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The Scales of Asian Football Confederation and the Success of Countries' Representatives in Asian Champions League

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Abstract

Nowadays, the International Federation of Football (FIFA) has 208 members, and Asian Football Confederation (AFC) is responsible for organizing and developing football as the most important organization in the old continent. Asian Champions League (ACL) is a football high level competition in Asia. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the criteria of AFC and the success of countries' representatives in ACL. This study was casual-comparative and applied. The statistical population included 32 clubs that participated in the 10th preliminary round of ACL. The statistical sample consisted of 11 countries which have representatives in this event. The data gathered from official website of AFC (www.the-afc.com), and the official magazine of Iran Pro League Federation "The Vision of Soccer". For analysing the data, we utilized K-S, Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Stepwise Multi Regression. The results indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between AFC criteria and the success of countries' representative in Asian Champions League (ACL). Also, technical standards predict the success of countries' representative in ACL significantly ($p < 0.0001$, $\beta = 0.88$). It seems that more attention to the technical standards will bring better results for the next seasons.

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1. Introduction

Many researches talked about the impact of soccer on nations (Martin, 2004). The growing globalization of the world economy also affects soccer. To be prosperous, soccer clubs must look beyond national boundaries for their players (Macmillan, Peter, & Ian Smith, 2007). Several researches have examined how a nation's standard

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of organization, media, trade and the others affect the success of a club in international and continental competitions (Ascari & Gagnepain, 2003).

Nowadays, sport study is a prominent element for the international community (Forrest, Sanz, & Tena, 2010). In one side, its role in strengthening relationships among different countries, and its competition environment among them is the reason that researchers consider sport as an integral part of every political, economic, socially and the other kinds of communications and transactions (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007).

Undoubtedly and among various sports, soccer is clearly the world's most popular sport (Barros, Assaf, & Arajoo, 2010). Today, many of countries introduce soccer as their national sport. Firstly, Soccer appeared in China, Egypt, Greece and Rome over 2000 years before (Dunmore, 2011). After its metamorphosis through many centuries, the rules and regulations be similar at 1877 all around the world (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007). Finally, International Federation of Football Association (FIFA) was founded on 21 May 1904 in Paris (Dobson & Goddard, 2001). The first non-European members enrolled FIFA was South Africa in 1910, Argentina in 1910 and Chile in 1912 (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007). Currently, FIFA has 208 members that compete with each other at 6 different continental confederations as follow (Imperiale, 2011):

1. Union of European Football Associations (UEFA)
2. Oceania Football Confederation (OFC)
3. Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF)
4. Asia Football Confederation (AFC)
5. Confederation Africa de Football (CAF)
6. Confederation "Sudamericana" de Football (CONMEBOL)

One duty of the confederation is to organize inter-continental competition (Beech & Chadwick, 2007). Confederation "Sudamericana", the first confederation, was founded 12 years after FIFA, on the date of Argentina independence in 1916 (Van Yperen, 2009). Two years before the creation of the second and third confederation, AFC in Asia and UEFA in Europe. The newest confederation was created in Oceania 1960 after the AFC rejected Australian's and New Zealand application for membership; although they finally enrolled AFC in 2007 (Foer, 2004).

Asia with an area about 43.4 square kilometres and with a population over 3.4 billion people (more than 60% of the world population), is the oldest and largest continent in the world. Many kind of international sports organizations such as International Badminton Federation (IBF), International Taekwondo Federation (ITF), and International Federation of "Kabadi" and so located in this continent. The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) as the lonely FIFA official representative is in charge of football in the old continent. Since it was established in 8 May 1954 in Manila, It was responsible to develop and promote soccer in ancient continent (Monk, 2009). This organization currently has 47 members, and the clubs and national competitions was held under the auspices of that (Foer, 2006). The most important national and club competitions included (Morrow, 1999):

1. At national level: Asian Cup, AFC Challenge Cup and Asian World Cup Qualifying Tournament
2. At club level: AFC President Cup, AFC Cup, and AFC Champions League

At club level, AFC Champions League can be called the most important soccer competition in Asia. The emergence of Asian Club Championship back to 1967. This was the first time that 8 Champion clubs from different countries competed with each other in Bangkok (Dunmore, 2011). After holding a number of irregular seasons by titles Asian Champions Cup (1986-2002), Asian Cup Winners Cup (1995-2002), and Asian Clubs Cup (1995-2002); AFC decided to change the format of competitions due to long distance between countries, financial problems of clubs and etc. Finally, the new season of AFC champion's league restarted at 2002-3 and it revived soccer in old continent. Second season of AFC Champions League was held by 28 clubs in seven groups of four teams in the East and West regions. After that and for the first time, this championship was held in 8

groups of 4 teams in the East and West. This was the origin of advanced soccer in Asia (Finn, Gerry, & Giulianotti, 2000).

Because of poor results of Asian Countries at Germany 2006 Soccer World Cup; AFC by imitating the UEFA Champions League, decided to determine certain criteria in 10 different sections (Foer, 2004):

1. Organization (20 scores): At least 12 teams must be presented at professional league of each participated countries at AFC Champions League; In addition, each club should play 33 matches at least in each season.
2. Technical Standard (100 scores): This refers to results of countries at the international and continental levels through the last 5 years.
3. Attendance (100 scores): The number of fans (at least 2000 at each match), the exact number of them and the number of sold ticket are the indicators for this criterion.
4. Governance (50 scores): Have special structure to manage the league, media, marketing and financial programs covered by means of this criterion.
5. Marketing and Promotion (20 scores): Providing a centralized program for TV right and sponsors are the main purposes of AFC for this criterion.
6. Business Scale (20 scores): AFC introduced TV right, sponsors and selling stuffs as main financial revenue for business scale.
7. Game Operation (20 scores): Providing security and comfortable services for fans and stakeholders are the most prominent factors for this criterion.
8. Media (20 scores): 50 per cent of league matches must be casted by TV, at least.
9. Stadia (20 scores): 4 stadia with capacity 5000 people at least with suitable projectors, grass and seats must be provided by each participant clubs.
10. Clubs (50 scores): 20 soccer players should register their contracts, at least.

In this study, we want to answer the question of do the scores obtained by representatives of Asian countries have the ability to predict the success of the them at the 8th season of AFC Champions League?

2. Methodology

The present study was casual – comparative and applied. The statistical population consisted of all 32 clubs at the 8th first round of AFC champions League in 2010 season. The study sample included 11 countries which had representatives in these games. According to literature review, there are many ways to determine the success of countries at sport events (Custonia & Skonia, 2011), but in this study the average score of each representative country was the indicators for success. Data gathered from official website of AFC (www.the-afc.com) and the official magazine of Iranian Soccer Federation (The Vision of Soccer). At first, Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test indicated the parametric situation ($p > 0.05$), then we utilize Pearson Correlation and Stepwise Multiple Regression; we consider success as criterion variable and the AFC criteria as predictors.

3. Results

Table 1 indicated that Japan (J - League) had the highest score among the Asian countries. Japan scores for the governance, marketing, business, operation, media, stadia and clubs are complete and its final score is 470. The other countries achieved different scores in different criteria as follow Table 1.

The second table shows the power of test. According to amount of F parameter and the level of significance ($F > 1$, $\text{sig} < 0.05$), 56 percent of success variation is related to predictors variables.

Table 1. The comparison of AFC criteria scores among Asia countries at 8th ACL season

Rank	Country	Organization	Technical Standard	Attendance	Governance	Marketing and Promotion	Business Scale	Game Operation	Media	Stadia	Clubs	Sum	Average Score
1	Japan	19.5	82.4	88.2	50	20	100	20	20	20	50	470	11.3
2	South Korea	15.4	94.8	64.5	38.5	17.5	98.5	20	19.7	20	49	438	12.5
3	China	19.1	61.5	70.1	28.5	17.5	100	20	18.1	20	50	415	5.5
4	Saudi Arabia	17.4	78.8	60.3	50	9.6	42.8	20	17.5	20	42.7	359	8.75
5	Emirate	17.1	53.7	47.5	39.6	18.5	17.4	20	15.3	14.7	46	349	4.75
6	Iran	19.5	69.6	55.3	47.9	14.4	42.4	20	12.6	9.2	45.4	336	10.2
7	Australia	13	51.3	76.2	12.5	18.8	28.2	20	16.7	20	49.4	306	7.0
8	Indonesia	18.5	24.4	69.2	42.7	15.2	25.1	20	14.9	12.7	44.9	287	3
9	Singapore	15.3	40.5	38.1	6.3	18.3	39.4	20	10.1	2.8	46.3	239	4
10	Qatar	16.7	46.4	42.2	16.7	11.5	17.8	20	15.8	6.9	32.5	230	11.5
11	Uzbekistan	18.2	59.5	41.4	12.5	8.8	1.8	20	13.6	7.3	39.3	223	8.5

Table 2. Success model for Asia countries at 8th season of ACL

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	P-Value
1	0.75	0.56	0.51	11.6	0.008

Table 3 also indicated that among the 10 different AFC criteria, Technical Standard is the only criteria which predicted the success of countries at 8th ACL season, significantly ($\beta = 0.75$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 3. Impact coefficients for the success of countries at the 8th ACL season

Variables	Non-standardized Coefficient β	Standardized Coefficient β	t	P-Value
Constant	0.58		0.25	0.04
Technical Standard	0.12	0.75	3.4	0.008

The Regression equity indicated as follow:

$$Y = 0.12(X) + 0.58$$

Y: Constant Variable (Success)

X: Technical standard

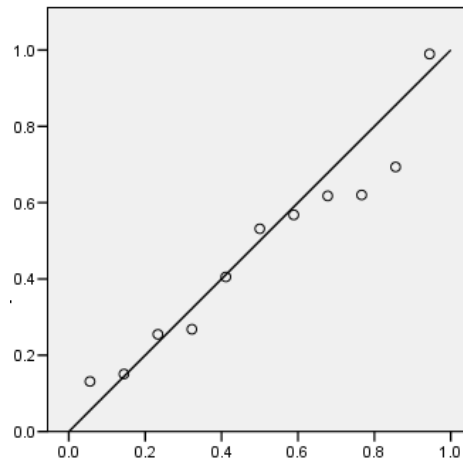


Fig 1. The linear correlational relationship between the success of countries and criteria variables

4. Discussion and conclusion

At first, in this study we tried to determine the significant relationship between AFC scores in 2009 of Asian countries and their results at the next year at 8th ACL season. According to result, technical standard is the only significant predictor of countries' representative in Asia at the 8th ACL season. It seems better score at the technical standard will bring better result for each representatives and promote the professionalization in country. For example, Japan with highest rank has an ongoing soccer and imported many players to different countries. The results of Asian countries at Germany 2006 Soccer World Cup is an indicator for technical standard's score; Japan, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Iran were the representatives of Asia in those games, but none of them could not go up from the first round; South Korea was the best and most qualified representative by 4 score and Iran, Japan and Saudi Arabia could take just 1 score from those games. FIFA ranking is another indicator for technical standard criteria; South Korea, Iran, Japan and Saudi Arabia stand on the 17th, 25th, 26th and 28th places, orderly. On the other hand, Indonesia which has by 24.4 score at the technical standard criteria is the weakest country.

Among 45 enrolled countries at AFC, Japan is qualified for 4 representative and the other countries like China, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Iran have a 3-year opportunity to develop their infrastructures and achieve minimum score of AFC until 2012.

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