated the reigning J. League champions, Yokohama F·Marinos, on penalties in another closely fought semi-final. Gamba won 1-0 at home, lost by the same score away, and reached their first ever League Cup final 4-1 via the penalty shoot-out.

2005 J.LEAGUE YAMAZAKI NABISCO CUP





Division One - A Two Horse Race?

Kashima Antlers' early ten point lead in Division One dwindled to nothing as their form slipped to 5 wins and 5 losses in 13 games from the restart on July 3 to the end of September. But a thrilling 3-3 draw with new leaders Gamba Osaka on September 24 proved that Antlers are determined to stay the course. Gamba thought they had broken away when they went 3-2 up in lost time, only to see Antlers strike back.

That 3-3 draw was representative of Gamba's entertaining game: 64 goals for and 44 against in just 25 matches at the end of September! Needless to say, they are Division One's highest scoring team, but no other side in the top half of the table has conceded anything like as many either. Gamba striker Araujo is leading the rush with roughly a goal a game.

Cerezo Osaka, Júbilo Iwata, JEF United Chiba, Urawa Reds and others are all maintaining their challenge, but with Division One play due to finish on December 3, the championship is looking increasingly like a two horse race.



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Araujo (Gamba Osaka)



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Hiroaki Morishima (Cerezo Osaka)



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Division Two - Kyoto on Course

Kyoto Purple Sanga have maintained their big lead in Division Two and are on the verge of securing one of the two automatic promotion spots and their return to J1 after a two year absence. Avispa Fukuoka have also opened up a comfortable gap in second place, so interest is fast converging on the hotly contested third place that will earn a play-off against the 16th team in J1. Consadole Sapporo and Vegalta Sendai are both

seeking to regain J1 status, while Ventforet Kofu and Montedio Yamagata are aiming to reach the top flight for the first time.



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Pre-J. League Academy Festival

The J. League Academy project for fostering young players from kindergarten-age up is gaining momentum at J. League clubs nationwide. This year's school summer holiday saw the holding of Pre-J. League Academy Festivals in preparation for the festivals' full launch next year. More than 700 children up to the age of 12 took part at four camps: in Sendai, Nagano, Kyoto and Hiroshima.

Children from 8 Kanto area J. League clubs attended the Nagano camp at the FC Tokyo-managed Kijimadaira Junior Football Park. Matches were played in a league format in teams of 8 with free substitution. One striking innovation was the Green Card awarded for Fair Play and consideration for others, such as for apologies for fouls. The children picked up the idea quickly and were soon showing each other extraordinary mutual respect in order to get carded as often as possible!

Other activities for building social awareness and skills included outdoor

nature experience and education, hands-on learning about the local culture of the mountainous Nagano region, and group work to resolve set



Friendship Cup Japan-Brazil



The J. League U-15 Selection team participated in the 8th Friendship Cup Brazil-Japan in Rio de Janeiro from August 25 to 29. The 20 Japanese boys from J. League clubs across Japan faced stiff opposition from Atletico Mineiro (1-4), Botafogo (3-3) and America (2-2) but greatly enjoyed the experience of playing against such top quality sides. They also fitted in a visit to a championship match between Flamengo and Figueirense and a friendly with the host CFZ (Centro de Futebol Zico) Rio U-16 team (2-1).

J. Youth Cup

The J. League's principal youth tournament is the J. Youth Cup (Sahara Cup) for U-18 teams. Starting in 1994, it has always featured many of the future big names of Japanese football, from Tsuneyasu Miyamoto, who won the second cup with Gamba Osaka in 1995, to such recent stars as Shunsuke Maeda, who played in the last three finals for Sanfrecce Hiroshima and represented Japan at this year's FIFA World Youth Championship in the Netherlands. It begins with a group league, home and away format, and carries on through the season to a knockout phase and

final.

Kashima Antlers won the cup for the second time last year but the all-time honours belong to Gamba Osaka, with three triumphs. Verdy Kawasaki (now Tokyo Verdy 1969) and Sanfrecce Hiroshima have also won twice each and the other winners are Shimizu S-Pulse, Vissel Kobe and Kyoto Purple Sanga.

The J. League also backs the U-15 and U-18 Japan Club Youth tournaments held each summer by the Japan Club Youth Football Federation under a three-year sponsorship deal running from 2005-7.

The tournaments were started in 1999 with the aims of promoting independent club-based football and fostering clubs that have firm community roots. Besides, the J. League supports U-15 and U-18 Inter-city Cups to encourage teams that do not reach the all-Japan tournaments; the East-West U-15 Menicon Cup; and the U-17 Toyota International Youth Tournament, which this year brought together teams from Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Korea, and the United States.



Redsland - A Comprehensive Home Ground for All Sports

Urawa Reds became the first J. League club to open a comprehensive centre for community sport, Redsland, on July 17. The park is managed by the club and has a total area of 140,000m². There are 5 football pitches, 3 of which can also be used for baseball, a rugby pitch, 11 tennis courts, a daytime camping area and a farming zone. Urawa hope that this composite park will foster sporting activity among the young,

encourage lifelong participation in sport and serve as a focal point for community development. Futsal pitches and other facilities will also be added in due course. Full-scale operation is due to begin in 2007.



Made in the J. League, Recognised in Europe

By Keir Radnedge

KEIR RADNEDGE is one of Britain's leading experts and analysts of international football. A former editor of World Soccer, he is a regular contributor to TV and radio channels as well as newspapers and magazines. His books include the newly-published "50 Years of the European Cup."



When directors of the Football Association of Japan talked, in the early 1990s, about bidding to host the World Cup, Europe did not believe them. When the J.League was launched, to an explosion of fireworks and cacophony of pop music in the old National Stadium, Europe did not believe it would last.

So Gary Lineker had gone to play for Grampus Eight? So Zico had come out of retirement to play for Kashima Antlers? These were considered just two veterans looking for one last, lucrative, short-term pay day. Not for the first time, European football underestimated Japan's capacity to fall in love with the beautiful game and make it work in a modern context.

Now, at last, European clubs are coming to realize the value of Japanese footballers. The showcase of next year's World Cup Germany will no doubt lead to many more being offered the opportunity to resist the flight home. Some Japanese players have succeeded in Europe and many have failed. But that outcome is not exclusive to products of the J.League.

Only one Japanese player had seriously dared the European experience in pre-J.League days. Winger Yasuhiko Okudera scored 26 goals in 234 league games over nine years in West Germany for Werder Bremen and Köln (Cologne) with whom he won the league championship in 1978. Further back one son of Tokyo played in England for Birmingham City and Shrewsbury Town in the late 1940s and early 1950s. But his name was Arthur Atkins and, apart from his city of birth, he was to all intents and purposes British.

Early curiosity about the J.League made it inevitable both that European clubs would send out their scouts and that European coaches, returning from Japan, would recommend potential signings. Italian clubs, always the most greedy importers, were soon in pursuit of the established Kazu Miura and the up-and-coming Hidetoshi Nakata. Miura, a little too late in his career, was a short-lived disappointment at Genoa and then Dinamo Zagreb in Croatia. His coach at Genoa, Franco Scoglio, said later: "Technically, he was outstanding. But because he was a superstar in Japan, he had never been taught tactical discipline. He just did what he wanted and, in Italy in particular, it's the team which must come first."

Nakata was a different proposition. He had grown up, with all his peers, in a professional environment in the J.League and his workrate, control and mobility earned a host of admirers at the 1998 World Cup in France. Japan may have lost all three games but, individually, Nakata was a winner. None of Italy's giants were prepared to take the gamble. But Luciano Gaucci, eccentric owner of provincial Perugia, saw Nakata's potential both on and off the pitch. Shirt sales and the local Umbrian tourist industry flourished.

Nakata duly moved on to Parma, Roma, Fiorentina and Bologna and is now struggling to succeed in the English Premiership with Bolton, where Akinori Nishizawa failed before him. The only regret he may one day take home to Japan is that his achievement on "making it" in Europe rested not only on his footballing talent but on his commercial value.

Players from China and Korea have wrestled with the same problem in Europe: separating their ability with a football from their ability – indirectly – to sell shirts. Gradually, they are winning the battle. International recognition of Japanese talent springing out of the nurseries of the J.League can be gauged from reference to successive World Cups. In 1998 all 22 of Japan's players were registered with J.League clubs; by 2002 four players were in Europe with another four about to follow them.

A suspicion lingers, however, that some players were signed with commercial rather than football values in mind. That was the fate of Yoshi Kawaguchi at Portsmouth, then in the effective English second division in 2001. Kawaguchi found English football a different world to the gentler J.League. The pace, aerial game and physical contact meant he conceded 21 goals in 11 games and kept only one clean sheet.

Outfield players face different problems though this is not only a problem for Japanese players. But Kazu Toda did not last long at Tottenham after a pre-season friendly against a lower league team in which he appeared to kick opponents more often than he kicked the ball.

More popular a graduate from the J.League was Junichi Inamoto whose workrate and endeavour has been appreciated by fans of Arsenal, Fulham, Cardiff and West Bromwich Albion. But has he failed to impose his individual personality. England fans were then astonished to see him seize a goal-scoring, leadership role in the 2002 World Cup finals. Back in a Japanese football context, Inamoto looked a different player.

Perhaps this is why more attack-minded Japanese players, with greater individual acumen, have flourished. Shinji One has been unlucky with injuries during his stay in Holland with Feyenoord but Celtic of Glasgow are delighted with Shunsuke Nakamura, the first Japanese import into Scottish football. No wonder manager Gordon Strachan, while appreciating Japan's needs, is fighting to restrict Nakamura's international comings and goings over the next six months.

As Strachan says, "Naka's success in Europe shows just what great progress the J. League has made in a very short space of time."

Nakamura's success is a perversely positive sign that Japanese players are being accepted as all-round footballers in their own right. In France, for example, Daisuke Matsui struggled to find his feet with Le Mans in the second division but eventually helped them gain promotion and make an impressive start to life back up among the elite.

Three and half years ago European visitors to the World Cup finals – seeing the passion of the Japanese team and the fervour of the fans – understood the folly of those early critical misjudgments. Respect was enhanced by qualification for Germany. Japanese football and the J.League, both through the teams and the individual players, have come of age in European eyes.