

Tuesday 23 Jan 2018

HITACHI

ASPIRE FOOTBALL DREAMS 2-0 FENERBAHÇE GUANGZHOU EVERGRANDE 1-1 ASPIRE ACADEMY KASHIWA 3-2 TOTTENHAM

ASPIRE TAKES CENTRE STAGE AT AL KASS









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HOSTS TAKE CENTER STAGE ON AL KASS DAY TWO



A day after a pair of European clubs staked their claim as tournament favorites, two teams with roots in Qatar took to the pitch for the first time at the 2018 Al Kass International Cup at Aspire Zone.

VIPs and special guests in attendance included Nasser Al Khater, Assistant Secretary General for the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy; Andreas Bleicher, Chief Advisor for International Football Affairs at Aspire Zone Foundation; and Turki Al Sebaie, Director of Technical Operation at Al Kass.

Results were mixed for Aspire Football Dreams and Aspire Academy, but both walked away from Match Day Two in position to advance to the knockout rounds.

Aspire Football Dreams, a CSR initiative by Aspire that formed a team of promising players from developing countries, cruised to a 2-0 victory over Fenerbahçe in the day's first match. The final score didn't do justice to AFD's control of the game, and the local side could easily have doubled its tally. After peppering the Turkish goal with a series of near-misses, the Dreamers took the lead in the 28th minute when Sibiry Keita controlled the ball inside the area and found the back of the net.

Three minutes after the break, Christian Otabil doubled the gap when he connected on a cross from the right side. Fenerbahçe, coming off a 6-2 loss to Real Madrid in Sunday's opener, struggled to balance its attack with its need to defend against a pressing AFD side, and couldn't come up with any answers.

In the second game, Aspire Academy earned a hard-fought 1-1 draw with Guangzhou Evergrande. The Chinese squad, battling a quick turnaround after losing their opening match Sunday, struck first. On 22 minutes, Kaiyuan Tan knocked home the rebound off a free kick by Abudouhiani Kaisaier, and Guangzhou led 1-0.

But Aspire Academy kept the same composure that took them to the tournament final last year. Five minutes before the break, Abdulla Al-Ali sent a beautiful cross in to Ahmed Alganehi, who tapped it to Naif Alhadrami for the classy finish. The remarkable goal remained the high point, as Guangzhou's gritty defence turned back repeated Aspire attacks. The draw leaves Aspire in good position to move to the knockout round; they'll move on if they avoid losing by fewer than few goals tomorrow versus Benfica.

In the nightcap, Kashiwa Reysol and Tottenham Hotspur proved a rousing conclusion to the tournament's second day, with Kashiwa winning, 3-2. Kashiwa's Mao Hosoya provided the winner in the 82nd minute, as his shot deflected off the desperate effort of keeper Oluwaferanmi Oluwayemi and trickled into the net.

The back-and-forth affair saw the Spurs hit the woodwork three times and continually test Kashiwa keeper Leo Kokubo, who finished with 10 saves.

Hosoya opened the scoring with a penalty shot off a handball in the area, negating the Spurs' aggressive opening. Tottenham's Dilan Markanday answered just before the break with a breathtaking, curling shot into the upper left.

Kashiwa's Yuusuke Shimizu and Tottenham's J'Neil Bennett traded goals, setting up Hosoya's late heroics. The Spurs made a last-minute push and nearly equalised, but the Reysol defense and Kokubo held, giving the Japanese a thrilling win.

In today's action, AC Milan takes on Wydad AC at 3:30 pm. Aspire Football Dreams hopes to continue their winning ways against defending champions Real Madrid in a battle for the top of Group B at 5:35 pm. Tottenham Hotspur and Paris Saint-Germain close Match Day Three with a showdown of traditional European powers at 7:40 pm.





THE SECOND DAY OF THE AL KASS INTERNATIONAL CUP TOOK ON A LOCAL HUE AS FANS TURNED OUT TO WATCH HOST ASPIRE ACADEMY TAKE THE PITCH MONDAY. THE QATARI SIDE WAS JOINED BY ANOTHER SQUAD FAMILIAR TO FANS: ASPIRE FOOTBALL DREAMS, A TEAM OF PROMISING PLAYERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD, COMING FROM A CSR PROJECT OF ASPIRE BASED IN SENEGAL.

Local football fan Mohamed Abdin said he was keen to support Aspire Football Dreams. "It's been incredible to be here today. I particularly enjoyed the Aspire Football Dreams-Fenerbahçe match. Aspire Football Dreams is an incredibly strong team and I would love to see them go on to win the title," Abdin said.

As in previous years, talk in the stands inevitably turned to Qatar's preparations for hosting the FIFA World Cup 2022. Qatari fan Ahmed Abdul Karim said, "Hosting a prestigious tournament such as Al Kass puts Qatar on the road to sporting success ahead of the 2022 World Cup. It showcases to the rest of the world that Qatar is an ideal location for hosting international sporting events, and it also reaffirms our local passion for the game of football."



ASPIRING FOR MORE

Aspire Football Dreams have already won the Al Kass International Cup twice, and Al Kass commentator Mark Tompkins said he wouldn't be surprised to see them go far in 2018 too:

"We know Aspire Football Dreams are always going to be strong coming into this competition. They pull from such a great range of players. They've proven that they've got the strength and depth. They brought substitutes on who all seem to have the same amount of pace and strength, and they'll certainly be one of the teams that will be there or thereabouts at the end of the tournament."

Quote of The Day

"We would like to thank Al Kass for the opportunity to compete in this fantastic tournament it has been a wonderful experience. Qatar and Turkey have very strong relations and our continued collaboration is what brought Fenerbahçe to Al Kass, and we look forward to returning to Qatar to compete in the tournament for a second time."

Cengiz Aydin, Coach, Fenerbahçe

Player Perspective

"I learned a lot from the two matches we played in the Al Kass tournament, and it has encouraged the us to improve our skills. We have learned that it's important for all team members to stick together when we're on the field. Overall, it's been a great experience, and I hope we have the opportunity to play in this tournament again in the future."

Chen Rao, midfielder, Guangzhou Evergrande

TOP PLAYERS OF MATCH DAY ONE

Match 1

Sibiry Keita, Aspire Football Dreams 1 goal in 2-0 victory over Fenerbahçe

Match 2

Faisal Azadi, Aspire Academy Anchored midfield in 1-1 draw with Guangzhou Evergrande







CLASSY ASPIRE FOOTBALL DREAMS TOO STRONG FOR FENERBAHÇE

Aspire Football Dreams made a comfortable debut at Al Kass 2018, running out 2-0 winners against Fenerbahçe of Turkey. The scoreline did not flatter AFD, who controlled proceedings throughout and could have won by a far greater margin.

The teams appeared evenly matched in the opening exchanges, content to familiarise themselves with the opposition and work patiently to fashion openings.

Despite their 6-2 loss to Real Madrid 24 hours previously, Fenerbahçe continued to show plenty of determination, with captain Emre Nasuh again the fulcrum of the Turks' best football.

But it was AFD who settled first, enjoying a majority of possession and battling to retrieve the ball at every opportunity. They went close from a succession of early corners, and had a decent penalty claim turned down on 13 minutes.

Three minutes later, they should have gone ahead when Jumai Jallow pounced on a rebound but fired wide from close range, with only keeper Umut Tunc to beat. AFD were now clearly on top, and almost went in front in the 27th minute when Djakaria Barro dragged his shot narrowly wide. Moments later and Fenerbahçe could have scored, right-winger Batuhan Ekinci unlucky to see his cross-shot beat the keeper but narrowly drift wide of the far post.

The deadlock was finally broken with the game's next attack, when AFD's Sibiry Keita expertly controlled the ball inside the area and fired home past a helpless Tunc.

Jallow, cutting in from the right, missed a couple of presentable chances in quick succession as Aspire Football Dreams sought to press home their advantage, but Fenerbahçe's defence remained resolute to keep the score at 1-0 heading into half time.

However, their resistance was broken soon after the restart, when Christian Otabil connected with a low cross from the right to double AFD's advantage.

By now, Fenerbahçe were struggling to escape from their own half, their midfielders torn between the need to defend and a desire to attack, and their forward line almost devoid of supply lines as a result. In an attempt to remedy this impasse, Nasuh dropped back into central midfield and, on the hour mark, they managed to force a corner on the right, only for Cenk Alptekin's commanding header to be blocked. Fenerbahçe skipper Nasuh was withdrawn with a quarter of the game remaining, as AFD's dominance resumed.

Quicker to the loose ball, strong in the tackle, and accurate with their passing, it was only in front of the goal where the killer instinct was lacking, as several chances went begging.

As the second half wore on, Fenerbahçe began to enjoy a greater share of possession, but goalscoring chances remained few and far between. In a rare foray forward, Birkan Aktas hit a powerful strike from distance on 72 minutes, but Aspire Football Dream keeper Appiah Kubi comfortably gathered the effort as his side remained in control.

Aspire Football Dreams showed enough in this game to demonstrate that they have the potential to advance far into Al Kass 2018. They face Real Madrid next, however, and may need to show their clinical side in front of goal if they are to prevail.



ASPIRE FOOTBALL DREAMS

GK DF MF MF

MF

FW

DF

FW

DF

DF

FW

22 Appiah Kubi

5	Salim Diaby	
6	Djakaria Barro	
8	Leslie Adeniah (Cap.)	

- Sibiry Keita 10
- Isaac Nuhu 11
- Isaac Annan 12
- Jumai Jallow 16
- Abdel Nassere Mfouatah 17
- Shafic Ssebyala 18
- 19 Christian Otabil

FENERBAHÇE

1	Umut Eren Tunç	GK
2	Muhammet Ali Çetinkaya	DF
3	Abdulcebrail Akbulut	DF
4	Gürkan Baskan	
5	Cenk Alptekin	DF
6	Emirhan Karagülle	MF
7	Batuhan Ekinci	MF
9	Oguzhan Özcan	FW
10	Emre Nasuh (Cap.)	FW
13	Emir Miray Köksal	DF
15	Ömer Faruk Beyaz	MF

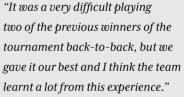




"It is an honour for me to be named MVP of the game. I think we all played an extremely good game and we are satisfied with the result. The next match we will go up against Real Madrid who are a big name, but we have demonstrated our skills in the past, and I feel confident we'll be able to do so again."

Sibiry Keita, Aspire Football Dreams

21 - 31 Jan 2



Fenerbahçe

ALKASS

Sibiry Keita, Aspire Football Dreams

MVP of the Match

Cenk Alptekin

THE EXPERTS SAY...

Mark Tompkins -Al Kass Analyst

The first corner of the game went to Aspire Football Dreams.

After a few minutes into the game it was starting to look a bit even for both teams.

Nuhu missed an excellent chance to bring a goal earlier in the game for Aspire Football Dreams, when he hit a side post, and missed the target.

Fenerbahçe also missed their best chance of the match 27 minutes into the game.

Finally, it was Aspire Football ams who brought in the first goal of the match, when Sibiry got control of the ball and gave a low shot just inside the box. It was a definitely a quality effort and a good relief for Aspire Football Dreams, because they were missing a lot of great chances early on in the game.

Nick Summerbee – Al Kass Analyst

The Aspire Football Dreams players were always looking for oportunities and taking them. It was a wonderful finish by Sibiry with that second goal, in the second half of the match.

Aspire were still pushing forward even when things were looking good for them – they were also going into all the dangerous areas and keeping good possession of the ball

throughout the game. This had definitely been a comfortable game for them.

I thought Fenerbahçe should have got at least a day's break from yesterday's game before coming out to play again against a team like Aspire Football Dreams—it was perhaps a bit too much for them.



CESPO

FOOTBALL

DREAMS

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ASPIRE ACADEMY OPEN WITH A DRAW AGAINST GRITTY GUANGZHOU

Aspire Academy delivered a composed performance in their opener at Al Kass 2018, drawing 1-1 against a rejuvenated Guangzhou Evergrande side, who showed few aftereffects following their 4-0 reverse to Benfica the previous evening.

Aspire started brightly, only for their smooth approach play to be stifled by the toughtackling Guangzhou backline.

In their initial Al Kass outing, Evergrande had managed only one shot on target, and their attacking intent remained distinctly limited in the opening period of their second match, as they struggled to contain an assured Aspire side.

In contrast to the previous evening, however, Guangzhou's team looked well-balanced this time round, with centre forward Pahaerding Airexiding provided with plenty of support.

And, on 15 minutes, they could – and should have gone ahead when Sai Ruen, unmarked at the far post, sliced high and wide when he might have done better.

Aspire had gotten off lightly, but they were made to pay seven minutes later, when Yujie Zang was fouled on the right side of the area, with his teammates incorrectly calling for a penalty.

Aspire keeper Mahmoud Abunada could not hold Abudouhiani Kaisaier's ferociously struck low free kick, and Kaiyuan Tan slotted home the rebound from two yards.

On the half hour mark, Aspire won a free kick on the edge of the area, which Ahmed Alganehi pulled just wide, as the home side recovered their poise.

And, with five minutes of the first half remaining, they found their reward when Alganehi met a superb cross-field ball from Abdulla Al-Ali on the volley, side-footing his first-time cross for Naif Alhadhrami to apply an expert finish.

A goal that will live long in the memory, it was the least Aspire deserved for their tenacious approach against highly physical opponents, and a fascinating second half beckoned.

Despite having played a gruelling match just 24 hours earlier, Guangzhou coach had made just three changes to his outfield starting line-up against Aspire. And, as the second 45 minutes got underway, it remained to be seen whether they could maintain their high-energy approach. Like their Qatari counterparts, they initially struggled to create clear chances.

On 65 minutes, Aspire's Hadi Tabasideh saw his long range, angled drive drifted just over, as the Academy began to impose themselves. Still full of running, and technically proficient, they remained patient as they searched for a breakthrough.

At the same time, the disciplined Academy backline limited Guangzhou to the occasional effort from distance, with Zang firing high with 20 minutes remaining.

However, with the clock ticking down, the prospect of a draw grew ever more likely. Despite their previous exertions – and repeated bouts of cramp among their tiring players - Evergrande continued to compete for every ball, making life difficult at every turn for the Academy.

Ultimately, despite their best efforts, Aspire were unable to break the deadlock. Their second and final group game will see them match up against a strong Benfica side on Wednesday. Providing that they can avoid defeat by fewer than four goals, progress to the knockout phase is assured. Based on their opening performance, it is the least that this talented team of local players deserve.





GUANGZHOU EVERGRANDE

GK

DF

DF

FW

MF

DF

MF

MF

MF

MF

DF

GΚ

DF

DF

DF MF

FW

MF

FW

DF

MF

40	Lipan He	

- Ruiwei Fan 3
- 5 Zhihao Zhang
- 9 Pahaerding Airexiding
- Sai Ruan 10
- Shilong Wang (Cap.) 11 Yujie Zhang
- 13
- Kaiyuan Tan 14
- 19 Abudouhaini Kaisaier
- Υυ Ηου 26 32 Wenzhe Zhao

ASPIRE ACADEMY

22	Mahmoud Abunada	

- 2 Mohamed Mohamed
- Abdulla Al-Ali 3
- Mohamed Aiash (Cap.) 4
- 6 Faisal Azadi Hadi Tabasideh 7
- 8
- Naif Alhadhrami
- Ahmed Alganehi 11
- Mohammed Al-Naimi 12
- Abdullatif Al-Ishaq 17
- Jassim Al-Zarra 18



"We have played two matches in the past 24 hours, which I think took its toll on the players. During the match against Aspire, we struggled to maintain possession of the ball, and we also didn't have many opportunities to score, but we are happy with the way we played and above all else, this tournament has been a good experience for the team."

Roberto Rojos, Coach Guangzhou Evergrande

THE EXPERTS SAY...

Nick Summerbee -Al Kass Analyst

It was a good first touch by Aspire Academy in the very first inute of the match, and in the first two minutes into the match they had already missed two great opportunities.

As I always say, these players have to think forward as early as possible to make a difference in the game. For a long time, there was a battle of free kicks from both teams in midfield. It was when

Guangzhou came in with that first goal that I realized what a difference 24 hours could make for Guangzhou. It looked like the Chinese team was really enjoying the game tonight. It was a wonderful start of the game, but Aspire was looking a bit lost and out of ideas.

It was absolutely a super goal from Aspire Academy towards the end of the first half, when Naif came in with an amazing layout and made it 1-1 for the local team.

Chris Makins -Al Kass Analyst

Both teams were putting in good pressure in the second half, and it was difficult to predict any outcome 60 minutes into the match.

Guangzhou had a couple of good shots, which always ended up sideways outside the box.

There were a lot of injuries, and both goalkeepers seemed to have cramps towards the end of the second half.

It was still 1-1 at the end of 90 minutes, and four minutes extra time was added.

Faisal Azadi, Aspire Academy MVP of the Match

ASPÍRE







GUANGZHOU

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KASHIWA SMASH AND GRAB DOWNS SPURS IN AL KASS CLASSIC



Kashiwa Reysol conjured an incredible 3-2 victory against a superb Tottenham side in a pulsating final game of Al Kass Day Two.

Kashiwa are now veterans of the International Cup and, at each edition in which they have appeared, they have impressed with their fast-paced possession football. The 2018 side are clearly modelled along the same lines.

Meanwhile Tottenham, appearing in Doha for the first time, displayed similar attributes to their Japanese opponents, making for a fascinating spectacle in which both sides combined maximum endeavour with welldrilled technical virtuosity.

Midway through the first half, lively Spurs forward J'Neil Bennett was unfortunate to see his cross-cum-shot elude keeper Leo Kokubo and cannon onto the crossbar, with the Japanese backline scrambling to clear the rebound.

Five minutes later, Rayan Clarke stung Kokubo's right hand with a low, venomous shot from just inside the area that the Japanese keeper did well to keep out. Spurs were now in the ascendancy, as Reysol's defenders struggled to keep their composure – and their clean sheet – in the face of sustained pressure. So it was completely against the run of play when Kashiwa took a shock lead on 37 minutes. There seemed little danger as Daichi Maeda advanced down the right wing. He swung in a speculative cross that struck centre back Luis Binks' outstretched arm.

Referee Mohammed Yousef had no hesitation in pointing to the spot, and Mao Hosoya had no hesitation in burying the resultant penalty high into the Tottenham goal.

Undeterred by going a goal behind, Tottenham raised their level still further and, moments later, were dreadfully unlucky not to equalise.

Edmund Maghoma shrugged off a couple of challenges as he advanced down the inside left channel before unleashing a magnificent curling effort that struck the far post, when it had seemed destined for the top corner.

The Spurs number 10, operating notionally in a left-sided position in midfield, was hugely impressive as he operated between the lines and fed the Tottenham attack. But it was another of their midfielders who drew the scores level in spectacular fashion in the dying moments of the first half.

Dilan Markanday picked the ball up just inside the area and jinked his way past several challenges before curling a fabulous shot into the top left corner. It was the last meaningful action of an absorbing opening 45 minutes.

As the second period commenced, Spurs continued as they had left off, and might have snatched a lead within a minute of the restart when Maghoma advanced into the area before feeding Bennett, who could not convert.

Undeterred, Kashiwa came back strongly, launching a series of attacks that culminated in a magnificent goal to retake the lead. Yuusuke Shimizu picked up the ball 25 yards out and advanced into the area before calmly chipping into the bottom left corner.

With 20 minutes remaining, former England international Scott Parker sacrificed defender Dennis Cirkin for forward Enoch Asante, as the Tottenham manager went all out for victory. Kokubo's goal came under sustained assault and, on 78 minutes, Spurs were level after Markanday fed Bennett, who slotted past the Kashiwa stopper.

By now, Reysol were hanging on by the skin of their teeth, as Clarke cut in from the right and fired a low shot that slammed against the foot of the post and bounced clear.

And yet, astonishingly, it was Kashiwa who once again took the lead when Hosoya pounced on a loose ball in the area to fire past Spurs keeper Oluwaferanmi Oluwayemi, his opposite number Kokubo running the length of the pitch to join in the ecstatic celebrations.

Tottenham should have levelled with the very next attack, as Asante's header drifted agonisingly wide of the right post, with Kokubo beaten. Their desperate onslaught continued as the fourth official signalled four minutes of added time, setting up a frantic finale. But Reysol held firm to earn a famous victory, on an evening that lit up the Aspire Zone.



KASHIWA

1	Leo Brian Kokubo
12	Fumiya Unoki
14	Mao Hosoya
19	Hiryu Okuda
20	Keita Ide (Cap.)
23	Yuusuke Shimizu
28	Sohki Tamura
29	Naito Saito
30	Fumito Okihara
32	Daichi Maeda
34	Shunto Ibi

GK FW

FW FW DF MF MF

MF

DF

MF

TOTTENHAM

1	Oluwaferanmi Oluwayemi	GK
3	Luis Binks	DF
4	Dennis Cirkin	DF
5	Maximus Tainio	DF
6	Jamie Bowden (Cap.)	MF
7	Maurizio Grippaldi	FW
8	Dilan Markanday	FW
10	Edmond Maghoma	
14	J'Neil Lloyd-Bennett	FW
16	Rayan Clarke	FW
17	Harvey White	MF



HOTSPUR





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Mao Hosoya, Kashiwa Reysol MVP of the Match



"Before the game we were quite nervous as we weren't familiar with Tottenham's style of play, but as we started playing we gained our confidence and just played the way we usually do."

Keita Ide Kashiwa Reysol



"We had a few mischances which ultimately cost us the game. For the next game, we need to adapt and be quicker and capitalise on the chances we create."

Jamie Bowden Tottenham Hotspur

THE EXPERTS SAY ...

Mark Tompkins – Al Kass Analyst

It had been fairly even for the first 10 minutes, when Kashiwa got their first free kick.

Both teams were passing the ball around a lot tonight, and they were not giving in to each other at all. Kashiwa missed a great opportunity 23 minutes into the game – it was a great chance to create a goal – but before long they were taking the lead 1-0. After a bit of heated play around midfield, Tottenham was back in the game only a few seconds before the stroke of half time. This was one of the best games we had seen so far in this tournament.

Chris Makins – Al Kass Analyst

Tottenham missed two brilliant chances to score, in the beginning of the second half. Clarke was very impressive on the field tonight.

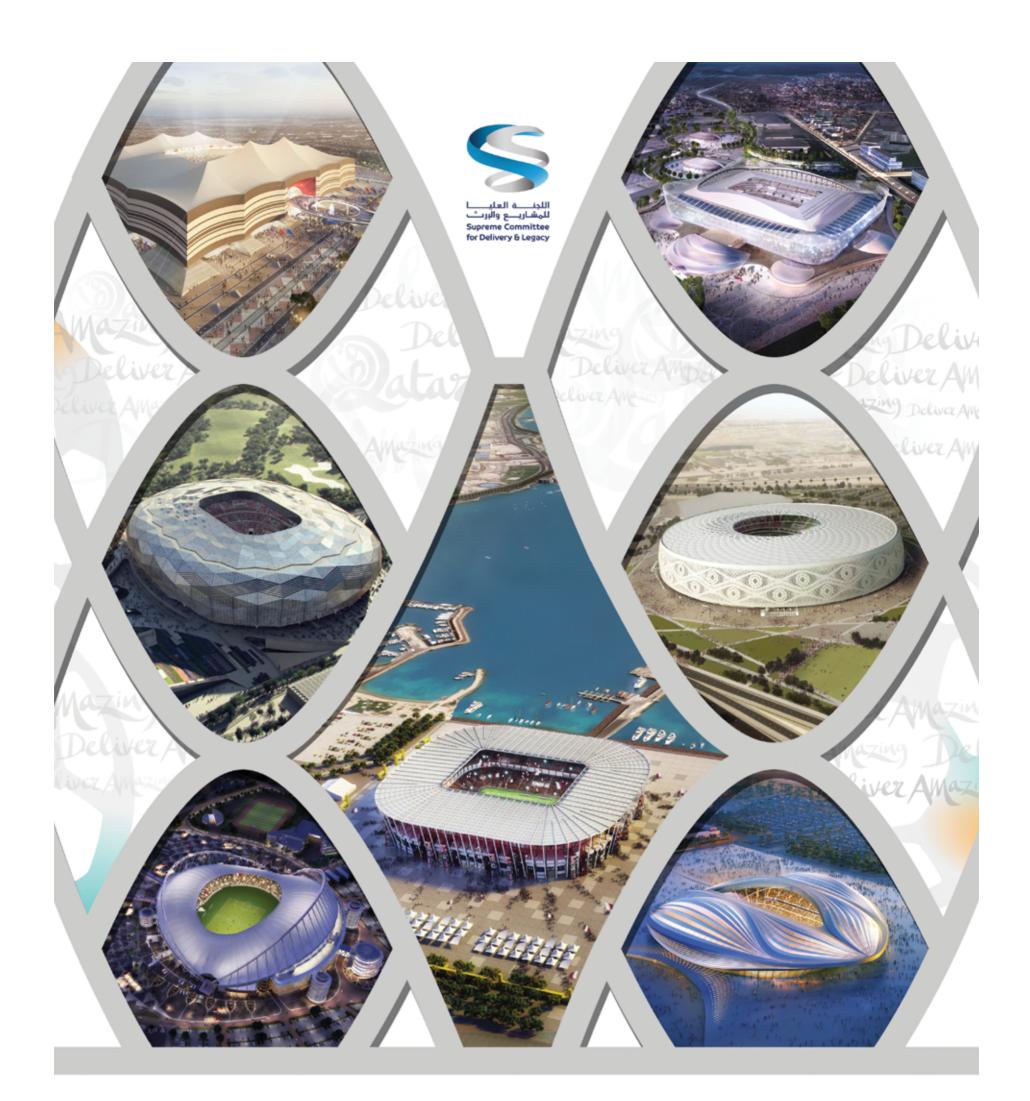
Shimizu brought in the first goal of the second half 58 minutes into the game.

It was technically a very good game towards the end of the second half. When the Kashiwa goalkeeper was out in the front and down, during the second half, there was a very good chance for Tottenham to bring in a goal right there, but the Kashiwa players easily cleared off the ball.

What a goal that was from Bennett, towards the end of the second half, and what a fantastic game this had been!



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