



RIYADH: Hilal's players celebrate with the trophy after winning the AFC Champions League final football match against South Korea's Pohang Steelers yesterday. — AFP

## Al Hilal win Asian Champions League

### Saudi giants beat Pohang Steelers 2-0

RIYADH: Saudi giants Al Hilal won the Asian Champions League with a 2-0 victory over South Korea's Pohang Steelers in the final yesterday. Both teams were aiming for an unprecedented fourth title but it was the hosts who made history with Nasser Al-Dawsari and Moussa Marega on target either side of the break at the King Fahd International Stadium in the Saudi capital.

A breathtaking history-making Nasser Al-Dawsari goal after just 16 seconds of the AFC Champions League final set Al-Hilal on their way to a deserved 2-0 win over Pohang Steelers and a record fourth continental title at Riyadh's King Fahd International Stadium yesterday.

The 22 year-old's early breakthrough was record-breaking in another sense as it was the fastest that the Champions League final has ever seen. It was also a stunning strike and worthy of winning any championship anywhere in the world. It was added to in the second half by Moussa Marega and Pohang, who were second-best for much of the game, never really looked likely to come back from that.

The East Asians, the tournament is divided into two geographical zones until the final, were up against it from the start. The roars from the 50,000 plus Saudi Arabian fans that had greeted kick-off had not even died down by the time the left-back gave the Blues the lead. Al-Dawsari, who made his national team debut earlier this year, picked up a loose ball just inside the Korean half, moved forward and unleashed a fierce shot from around 30 meters that flew into the top corner.

Goalkeeper Lee Jun may have been caught by surprise at the timing, the power and the pace of the shot but had it come in the last minute and not the first, there was still little that he could have done. It was unstoppable. The sea of blue around the arena erupted and Pohang were stunned as their opposite numbers celebrated with almost as much disbelief as delight.

The Koreans, with three continental titles of their own, had enough experience to know however that there were still more than 89 minutes to play. There was a reminder of that just ten minutes later as the Steelers silenced the din in Riyadh for the first time. Sin Jin-ho won the title with Ulsan Horang-i last December and the attacking midfielder must have thought he had got on the scoresheet this time as his half-volley from the edge of the area dipped over the diving Abdullah Al-Mayouf. Unfortunately for the Steelers the ball bounced back off the underside of the bar. Lim Sang-hyub was there to fire home the rebound but his shot bounced back off the underside of Al-Mayouf's legs. It was as close as the Koreans came all night.

The game started to settle into something approaching a more traditional final. The visitors were wary of conceding a second that would make an already tricky task doubly difficult and did not threaten enough. In fact, it started to get a little scrappy with some heavy challenges and misplaced passes. Hilal, with playmaker Matheus Pereira getting more and more into the game, looked more dangerous going forward but in the last half-hour of the first half, neither goalkeeper had much to do



RIYADH: Hilal's fans cheer during AFC Champions League final football match between KSA's Al-Hilal and South Korea's Pohang Steelers yesterday, at the King Fahd International Stadium in the Saudi capital. — AFP

until right at the end Al-Mayouf was grateful to see a close range header from Gwon Wan-kyu fly straight into his hands.

Pohang made a double substitution at the start of the second half, a signal of their more adventurous intent but it was Hilal who made the first chance with Pereira finding Gomis in the area, though the striker's shot was blocked by Alex Grant. Soon after Pereira's free-kick flew just over Pohang's top corner.

The Koreans, with seven losses in their last nine

league games, were struggling to get a foothold in the game but with just a one goal deficit were never out of it. A mix-up in the Hilal defense just before the hour allowed substitute Go Young-joon to get in a shot from the edge of the area that went wide. Then, with 63 minutes on the clock, Gomis slipped the ball through to Marega in the right side of the area and the former FC Porto striker found the opposite corner with a low shot. Given that Pohang had not done enough in attack, that seemed to be that. — Agencies

### Rain forces early end in Galle as West Indies avoid follow-on

GALLE: Rain forced an early end with the West Indies tail still hanging on after avoiding the follow-on for day three of the first Test against Sri Lanka in Galle yesterday. The West Indies added nine runs in 30 balls and lost Rahkeem Cornwall in a brief passage of play after lunch before the heavens opened. The forecast for the next two days was more wet weather.

With the new ball due, Suranga Lakmal was called up to bowl the 79th over of the West Indies innings from the City End and he dismissed Cornwall. Lakmal bowled a short ball and Cornwall could not resist the pull shot, but got the execution wrong and was caught by Ramesh Mendis running backwards from mid-wicket. Cornwall made 39 off 58 balls with five fours and a six.

But the 49-run stand between Cornwall and Joshua da Silva ensured the West Indies avoided the follow-on. After a brief pause in the rain, umpires inspected the field and decided to resume

play. Another downpour soon washed out the final session before it began, threatening to spoil Sri Lanka's early advantage.

"We are hoping and praying the weather gods are kind to us," said Sri Lanka spin bowling coach Piyal Wijetunga, who was disappointed his spinners had failed to dispatch the tourists before the rain, despite accounting for eight wickets between them. "Not a hundred percent happy with the way we went about things," he said. "The boys are excited and they try too many things without sticking to basics. Patience is the key and they need to learn." Play will resume early for the final two days to make up lost time, with 98 overs scheduled for each.

Earlier, Sri Lanka had posted 386 all out after electing to bat first. Skipper Dimuth Karunaratne scored his 13th Test hundred, going on to make 147 while Dhananjaya de Silva (61) and Pathum Nissanka (56) scored half-centuries. The West Indies collapsed to 113 for six at stumps on day two but recovered thanks to a rearguard action by the lower order. Kyle Mayers (45), Jason Holder (36) and Cornwall (39) all chipped in. The side's only warm-up game ahead of the series, a four-day match against Board President's XI in Colombo, was called off without a ball being bowled, due to rain. — AFP

### Begiristain the key to Guardiola's longevity

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola said the presence of director of football Txiki Begiristain is the reason he is into his sixth season with the English champions and has extended his deal to 2023. City's structure off the field has been brought back into the focus by the chaos at rivals Manchester United, where outgoing executive vice chairman Ed Woodward may prolong his stay at Old Trafford to oversee a fifth managerial appointment in eight years.

Guardiola took a year out of the game after being burned out by four years as coach of his boyhood club Barcelona and stayed just three seasons with German giants Bayern Munich. Many expected a similar stint at City, who had prepared the groundwork to attract Guardiola by appointing his former Barcelona colleagues Begiristain and CEO Ferran Soriano to senior positions at the club.

Together they have built an empire at the Etihad, winning three Premier League titles, one FA Cup and four League Cups. "One of the reasons why I extended my contract is because Txiki is here. I am now 50, we met each other when I was 19-years-old," said Guardiola yesterday. "So since then, we've been close friends and we work together incredibly well. When we are winning, we try to analyse, why we are winning? When we lose, why are we losing? No one judges the other one for good or bad. I've never been judged on a result. Both of you work for the best for this club."

"He is the most humble person I met. He never goes to the media, he's always behind the scenes. You don't find many of these types of people in this world when the egos are always there. I put that example for myself. "So he's an exception. What he has done in Barcelona, creating one of the best teams of all-time, and how he has been working here for these years... "He always gives the credit for the players, of course for the managers, for the chairman, for the CEO, and always is there so that's why it's a pleasure. We're with him because I can do my job."

City can secure a place in the Champions League last 16 with just a point at home to Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday, while victory over the star-studded French side would guarantee top spot in Group A. PSG boss Mauricio Pochettino has been linked with the vacant managerial post at United following Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's sacking on Sunday. Pochettino is on course to win the first league title of his managerial career with PSG who are currently 11 points clear at the top of Ligue 1.

But Guardiola said his record of not winning trophies at Espanyol, Southampton and Tottenham should not overshadow the excellent job the Argentine did for all three clubs. "You can be a top manager and not win titles. The managers that have the chance to win the titles are at top, top clubs with good investments and exceptional players. Otherwise, for managers, it is impossible to win," added Guardiola. "That doesn't mean the managers in the Championship or not in the top six of the Premier League cannot be excellent managers in tactics, communication, leading. It's not necessary to win titles." — AFP