



# COMPETITION REGULATIONS

AFC Cup 2023/24





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## DEFINITIONS

In these Competition Regulations, capitalised terms shall have the following meanings, unless the context specifically indicates otherwise:

Accommodation	Any location approved by the AFC which provides accommodation to the AFC Delegation, Team Official Delegations, AFC Commercial Rights Partner, and Commercial Affiliates.
Accreditation Card	Any physical item which is issued by the AFC and/or Host Club which provides the recipient the right to access a Controlled Access Area (or part thereof) where the Controlled Access Area is under the control of the AFC, Host Club or the Host Association.
Advertising Rights	The right to promote brands and/or corporate names and/or products and/or services at and/or in relation to the Competition by whatever means available, whether existing now or to be developed in the future, whether at the Stadiums or Facility Areas or within the Controlled Access Areas, by in-stadium/out-stadium perimeter signage and other advertising, digital signage and screens, closed circuit television, equipment usage or other methods and through printed matter (including digitally delivered printed matter) such as programmes, posters, letterheads, press releases, newsletters and Tickets, and subject to any AFC regulations, the right to display such advertising on the clothing or footwear worn, or on any equipment used, carried or transported by officials (including for the avoidance of doubt by Match Officials), medical and security staff, ball crew, player escorts, flag bearers and/or photographers. The display of the name and/or logo of the bona fide supplier of clothing on the uniform strip of officials is also included. For the avoidance of doubt, advertising on the strip of Participating Players is excluded, other than where it is the trademark of the bona fide manufacturer and is in accordance with any FIFA and/or AFC regulations. Similarly, branding on any equipment, goods and/or services used in connection with the Competition, save where supplied by a Commercial Affiliate, may only include customary branding of the bona fide manufacturer.
AFC	Asian Football Confederation.
AFCAS	The AFC Administration System, the AFC's online competition management and registration system.
AFC Club Competitions Ranking	A technical ranking which ranks each Member Association based on its Clubs' sporting results in the AFC Champions League and AFC Cup.
AFC Commercial Rights Partner	The entity appointed by the AFC for the sale of Commercial Rights (or any part thereof) and the provision of services in relation thereto.

AFC Committee	Any Committee of the AFC as constituted in accordance with the AFC Statutes.
AFC Competitions Committee	The Standing Committee of the AFC which is responsible for matters relating to the Competition in accordance with the AFC Statutes and the AFC Organisation Regulations.
AFC Delegation	(i) AFC staff members; (ii) Match Officials; (iii) other officials appointed by the AFC; (iv) AFC Committee members; and (v) AFC guests.
AFC Marks	All design marks, slogans, designations, names, logos, insignia, emblems or devices (in any application) owned and/or controlled by the AFC (in any language) relating to the AFC itself but excluding the Competition Marks.
AFC Website	The official website of the AFC (currently <a href="http://www.the-AFC.com">http://www.the-AFC.com</a> ), including without limitation all other domains or official media platforms and channels created and/or owned by the AFC (e.g. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.).
Away Club	A Participating Club playing a Match in the Competition away from their home Stadium.
Broadcast Partner	Any entity, including the Host Broadcaster, which has been granted the Media Rights (or any part thereof) to the Competition.
Champion	The Participating Club that wins the final Match of the Competition.
Clean Stadium	A Stadium or Official Training Site whether inside, in the airspace above or the outer perimeter, delivered to the AFC at a prescribed time, that is free from: (i) any advertising and commercial signage of any kind, whether on any Stadium infrastructure, staff uniforms, accreditations, fences, equipment or elsewhere; (ii) third-party agreements relating to the use and operation of the Stadium (or part thereof); (iii) encumbrances that may affect the use and exploitation of the Commercial Rights; and/or (iv) Stadium or venue naming rights.
Club	A professional club or an amateur club which participates in Leagues or competitions under the auspices of a Football Association.
Commercial Affiliate	Any entity which has been granted the right to exercise and exploit the Commercial Rights (or any part thereof) in respect to the Competition.
Commercial Rights	Advertising Rights, Concession Rights, Hospitality Rights, Image Rights, Media Rights, Merchandise Rights, Promotional Rights, Sponsorship Rights, Travel and Tour Rights and any other rights of a commercial nature relating to the Competition.

Competition	The AFC Cup 2023/24™, which includes without limitation, all Matches as set out in the Match Schedule, including all Preliminary Stage and Playoff Stage Matches, all activities on the Field of Play (other than Matches), opening ceremonies, presentation or closing ceremonies, press conferences or Official Functions connected therewith.
Competition Data	Any and all information related to the Competition, including fixture lists, Image Rights, information and/or statistics about the Participating Clubs and/or Participating Players, information and/or statistics about their participation and/or performance in the Competition, Match analysis, Referee decisions, and any other information in relation to the Competition.
Competition Marks	All design marks, slogans, designations, names, logos, insignia, emblems, mascots or devices (in any application) owned and/or controlled by the AFC (in any language) relating to the Competition.
Competition Website	The official website of the Competition (if any) with a dedicated URL including without limitation all other domains or official media platforms and channels of the Competition created and/or owned by the AFC (e.g. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.).
Complimentary Tickets	Tickets which are supplied without charge.
Concession Rights	Sampling, vending, display and other distribution methods and payment methods connected therewith for and of products or services, including pourage rights at the Stadiums and Facility Areas.
Controlled Access Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) any Stadium;</li> <li>(ii) any Official Training Site;</li> <li>(iii) any official hotel (public areas being excepted), subject to and to the extent agreed in any executed hotel agreement;</li> <li>(iv) any official exclusion zone encircling a Stadium on a Match day;</li> <li>(v) any official parking area, accreditation centre, international broadcast compound, and/or hospitality area;</li> <li>(vi) the venue of any Official Function;</li> <li>(vii) any official AFC fan park;</li> <li>(viii) Facility Areas; and/or</li> <li>(ix) any other location and/or facility designated by the AFC as a Controlled Access Area, associated with the Competition to which access is permitted only to those in possession of an Accreditation Card, Ticket, and/or other officially-sanctioned entry permit.</li> </ul>
Digital Media	The AFC Website and any other authorised Competition Website, in addition to any mobile application (app), online video channel, data product, photo-sharing account, social media account, and any further form of digital media developed herewith.

Extra Time	Two (2) equal periods of additional time which shall be played in accordance with these Regulations should there be no winner at the conclusion of a Match.
Facility Areas	The location of Official Functions, ceremonies, press centres, Ticket offices, Competition hotels, media areas (including without limitation areas used for viewing of any public exhibition), sponsor village areas (including without limitation 'AFC fan park' areas, and areas used for the activation of the Commercial Rights), official hospitality areas (including without limitation areas used for the exploitation of the Hospitality Rights), and information centres controlled by or on behalf of the AFC and used in connection with the Competition whether at the Stadium or elsewhere at the Venues.
Field of Play	The area described in Law 1 of the Laws of the Game issued by the International Football Association Board ("IFAB") and administered by FIFA.
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association.
Final	The final Match of the Competition which determines the Champion.
Football Association	The controlling body for football within a country or territory recognised by the AFC.
Force Majeure	Any event affecting the performance of any provision of these Regulations arising from or attributable to acts, events, omissions or accidents which are beyond the reasonable control of a party. This shall include, without limitation, abnormally inclement weather, flood, lightning, storm, fire, explosion, earthquake, structural damage, power supplies shortage/failure, war, terrorist action, military operations, riot, crowd disorder, strike, lock-outs or other industrial action, or civil commotion, epidemic or pandemic.
Group Stage	The third stage of the Competition held in accordance with these Regulations.
Hospitality Rights	The opportunity to offer and sell hospitality and entertainment services at the Venues or within the Controlled Access Areas in combination with the Tickets whether such facilities are in boxes, marquees or otherwise, but excluding those non-commercial functions and facilities reserved for AFC and/or Host Club officials and its guests not forming part of the Commercial Rights.
Host Broadcaster	The party appointed to ensure and provide the production of broadcast signals of the Matches and other events of the Competition, and the provision of all related services in accordance with the Media Rights granted to it.
Host Association	A Member Association approved by the AFC to organise, host and stage Matches in the Competition.
Host City	Any city and/or identifiable metropolitan area in which any Match is staged.
Host Club	A Participating Club which is approved by the AFC to organise, host and stage Matches in the Competition in collaboration with the respective Host Association.

Image Rights	The right to use still and/or moving images and/or representations of Participating Clubs, Participating Players, Participating Officials, Match Officials and other officials and persons forming part of the Competition.
International Competition	An international football competition organised by the AFC in conjunction with other continental football confederations and/or by FIFA in conjunction with other continental football confederations.
Kicks from the Penalty Mark	'Kicks from the Penalty Mark' as described in the Laws of the Game.
Knockout Stage	The fourth stage of the Competition held in accordance with these Regulations.
Laws of the Game	The laws of association football issued by the IFAB.
League	A professional league and/or amateur league which consists of a combination of Clubs within the territory of a Football Association and which is subordinate to and under the authority of that Football Association.
Manual	The AFC Competition Operations Manual which sets out the operational responsibilities of the relevant stakeholders in relation to the organising, hosting and staging of Matches and Competitions.
Match	A football match in its entirety (including a replayed and/or deferred football match, Extra Time and Kicks from the Penalty Mark) which takes place as part of the Competition in accordance with the Match Schedule. For the avoidance of doubt, a match formally commences when the Stadium is officially opened to spectators and formally concludes when the Stadium is officially closed to spectators.
Match Contribution	The payment made to a Participating Club for its participation in a Match as a travel contribution.
Match Officials	Any individual appointed to officiate a Match in the Competition in the role of the Referee, Assistant Referee, Fourth Official, Video Assistant Referee (VAR), Assistant Video Assistant Referee (AVAR), and any other Match Official stipulated in the Laws of the Game.
Match Schedule	The official schedule which sets out, without limitation, the dates and times on which Matches will be played, the Stadiums at which the Matches will be played, and the names of the Participating Clubs.
Media	Any individual granted a media Accreditation Card by the AFC.

Media Rights	The right and licence to produce, edit and/or transmit, for intelligible reception throughout the world in any language and in any format, and on any platform including film, fixed media, Digital Media, games, internet, public exhibition, radio, mobile, and television, a visual, audio-visual, and/or audio signal and/or image or recording (including without limitation the basic feed, multi feeds, additional feeds, audio feeds, a feed incorporating Competition Data, world feed, and unilateral feeds) of the Competition, and all interview activities and action during and forming part of the Competition including Official Functions and the Image Rights by any and all means of transmission distribution, exhibition and reception, now existing or hereinafter developed including but not limited to analogue, digital, satellite, cable and interactive communication systems, on a live, delayed, and unlimited repeat basis, in full or in part (including without limitation by way of clips and/or highlights and/or support programmes and/or magazine shows and/or news access), and all rights to exploit any and all commercial opportunities (including for example broadcast sponsorship and commercial airtime opportunities) arising from and/or in connection with such rights.
Member Association	A Football Association which is a member of the AFC.
Merchandise Rights	The right granted to Commercial Affiliates for the use and exploitation of the Competition Marks and/or official designation in the manufacture, packaging, distribution, and sale of goods and services of all kinds, including items of equipment (e.g. footballs), clothing, coins, medals, games (electronic or otherwise), other collectibles and Premiums related to the Competition.
Neutral Venue	Any Stadium utilised for a Match which is not the regular home Stadium or Venue utilised by the Participating Club designated as the Host Club, unless expressly authorised by the AFC. The designation of a Stadium as a Neutral Venue must be expressly authorised by the AFC in accordance with these Regulations.
Official Function	Any event which is officially organised or sanctioned by the AFC in connection with the Competition. For the avoidance of doubt, this expressly includes, without limitation, all Matches and/or events held at Official Training Sites, the opening ceremony, the closing ceremony, any AFC gala dinner, lunch, or banquet, cultural events, official press conferences, official draws, workshops and launch events.
Official Training Site	Any site designated by the Host Club in collaboration with the respective Host Association and approved by the AFC for use by the Participating Clubs throughout the Competition for training purposes.
Participating Club	A Club which is approved by the AFC to participate in the Competition.
Participating Official	Any official who is registered to participate in the Competition.
Participating Player	Any player who is registered to participate in the Competition.

Playoff Stage	The second stage of the Competition held in accordance with these Regulations.
Preliminary Stage	The first stage of the Competition held in accordance with these Regulations.
Premiums	Any promotional items (including packaging, labelling, and/or containers thereof) which incorporate any mark and/or logo of the AFC and/or any Competition Mark, and which may only be distributed free of charge or as prizes.
Promotional Rights	Any advertising and/or promotions which are carried out in connection with the Competition, Competition Marks, or other rights/opportunities granted by the AFC.
Proprietary Interests	Without limitation, intellectual property, copyright and analogous rights, trademark rights, moral rights, performing rights, personality rights, and all remedies available under the applicable laws of unfair competition comprised in the Commercial Rights.
Regulations	These Competition Regulations.
Sponsorship Rights	<p>The right, in any and all media, throughout the world, and in all languages, to promote an association between the Competition and certain products, services, and/or brands, and shall include (by way of illustration only) the exclusive right to exercise rights of association with the Competition, including without limitation the rights to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) use an official designation;</li> <li>(ii) use the AFC Marks and/or applicable Competition Marks on branded products and/or product packaging (including Premiums, and in relation to the Competition Marks only on items for retail sale) and/or advertising;</li> <li>(iii) receive commercial programme Tickets; and</li> <li>(iv) receive broadcast sponsorship opportunities in connection with broadcasts of a Match or Official Function.</li> </ul>

Stadium	<p>Any stadium at which a Match is played. For the avoidance of doubt, this includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(i) the entire premises (to the extent that a valid Accreditation Card or Ticket is required in order to gain access) of a stadium facility inside the outer stadium perimeter fence and (on Match days and any day on which any official training takes place within the stadium), the aerial space above such stadium premises;</li><li>(ii) parking facilities;</li><li>(iii) VIP and hospitality areas (including any hospitality village);</li><li>(iv) concession areas;</li><li>(v) commercial display areas;</li><li>(vi) buildings;</li><li>(vii) the Field of Play;</li><li>(viii) the Media tribune;</li><li>(ix) any broadcast compound;</li><li>(x) the stadium media centre;</li><li>(xi) the press conference room;</li><li>(xii) the mixed zone;</li><li>(xiii) any stands; and</li><li>(xiv) any areas beneath the stands.</li></ul>
Team Official Delegation	The final-registered delegation of a Participating Club for each Match of the relevant stage of the Competition subject to the limits set out in these Regulations.
Team Technical Seats	The seats located in the stands behind the technical area with access to the Field of Play and team dressing rooms.
Ticket	A pass providing access to a Venue for the purpose of attending either a Match, official training, or Official Function.
Ticketing	All operational measures to provide Tickets to all spectators of every Match and for Official Functions of the Competition allowing them to enter the Stadium or a Venue. Ticketing shall include the management of the operation necessary for the production, sale, distribution, delivery and payment of the Tickets of the Competition.
Travel and Tour Rights	The right to organise and/or sub-license official travel and tour activities in relation to the Competition, which travel and tour activities shall, for the avoidance of doubt, include the provision of Tickets to a Match and/or Official Functions of the Competition.
Venue	The Host City and immediate surrounding area in which a Stadium is located.

For the purposes of these Regulations, and provided the context so permits:

- (a) the singular shall include the plural and vice-versa;
- (b) the feminine gender shall include the masculine and vice-versa;
- (c) reference to natural persons shall include any legal person or corporation;
- (d) references to the AFC shall include its successors and permitted assigns, and where the context requires, the AFC Committees;
- (e) reference to the AFC Commercial Rights Partner or Commercial Affiliates shall include where advised by the AFC, their successors and permitted assigns; and
- (f) all defined terms, unless otherwise stated herein shall bear the same meaning as ascribed in the AFC Statutes and the Manual, unless the context indicates otherwise.

## SECTION 1: GENERAL PROVISIONS

### 1. AFC Cup 2023/24

- 1.1. The AFC stages the AFC Cup annually for Participating Clubs.
- 1.2. These Regulations govern the rights, duties, and responsibilities of the AFC, the Participating Clubs (as well as their Member Associations and Leagues), Host Associations, Participating Players and Participating Officials taking part in the Competition.
- 1.3. These Regulations and all related directives, decisions, guidelines, and circulars issued by the AFC shall be binding upon all parties participating and involved in the preparation, organisation, and hosting of Matches in the Competition.
- 1.4. The Manual forms an integral part of and shall be read in conjunction with these Regulations. The Manual shall be binding upon all parties participating and involved in the preparation, organisation, and hosting of Matches in the Competition. Failure to adhere to any matter set out in the Manual may lead to the imposition of sanctions as set out in the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code. In the event of any discrepancy between these Regulations and the Manual, these Regulations shall prevail to the extent of the inconsistency.
- 1.5. Any rights and Proprietary Interests associated with the Competition that are not granted by these Regulations and/or specific agreements to any Member Association and/or any Participating Club shall vest in the AFC.
- 1.6. Any reference to the AFC Statutes and to the AFC and FIFA regulations refer to those valid at the time of application.

### 2. The Asian Football Confederation

- 2.1. The AFC Competitions Committee shall be responsible for organising the Competition in accordance with the AFC Statutes. The AFC General Secretariat shall carry out the necessary administrative work in support of the AFC Competitions Committee.
- 2.2. The responsibilities of the AFC shall include, but are not limited to:
  - 2.2.1. supervising general preparations and deciding on the Competition format, the draws, and the entries to the Competition;
  - 2.2.2. determining the Match Schedule (*cf.* Article 11);
  - 2.2.3. selecting Stadiums for the Competition after consultation with the Participating Clubs and their Member Associations (*cf.* Article 14);
  - 2.2.4. appointing Match Officials and AFC Delegation for each Match;
  - 2.2.5. choosing and/or approving the official football and stipulated technical material;

- 2.2.6. approving the choice of WADA-accredited laboratories that will carry out doping analyses (*cf.* Article 50);
- 2.2.7. reporting cases where appropriate to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee (*cf.* Article 59);
- 2.2.8. replacing Participating Clubs that have withdrawn from the Competition (*cf.* Article 5);
- 2.2.9. dealing with cases of cancelled Matches or abandoned Matches (*cf.* Articles 12 and 13);
- 2.2.10. dealing with cases of Force Majeure (*cf.* Article 69);
- 2.2.11. providing insurance coverage for the AFC Delegation appointed to any Match from the time of their departure from their home Member Association to their departure from the Venue (*cf.* Article 51); and
- 2.2.12. dealing with any other aspect of the Competition that is not the responsibility of any other body pursuant to these Regulations or the AFC Statutes (*cf.* Article 70).

2.3. All decisions made by the AFC Competitions Committee and/or AFC General Secretariat in relation to the Competition are final and binding and not appealable.

2.4. All decisions made by the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee in relation to the Competition are subject to the operation of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.

2.5. All decisions made by the AFC Entry Control Body in relation to the Competition are subject to the operation of the Procedural Rules Governing the AFC Entry Control Body.

### 3. Participating Clubs and Member Associations

3.1. The principal obligations and responsibilities of each Participating Club and its Member Association are stipulated in the Participating Team Agreement ("PTA"), these Regulations, the Manual, the AFC Statutes, and all other AFC regulations, directives, guidelines and circulars.

- 3.1.1. Each Participating Club that has qualified for the Competition must submit a PTA.
- 3.1.2. The PTA and other such documents as requested by the AFC in relation to the PTA shall be completed and submitted to the AFC via AFCAS in accordance with the deadline provided by the AFC.
- 3.1.3. Failure to submit a validly completed PTA to the AFC by the deadline shall result in the non-participation of the relevant Participating Club.

3.2. Each Participating Club shall ensure as a condition of its participation in the Competition that every member of its Team Official Delegation for each Match is aware of and agrees to comply with the PTA.

- 3.3. Each Participating Club shall undertake to:
  - 3.3.1. observe all obligations set out in the PTA, these Regulations, the Manual, the AFC Statutes, and all other AFC regulations, directives, guidelines and circulars, and applicable national and supra-national laws;
  - 3.3.2. comply with the Laws of the Game;
  - 3.3.3. accept that all the administrative, disciplinary and refereeing matters connected with the Competition shall be settled by the AFC in compliance with these Regulations;
  - 3.3.4. field its strongest team throughout the Competition;
  - 3.3.5. observe the principles of fair play;
  - 3.3.6. ensure the good conduct of its Team Official Delegation and of any person carrying out duties on its behalf throughout the Competition, which includes but is not limited to their arrival on the territory of any Host Association until their departure;
  - 3.3.7. as Host Club, make the appropriate arrangements for the staging of Matches in conjunction with its Member Association and the AFC General Secretariat in accordance with these Regulations and any instructions from the AFC;
  - 3.3.8. accept all arrangements made by any Host Club and/or Host Association in agreement with the AFC;
  - 3.3.9. ensure that its Participating Players and Participating Officials attend and participate in all official activities and events, including without limitation any team arrival meeting, match coordination meeting, press conference, and other media and marketing activities in accordance with the instructions issued by the AFC;
    - 3.3.9.1. failure to attend and/or fully participate in any official activity or event shall result in the Participating Club being fined at least USD5,000; and
    - 3.3.9.2. the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may issue further sanctions at its discretion.
  - 3.3.10. provide to the AFC, free of charge, prior to the Competition, any photographs, audio/visual materials and/or information regarding the Participating Club, Participating Players and/or Participating Officials including without limitation statistics and historical information and any further information as requested by the AFC;
  - 3.3.11. link the official URL for the Competition on its official website; and
  - 3.3.12. not establish any digital, media or social media platform in connection with the Competition without the involvement and express approval of the AFC.

3.4. Each Participating Club and its Member Association shall, at their own expense, be solely responsible throughout the Competition for:

3.4.1. the insurance coverage for:

3.4.1.1. its Team Official Delegation which shall include without limitation hospital and surgical insurance, travel insurance, and sports equipment insurance for all Matches;

3.4.1.2. its approved Stadium. A release of liability must be signed and returned to the AFC at least thirty (30) days before the start of the Competition. If such an indemnification is not received in due time, the Host Club agrees that the necessary insurance coverage may be concluded by the AFC and expensed to the Host Club;

3.4.2. all other necessary insurance policies, which must provide an appropriate guaranteed sum for injury and damage to persons, objects, and property, and correspond with the specific circumstances of the Participating Club. Such policies must cover all risks connected with the organising, hosting, and staging of Matches in the Competition, exempt the AFC from all claims and liabilities, and name the AFC as a co-insured. The AFC must be notified of all insurance policies and may request copies of any and all policies at its discretion;

3.4.3. payment of incidental expenses and for any costs incurred by its Team Official Delegation (*cf.* Article 51);

3.4.4. payment of any costs of extending the stay of any member of its Team Official Delegation in any Host Association (*cf.* Article 51);

3.4.5. obtaining visas to enter the territory of any Host Association. This includes all costs related to the visa application process;

3.4.6. payment of all taxes, fees, duties and any other costs related to the importation and/or exportation of equipment, merchandise and/or goods to be used for the Competition; and

3.4.7. guaranteeing safety and security at its Stadium (*cf.* Articles 14 and 47).

3.5. Each Participating Club and/or its Member Association shall indemnify, defend, and hold the AFC and all of its officers, directors, employees, representatives, agents, subsidiaries, local organising committees and all other auxiliary persons free and harmless against any and all liabilities, obligations, losses, damages, penalties, claims, actions, fines, and expenses (including reasonable legal expenses) of whatsoever kind or nature resulting from, arising out of, or attributable to, any non-compliance with these Regulations by the Participating Club and/or its Member Association, its Team Official Delegation, its affiliates and any third-parties contracted to the Participating Club and/or its Member Association.

- 3.6. The Member Association of the Host Club is responsible for nominating a Local General Coordinator, a Local Media Officer and a Local Safety and Security Officer for each Match that is played within its territory and shall submit the nomination to the AFC for the AFC's approval (together with the Venue information) in accordance with the deadline(s) notified by the AFC. Should a Match be played at a Neutral Venue, the Member Association of the Host Club shall still be held accountable for the relevant nomination, and this must be done in collaboration with the Member Association on whose territory the Match is played.
- 3.7. Each Participating Club shall arrive at the Venue for an away Match at least two (2) days before the Match and depart from the Venue no later than one (1) day after the Match.
  - 3.7.1. Should an Away Club wish to arrive at the Venue only one (1) day before the relevant Match, it shall submit a request via an official letter to the AFC with valid reasons and arrival flight itinerary details at least seven (7) days prior to the Match for the AFC's approval (to be accepted at its sole discretion).
  - 3.7.2. Should the AFC accept such a request, the late arrival of the relevant Club shall not interrupt the timing of Official Functions and/or the participation of the relevant Participating Club in Official Functions.
  - 3.7.3. The requirements and timings set out in Article 3.7 shall also apply to any Host Club which is hosting a home Match at a Neutral Venue.
  - 3.7.4. Participating Clubs shall not play in any non-official matches when travelling to and from the Venue of an away Match.
- 3.8. It is acknowledged that one or more Participating Clubs may qualify directly for one or more International Competitions as a result of their performance in the Competition. Where applicable, each such Participating Club undertakes to participate in the relevant International Competition(s).
- 3.9. Participating Clubs are not authorised to represent the AFC or the Competition without the prior written approval of the AFC.
- 3.10. All Participating Players and Participating Officials are encouraged to attend the AFC Annual Awards in the relevant calendar year if they are nominated for an award.
- 3.11. Each Participating Club and its Member Association shall ensure that any decision made by the AFC relating to its duties and responsibilities is enforced immediately.

### 4. Entry

- 4.1. Entry to the Competition is governed by the Entry Manual for AFC Club Competitions ("Entry Manual"). To be eligible to participate in the Competition, Clubs must meet the requirements set out in the Entry Manual.

- 4.2. All decisions regarding entry to the Competition are subject to the provisions set out in the Entry Manual and the jurisdiction of the AFC Entry Control Body as set out in the Procedural Rules Governing the AFC Entry Control Body.
- 4.3. Eligible Clubs must complete a PTA and submit it to the AFC in accordance with Article 3 to confirm their entry into the Competition.
  - 4.3.1. The name and logo of a Participating Club shall be the same as the name and logo submitted to the AFC General Secretariat for the purposes of complying with the club licensing criteria set out in the Entry Manual.
  - 4.3.2. The name and/or logo of a Participating Club shall not directly refer to the name and/or logo of any third-party entity, whether or not that third-party entity is a commercial partner or sponsor of the Participating Club.
  - 4.3.3. The AFC may grant an exception to Article 4.3.2 if one (1) of the following requirements are met:
    - 4.3.3.1. the name of the Participating Club is a pre-existing name with long-term use. The third-party entity must have been directly involved in the creation of the Participating Club itself (by financial or other means); or
    - 4.3.3.2. the Participating Club previously competed in an AFC competition utilising the name.
- 4.4. Participating Clubs are not permitted to change their name after the first Match in the Competition has been played.

## 5. Withdrawal from the Competition

- 5.1. All Participating Clubs undertake that they shall play all their Matches in the Competition until elimination.
- 5.2. Without limitation, any Participating Club that (for any reason):
  - 5.2.1. informs the AFC in writing that it does not intend to or is unable to report to a Venue and/or for a Match;
  - 5.2.2. fails to report to a Venue and/or for a Match;
  - 5.2.3. refuses or fails to continue a Match;
  - 5.2.4. leaves the Stadium prior to the completion of a Match;
  - 5.2.5. is excluded, suspended or banned by any competent body from participating in the Competition (or any stage of the Competition) at any time after the draw for the Competition (or stage, as appropriate); or

5.2.6. is excluded, suspended or banned by any competent body from participating in any Match in the Competition at any time after the relevant Match has been scheduled,

shall be considered to have withdrawn from the Competition.

5.3. Subject to Articles 5.5 to 5.8, the AFC Competitions Committee shall be responsible for making the necessary decisions where a Participating Club withdraws from the Competition, whether before or after commencement of the Competition (as applicable), and shall be entitled to take any action it considers appropriate in such circumstances, including without limitation regarding whether or not to change the technical regulations (*cf.* Section 4) and/or the competition system (*cf.* Article 6) and, where applicable, the means of effecting such change(s).

5.4. The AFC Competitions Committee shall be responsible for determining events of Force Majeure in connection with any withdrawal and shall, subject to Articles 5.5 to 5.8, be entitled to take any action it considers appropriate in such circumstances. Any Participating Club that wishes to put forward a case of Force Majeure for the consideration of the AFC Competitions Committee must do so in writing (with supporting evidence) no later than thirty (30) days after the date of its withdrawal. The AFC General Secretariat may put forward cases of Force Majeure for the consideration of the AFC Competitions Committee at any time at its discretion.

5.5. In the event that a Participating Club withdraws from the Competition, whether before or after commencement of the Competition (as applicable), the Competition shall continue with the remaining Participating Clubs and Matches without any replacement.

For the avoidance of doubt, this Article 5.5 shall apply in all instances and is applicable even in cases of Force Majeure determined by the AFC Competitions Committee.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the AFC General Secretariat may, at its discretion, put forward a request to replace the relevant Participating Club and, where applicable, the means of effecting such replacement, for the consideration of the AFC Competitions Committee, in which case the AFC Competitions Committee shall be entitled to take a decision on the matter.

5.6. Any Participating Club that withdraws from the Competition after it has commenced shall have all its Matches cancelled and considered null and void. All points and goals in those Matches shall not be taken into consideration when determining the final rankings in a group pursuant to Article 8.3.

For the avoidance of doubt, this Article 5.6 shall apply in all instances and is applicable even in cases of Force Majeure determined by the AFC Competitions Committee.

5.7. Any Participating Club that has been considered to have withdrawn from the Competition whether before or after commencement of the Competition (as applicable), shall be:

5.7.1. disqualified from participating in the next two (2) seasons of AFC club competitions; and

5.7.2. where relevant, disqualified from participating in any tournament organised under Article 3.8, if qualification has been attained.

This Article 5.7 is not applicable in cases of Force Majeure determined by the AFC Competitions Committee but shall apply in all other instances.

5.8. Where any Participating Club fails to comply with Article 5.1 and withdraws from the Competition at any stage, the case shall be referred to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee.

In this regard, any Participating Club that withdraws from the Competition:

5.8.1. before it has commenced, shall be fined:

5.8.1.1. at least USD10,000 if its withdrawal occurred thirty (30) days or more before its first Match in the Competition; or

5.8.1.2. at least USD20,000 if its withdrawal occurred less than thirty (30) days before its first Match in the Competition.

5.8.2. after it has commenced, shall be fined:

5.8.2.1. at least USD25,000 if its withdrawal occurred after the commencement of the Preliminary Stage; or

5.8.2.2. at least USD30,000 if its withdrawal occurred after the commencement of the Playoff Stage; or

5.8.2.3. at least USD50,000 if its withdrawal occurred after the commencement of the Group Stage; or

5.8.2.4. at least USD100,000 if its withdrawal occurred after the commencement of the Knockout Stage.

In addition, in all instances, the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee shall order the relevant Participating Club to return to the AFC any subsidy that has been paid in support of its participation in the Competition (or, if not yet paid, to forfeit its right to that subsidy) and to pay compensation for any and all damages or losses suffered by, where applicable, the other Participating Clubs, the AFC, the AFC Commercial Rights Partner, Commercial Affiliates and the Organising Associations. The amount of compensation shall be determined by the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee.

This Article 5.8 is not applicable in cases of Force Majeure determined by the AFC Competitions Committee, but shall apply in all other instances.

5.9. All decisions of the AFC Competitions Committee under Articles 5.3 to 5.5 shall be final and binding and not appealable.

## SECTION 2 : COMPETITION SYSTEM AND MATCH SCHEDULE

### 6. Competition System

- 6.1. The Competition shall consist of four (4) stages:
  - 6.1.1. the Preliminary Stage;
  - 6.1.2. the Playoff Stage;
  - 6.1.3. the Group Stage; and
  - 6.1.4. the Knockout Stage.
- 6.2. Participating Clubs shall be divided into five (5) zones in accordance with the geographic zones identified in the AFC Statutes as follows:
  - 6.2.1. Participating Clubs from the West zone shall form the ACC West Zone ("West Zone").
  - 6.2.2. Participating Clubs from the South zone shall form the ACC South Zone ("South Zone").
  - 6.2.3. Participating Clubs from the Central zone shall form the ACC Central Zone ("Central Zone").
  - 6.2.4. Participating Clubs from the ASEAN zone shall form the ACC ASEAN Zone ("ASEAN Zone").
  - 6.2.5. Participating Clubs from the East zone shall form the ACC East Zone ("East Zone").
  - 6.2.6. Participating Clubs shall play against other Participating Clubs within the same zone except for the Inter-Zone Semi Finals, Inter-Zone Final and Final.
  - 6.2.7. The AFC General Secretariat may decide to exceptionally depart from this system, taking into account sporting, geographic, and economic factors. The Entry Manual may provide further information.
- 6.3. The Entry Manual sets out the principles to determine the number of slots allocated to the Clubs of eligible Member Associations in the Preliminary Stage, Playoff Stage and Group Stage in accordance with the AFC Club Competitions Ranking. The AFC Competitions Committee shall decide upon the format of the competition system.
- 6.4. Depending on the number of entries, or in the case of withdrawal or suspension of any Participating Clubs, the AFC Competitions Committee may change the competition system and/or technical rules. Such decisions are final and binding and not appealable.

## 7. Preliminary Stage and Playoff Stage

- 7.1. Each round of the Preliminary Stage and Playoff Stage shall consist of Participating Clubs tied in pairings depending on the number of Participating Clubs, with each pairing played in a single-leg knockout format.
  - 7.1.1. Participating Clubs from the same Member Association shall not be paired against each other.
  - 7.1.2. The Participating Club from the higher-ranked Member Association pursuant to the AFC Club Competitions Ranking shall host the Match.
- 7.2. For each round of the Preliminary Stage and Playoff Stage, Participating Clubs shall play one (1) Match each in accordance with the Match Schedule.
- 7.3. At the conclusion of each round of the Preliminary Stage:
  - 7.3.1. the winners shall qualify for the next round of the Preliminary Stage. If it is the final round of the Preliminary Stage, the relevant Participating Clubs shall qualify for the Playoff Stage; and
  - 7.3.2. the losers shall be eliminated from the Competition.
- 7.4. At the conclusion of the Playoff Stage:
  - 7.4.1. the winners shall qualify for the Group Stage; and
  - 7.4.2. the losers shall be eliminated from the Competition.

## 8. Group Stage

- 8.1. The Group Stage shall consist of thirty-six (36) Participating Clubs, drawn into nine (9) groups of four (4) teams each, with each group played in a home and away league format.
  - 8.1.1. Three (3) groups shall contain Participating Clubs from the West Zone.
  - 8.1.2. Three (3) groups shall contain Participating Clubs from the ASEAN Zone.
  - 8.1.3. One (1) group shall contain Participating Clubs from the South Zone.
  - 8.1.4. One (1) group shall contain Participating Clubs from the Central Zone.
  - 8.1.5. One (1) group shall contain Participating Clubs from the East Zone.
  - 8.1.6. Notwithstanding the above, additional groups may be added to the Group Stage in accordance with the Entry Manual.

- 8.1.7. Participating Clubs from the same Member Association shall not be drawn in the same group, with the exception of Participating Clubs from zones with only one (1) group.
- 8.2. Participating Clubs shall play one (1) home and one (1) away Match against each Participating Club within its group in accordance with the Match Schedule.
- 8.3. The ranking in each group shall be determined in accordance with Article 1 of the Manual and in descending order as follows:
  - 8.3.1. higher number of points obtained in all group Matches;
  - 8.3.2. if two (2) or more Participating Clubs are equal on points, the following criteria are applied to determine the ranking (in descending order):
    - Head-to-Head Criteria**
      - 8.3.2.1. higher number of points obtained in the group Matches played among the Participating Clubs in question;
      - 8.3.2.2. superior goal difference from the group Matches played among the Participating Clubs in question;
      - 8.3.2.3. higher number of goals scored in the group Matches played among the Participating Clubs in question;
    - Tiebreaker**
      - 8.3.2.4. if, after having applied the Head-to-Head criteria, two (2) or more Participating Clubs still have an equal ranking, the Head-to-Head criteria shall be reapplied exclusively to the Matches between the Participating Clubs in question to determine their final rankings. If this procedure does not lead to a decision, the Group Results Criteria shall apply;
    - Group Results Criteria**
      - 8.3.2.5. superior goal difference from all group Matches played;
      - 8.3.2.6. higher number of goals scored from all group Matches played;
      - 8.3.2.7. Kicks from the Penalty Mark if only two (2) Participating Clubs still have an equal ranking and have played their last group Match against each other;
      - 8.3.2.8. the lower score calculated according to the number of yellow and red cards received in the group Matches (Appendix 1 of the Manual);
      - 8.3.2.9. the Participating Club from the Member Association with the higher AFC Club Competitions Ranking; or

8.3.2.10. should two (2) Participating Clubs from the same Member Association be drawn in the same group and the ranking cannot be determined after having applied all of the above procedures, the final ranking between the Participating Clubs in question shall be determined by drawing lots.

8.4. Should the competition system require the best-ranked Participating Clubs from among different groups to advance, the rankings shall be determined by the method set out in Appendix 2 of the Manual.

8.5. At the conclusion of the Group Stage:

- 8.5.1. for zones with only one (1) group, the first-placed Participating Clubs in each group shall be declared the champion of its zone ("Zonal Champion") and qualify for the Inter-Zone Semi Finals;
- 8.5.2. for zones with two (2) groups, the first-placed Participating Clubs in each group shall qualify for the Zonal Final of its zone;
- 8.5.3. for zones with three (3) groups, the first-placed Participating Clubs in each group, as well as the best second-placed Participating Club among all groups in the same zone, shall qualify for the Zonal Semi Finals of its zone; and
- 8.5.4. all other Participating Clubs shall be eliminated from the Competition.

## 9. Knockout Stage

9.1. The Knockout Stage shall consist of the Zonal Semi Finals, Zonal Finals, Inter-Zone Semi Finals, Inter-Zone Finals, and the Final. Each round shall be played in a home and away knockout format, except for the ASEAN Zonal Semi Finals, ASEAN Zonal Final and Final, which shall be played in a single-leg knockout format in accordance with the Match Schedule.

9.2. The Participating Clubs shall play against other Participating Clubs within the same zone in the Zonal Semi Finals and Zonal Finals. The Participating Clubs shall play against other Participating Clubs from different zones in the Inter-Zone Semi Finals and Inter-Zone Finals.

9.3. For zones with three (3) groups:

- 9.3.1. The four (4) Participating Clubs that qualify from the Group Stage shall play the Zonal Semi Finals of its zone as follows depending on which best second-placed Participating Club qualifies:

	<u>2A Qualifies</u>	<u>2B Qualifies</u>	<u>2C Qualifies</u>
ZSF1	1C vs 1A*	1A vs 1B*	1B vs 1C*
ZSF2	2A vs 1B	2B vs 1C	2C vs 1A

- 9.3.1.1. The table above shall apply to the relevant groups in accordance with the Match Schedule following the same alphabetical order.
- 9.3.1.2. For Zonal Semi Finals to be played in a home and away knockout format, the winners of each group shall host the second leg. In case two (2) group winners are paired to play against each other, the Participating Club marked (\*) in the table above shall host the second leg (e.g. if 2A qualifies, 1C shall be paired against 1A; and 1C shall host the first leg while 1A shall host the second leg).
- 9.3.1.3. For Zonal Semi Finals to be played in a single-leg knockout format, the winners of each group shall host the Match. In case two (2) group winners are paired to play against each other, the Participating Club marked (\*) in the table above shall host the Match (e.g. if 2B qualifies, 1A shall be paired against 1B; and 1B shall host the Match).
- 9.3.2. The two (2) winners of the Zonal Semi Finals shall play in the Zonal Final of its zone. The winner of each Zonal Final shall be declared the Zonal Champion of its zone.
- 9.4. For zones with two (2) groups, the two (2) Participating Clubs that qualify from the Group Stage shall play in the Zonal Final of its zone. The winner of each Zonal Final shall be declared the Zonal Champion of its zone.
- 9.5. The four (4) Zonal Champions of the South Zone, Central Zone, ASEAN Zone and East Zone shall be drawn to play in the Inter-Zone Semi Finals. The two (2) winners of the Inter-Zone Semi Finals shall play in the Inter-Zone Final.
- 9.6. The sequence of hosting the Zonal Finals, Inter-Zone Semi Finals and Inter Zone Finals shall be determined during the official draw for the Knockout Stage.
- 9.7. The Zonal Champion of the West Zone and the winner of the Inter-Zone Final shall play in the Final.
  - 9.7.1. The sequence of hosting the Final is determined on a rotation basis between the West Zone and the rest of the zones (i.e., for seasons beginning in odd years the Final shall be hosted in the West Zone by the finalist Participating Club from the West Zone and for seasons beginning in even years the Final shall be hosted by the finalist Participating Club which is not from the West Zone in the zone to which it is affiliated).

## 10. Extra Time and Kicks from the Penalty Mark

- 10.1. If no winner is determined at the end of normal playing time in any Match in the Preliminary Stage, Playoff Stage, ASEAN Zonal Semi Finals, ASEAN Final, the second match of any tie in the Knockout Stage or Final, Extra Time comprising two (2) periods of fifteen (15) minutes each shall be played.

- 10.2. Extra Time shall be played after an interval of five (5) minutes at the end of normal playing time. A short drink break (which should not exceed one [1] minute) is permitted at the interval of half-time in Extra Time.
- 10.3. One (1) additional substitute and one (1) additional substitution opportunity may be used when a Match goes into Extra Time (whether or not the Participating Club has already used the full number of permitted substitutes and opportunities).
- 10.4. If no winner is determined at the end of Extra Time, Kicks from the Penalty Mark shall be taken in accordance with the Laws of the Game and the Manual.

## 11. Match Schedule

- 11.1. All Matches shall be played in accordance with the AFC Competitions Calendar. The dates are final and binding and not appealable.
  - 11.1.1. The AFC shall propose the kick-off times to the Participating Clubs. Should a Participating Club wish to change the kick-off time, it must submit a valid reason in writing to the AFC for its approval.
  - 11.1.2. Where necessary for sporting reasons and taking into consideration the time zones and/or Stadium availability, Matches in the same group of the Group Stage may be played simultaneously.
  - 11.1.3. All kick-off times shall be determined by the AFC General Secretariat, taking into consideration sporting, organisational (including safety and security), marketing and broadcasting matters.
- 11.2. The Match Schedule shall be determined following the official draw for the relevant stages of the Competition. The date and format of the official draws shall be determined by the AFC General Secretariat.
- 11.3. The AFC General Secretariat retains final discretion to amend the Match Schedule at any time.

## 12. Cancellation of Matches

- 12.1. For any Match which is cancelled as a result of Force Majeure, the AFC Competitions Committee shall decide on the matter at its sole discretion and take whatever action is deemed necessary.
  - 12.1.1. Decisions made pursuant to Article 12.1 are final and binding and not appealable.
- 12.2. Any Match which is cancelled, except in cases of Force Majeure recognised by the AFC Competitions Committee, may lead to the imposition of sanctions by the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee against the relevant party that caused the cancellation in accordance with the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.

- 12.3. If a Match cannot commence for any reason, the procedure described in Article 7 of the Manual shall be followed.

## 13. Abandonment of Matches

- 13.1. For any Match which is abandoned as a result of Force Majeure, the AFC Competitions Committee shall decide on the matter at its sole discretion and take whatever action is deemed necessary.
  - 13.1.1. Decisions made pursuant to Article 13.1 are final and binding and not appealable.
- 13.2. Any Match which is abandoned, except in cases of Force Majeure recognised by the AFC Competitions Committee, may lead to the imposition of sanctions by the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee against the relevant party that caused the abandonment in accordance with the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.
- 13.3. If a Match is stopped by the Referee for any reason, the procedure described in Article 8 of the Manual shall be followed.

## SECTION 3 : STADIUMS AND OFFICIAL TRAINING SITES

### 14. Stadiums

- 14.1. Each Participating Club shall nominate the Stadium to be utilised for its home Matches when entering the Competition. All Stadiums must comply with the AFC Stadium Regulations and all other applicable AFC regulations. The AFC General Secretariat makes the final decision to approve any Stadium to host Matches in the Competition and may carry out inspections at any time before and during the Competition to check whether the requirements are met. All costs related to the inspection shall be borne by the relevant Participating Club.
  - 14.1.1. The Stadium nominated shall be the normal home stadium of the Participating Club for matches in its League, unless otherwise instructed by the AFC.
  - 14.1.2. The AFC reserves the right to refuse the nomination of a Stadium and require a Participating Club to play its Matches in a different Stadium within the same Venue or territory of its Member Association, or alternatively at a Neutral Venue in accordance with Articles 14.3 and 14.4.
- 14.2. Each Participating Club must play their home Matches in the one and only Stadium approved by the AFC throughout the Competition.
  - 14.2.1. A Participating Club cannot change its Stadium during the Competition unless it is forced to do so due to circumstances beyond its control.
  - 14.2.2. Should a Participating Club wish to change its Stadium during the Competition, it must provide evidence to the AFC, including without limitation photographs, other visual evidence, and letters from the relevant authorities as to why the Stadium is unable to host Matches, at least thirty (30) days prior to its next home Match.
  - 14.2.3. Only upon receipt of the evidence shall the AFC make a decision on whether the Participating Club may nominate a new Stadium for its home Matches. Such Stadium must comply with the AFC Stadium Regulations and all other applicable AFC regulations.
  - 14.2.4. The AFC shall decide whether to approve the newly nominated Stadium. Should the AFC be required to conduct an inspection, all costs shall be borne by the Participating Club and/or its Member Association.
  - 14.2.5. Should the newly nominated Stadium not be approved by the AFC, or should a Participating Club be unable to play home Matches in its one and only Stadium approved by the AFC and not nominate a new Stadium, the AFC General Secretariat shall select an alternate Stadium in accordance with Article 14.1.2.
- 14.3. Participating Clubs who are required to play home Matches at a Neutral Venue shall comply with the matters set out in these Regulations.

- 14.4. If the AFC deems, for whatever reason, that a Stadium is unable to stage a Match or Matches, the relevant Participating Club shall propose an alternate Stadium. Should the Participating Club not propose an acceptable alternate Stadium by a deadline set by the AFC, the AFC General Secretariat may select a Neutral Venue to stage a Match or Matches.
  - 14.4.1. The Participating Club concerned is responsible for all Match arrangements for the staging of the Match or Matches, including all costs as set out in these Regulations. This includes Matches played at a Neutral Venue.
  - 14.4.2. Should the Participating Club not propose an acceptable alternate Stadium within any deadline set by the AFC and/or refuse to partake in Matches at the proposed Neutral Venue selected by the AFC General Secretariat, it shall be considered to have withdrawn from the Competition and be subject to Article 5.
  - 14.4.3. The AFC General Secretariat makes all final decisions pursuant to Article 14.4.
- 14.5. For any Match played at a Neutral Venue, the Host Club must organise and stage the Match:
  - 14.5.1. in accordance with these Regulations;
  - 14.5.2. in accordance with the Manual;
  - 14.5.3. in accordance with any instructions of the AFC;
  - 14.5.4. in cooperation with the Member Association on whose territory the Match shall be played; and
  - 14.5.5. in cooperation with the local authorities.
- 14.6. Host Clubs shall ensure that no football matches and/or any other events or activities are held at any Stadium during the period starting at least two (2) days prior to each Match (other than in relation to the Final, where such period shall be determined by the AFC) until one (1) day after the Match, unless prior written permission has been obtained from the AFC. The Stadium shall be delivered to the AFC for its exclusive use during this period.
  - 14.6.1. A Host Club that fails to comply with Article 14.6 shall be fined at least USD10,000.
  - 14.6.2. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.
- 14.7. The Final shall be played in a Stadium approved by the AFC. The Venue shall be decided by the AFC taking into consideration all logistical factors, including without limitation, accommodation and transportation.

## 15. Field of Play

- 15.1. If a Host Club considers the Field of Play unfit for a Match, it shall immediately inform the AFC, the Away Club and the Match Officials before their departure to the Venue.

- 15.1.1. A Participating Club that fails to comply with Article 15.1 shall be liable for all costs incurred for the travel, board and lodging expenses of the parties involved.
- 15.2. The AFC Match Commissioner and Match Officials will inspect each Stadium prior to the Match and ensure that all arrangements are in accordance with the Laws of the Game. If the conditions of the Field of Play including the dimension of the goal and field are not in accordance with the Laws of the Game, the AFC Match Commissioner shall issue instructions to the Host Club to ensure rectification.
  - 15.2.1. If, in the opinion of the Referee, the instructions issued pursuant to Article 15.2 are not complied with by the start of the Match, the Host Club shall forfeit the Match in accordance with the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.

## 16. Official Training Sites

- 16.1. Each Participating Club shall nominate the Official Training Sites to be utilised for its home Matches when entering the Competition. The AFC General Secretariat makes the final decision to approve any Official Training Site and may carry out inspections at any time before and during the Competition to check whether the requirements are met. All costs related to the inspection shall be borne by the relevant Participating Club.
  - 16.1.1. The AFC reserves the right to refuse the nomination of an Official Training Site and require a Participating Club to nominate an alternate Official Training Site.
  - 16.1.2. Official Training Sites shall be situated no more than thirty (30) minutes or thirty (30) kilometres away from the Accommodation of the Away Club, unless otherwise approved by the AFC.
- 16.2. Official Training Sites shall contain a fully-equipped training field prepared to match-condition.
  - 16.2.1. A Host Club that fails to comply with Article 16.2 shall be fined at least USD10,000.
  - 16.2.2. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.
- 16.3. Official Training Sites shall be made available at least two (2) days prior to each Match until the commencement of the Match. They shall not be used for any other purpose during this period, unless prior written permission has been obtained from the AFC.
  - 16.3.1. A Host Club that fails to comply with Article 16.3 shall be fined at least USD10,000.
  - 16.3.2. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.
- 16.4. Participating Clubs must strictly follow the official training schedule decided in the match coordination meeting one (1) day prior to the Match. Should both Participating Clubs wish to train at the same time, the Away Club shall be given priority.

## SECTION 4 : TECHNICAL REGULATIONS

### 17. Laws of the Game

- 17.1. All Matches shall be played in accordance with the Laws of the Game. In the case of any discrepancy in the interpretation of the Laws of the Game, the English version shall prevail.
- 17.2. Each Match shall last ninety (90) minutes, comprising two (2) periods of forty-five (45) minutes, with a half-time interval of fifteen (15) minutes.
- 17.3. Five (5) of the substitutes listed on the 'Match Start List' may take part in the Match and each Participating Club shall have three (3) substitution opportunities in accordance with the Laws of the Game. Any Participating Player who has been substituted may take no further part in that Match.
- 17.4. The AFC may, at its discretion, decide to use football technologies in any Match or Matches in the Competition or in the Competition as a whole (including Goal-Line Technology [GLT], a Video Assistant Referee [VAR] system or Electronic Performance and Tracking Systems [EPTS]) in accordance with the Laws of the Game.

### 18. Refereeing

- 18.1. If the Referee is prevented from carrying out his/her duties, such Referee shall be replaced by the Fourth Official. The same applies for either of the Assistant Referees if a Reserve Assistant Referee is not appointed.
- 18.2. A Video Assistant Referee (VAR) may assist the Referee to make a decision using replay footage in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Laws of the Game in force at the time of the Competition.

### 19. Team Bench and Technical Area

- 19.1. A maximum of twelve (12) Participating Players and a maximum of eleven (11) Participating Officials are permitted to sit on the team bench during a Match, provided they are in possession of the appropriate Accreditation Card.
- 19.2. The Host Club shall ensure to secure a minimum of twenty-one (21) Team Technical Seats for each Participating Club's additional Participating Players and Participating Officials who will not be seated on the team bench. For the avoidance of doubt, only up to twelve (12) Participating Players and nine (9) Participating Officials from each Participating Club who are duly registered for the Competition are permitted to sit on the Team Technical Seats, and they must be in possession of the appropriate Accreditation Card.

## 20. Footballs

### Preliminary Stage and Playoff Stage

- 20.1. The footballs used in the Preliminary Stage and Playoff Stage shall be selected and supplied by each Host Club. The Host Club shall supply the Away Club with the same football for its training throughout the period of its stay.
- 20.2. Participating Clubs shall solely utilise the training footballs provided by the Host Club for the official training and warming-up purposes.

### Group Stage and Knockout Stage

- 20.3. The footballs used in the Group Stage and Knockout Stage shall be selected and supplied by the AFC.
- 20.4. Each Participating Club entering the Group Stage shall receive twenty (20) footballs for training prior to the Group Stage.
- 20.5. Participating Clubs shall solely utilise the twenty (20) training footballs provided by the AFC for training and warming-up purposes. Away Clubs are required to utilise the footballs as provided in accordance with Article 20.4 during away Matches.
- 20.6. The Host Club/ Host Association shall receive footballs for each Match it hosts, and these Match balls must only be used for the Match(es).
- 20.7. Each Member Association and/or its Participating Club(s) are responsible for any taxes and/or fees pertaining to the customs clearance of footballs delivered to the Member Association and when travelling for their away Matches.

## 21. Equipment

- 21.1. The AFC has the sole authority to approve the equipment (including kit) in accordance with the AFC Equipment Regulations.
- 21.2. Each Participating Club shall indemnify the AFC and hold the AFC harmless from any and all damages in the event that a conflict arises as a result of any endorsement deal existing between itself and its sponsor(s) which contravenes the AFC Equipment Regulations.

## SECTION 5 : TEAM OFFICIAL DELEGATION

### 22. Team Official Delegation

- 22.1. All Participating Players and Participating Officials of a Team Official Delegation will be issued with Accreditation Cards authorised by the AFC General Secretariat. Each Participating Club shall produce the Accreditation Cards for its Participating Players and Participating Officials using the materials provided by the AFC.
- 22.2. Each Participating Club shall ensure that no person in its Team Official Delegation or otherwise affiliated to it, enters or is present on its team bus, in its team dressing room, on the Field of Play, or in any other Controlled Access Area without being in physical possession of the necessary Accreditation Card which has been validly issued to such person.
- 22.3. For each Match in the Competition, Participating Clubs shall register a Team Official Delegation comprising a maximum of twenty-three (23) Participating Players and up to eleven (11) Participating Officials.
  - 22.3.1. Each Participating Club may nominate an additional nine (9) Participating Officials as part of its Team Official Delegation, who shall receive the same Accreditation Card as the eleven (11) Participating Officials referred to above.
  - 22.3.2. All costs related to the additional nine (9) Participating Officials shall be borne by the relevant Participating Club.

### 23. Registration Windows

- 23.1. There are three (3) registration windows for the Competition. The registration windows shall open on the dates communicated by the AFC. The applicability of each registration window and the relevant closing dates are as follows:
  - 23.1.1. Registration Window 1: This registration window applies only to Participating Clubs which enter the Competition at the Preliminary Stage or Playoff Stage. It shall close fifteen (15) days prior to the relevant Participating Club's first Match in the Competition.
  - 23.1.2. Registration Window 2: This registration window applies only to Participating Clubs which enter the Competition at the Group Stage (having not participated in the Preliminary Stage or Playoff Stage). It shall close thirty (30) days prior to the relevant Participating Club's first Match in the Competition.
  - 23.1.3. Registration Window 3: This registration window applies to all Participating Clubs which qualify for the Knockout Stage. It shall close fifteen (15) days prior to the relevant Participating Club's first Match in the Knockout Stage.

23.2. Participating Players and Participating Officials registered pursuant to the replacement provisions contained in Articles 28, 29, 30 and/or 32 are considered to have been registered during the same registration window covered by those replacement provisions.

## 24. Eligibility of Players

24.1. Each Participating Club shall ensure that all players:

- 24.1.1. are duly registered with the AFC pursuant to these Regulations; and
- 24.1.2. are duly registered by the Participating Club with its Member Association pursuant to its transfer rules and those set out in the FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players.

24.2. Individuals who meet the criteria set out in Article 24.1 are eligible to participate in the Competition, subject to the provisions of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.

24.3. Each Participating Club shall ensure to submit authentic documents for registration of its Participating Players.

24.4. The approval of the registration of a Participating Player by the AFC General Secretariat does not mean that the Participating Player is eligible to participate in the Competition. Each Participating Club is responsible for fielding only eligible Participating Players in a Match. Failure to do so shall lead to the consequences stipulated in the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.

24.5. A Participating Player shall be deemed ineligible, without limitation, if:

- 24.5.1. there is a violation of Article 24.1; or
- 24.5.2. he participates in a Match contrary to a decision of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee, these Regulations, or the operation of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code; or
- 24.5.3. the AFC determines that any document submitted during registration is falsified or forged.

## 25. Registration of Players

25.1. There are two (2) stages of registration for the players in the Competition:

- 25.1.1. Registration Windows 1, 2 and 3: each Participating Club must submit a squad of a minimum of eighteen (18) and a maximum of thirty-five (35) players; and
- 25.1.2. Player Selection List: each Participating Club must submit a 'Player Selection List' prior to each Match which identifies the starting eleven (11) and up to twelve (12) substitutes comprising individuals registered in the relevant registration window.

25.2. Should the AFC not receive all required documents by the stipulated deadlines for Registration Windows 1 and 2, the Participating Club concerned shall be considered to have withdrawn from the Competition prior to its commencement and be subject to Article 5.

### 26. Documents for Registration of Players

26.1. Participating Players must be registered via AFCAS with the supporting documents set out in the Manual.

### 27. Player Status

27.1. Subject to Articles 25.1, 28.2, 29.2 and 30.2, there shall be no limit on the number of foreign Participating Players that each Participating Club may register during Registration Windows 1, 2, and 3, however, each Participating Club may only select up to six (6) foreign Participating Players in the Player Selection List. In case more than five (5) foreign Participating Players are selected in the Player Selection List, then at least one (1) of these foreign Participating Players must hold the nationality of a Member Association.

27.2. A stateless Participating Player registered by a Participating Club shall be treated as a foreign Participating Player not holding the nationality of a Member Association unless it can be proven (to the AFC's satisfaction, at its sole discretion) that:

27.2.1. such Participating Player has validly participated in a match for a representative team of the Member Association to which the relevant Participating Club is affiliated (the "Local MA") in an official competition of any category or any type of football, in which case he shall be treated as a local Participating Player; or

27.2.2. such Participating Player has validly participated in a match for a representative team of another Member Association which is not the Local MA in an official competition of any category or any type of football, in which case he shall be treated as a Participating Player holding the nationality of a Member Association.

27.3. Any Participating Player who has acquired a new nationality of a Member Association (e.g. through naturalisation) and wishes to participate in the Competition utilising that nationality must demonstrate, at least, one of the following:

27.3.1. that the nationality was acquired more than five (5) years before the date of the Participating Player's registration for the Competition; or

27.3.2. that he is eligible to participate for the representative team of the relevant Member Association in accordance with the FIFA Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes.

27.4. Any Participating Player who is eligible to represent more than one (1) Football Association on account of his nationality of one (1) country (e.g. a player with a Chinese nationality may be eligible to represent three [3] different Member Associations) and wishes to participate in the Competition utilising the nationality of a Member Association must demonstrate one (1) of the following:

- 27.4.1. that he has participated in an official competition for a representative team of the relevant Member Association; or
- 27.4.2. that he is eligible to participate for a representative team of the relevant Member Association in accordance with the FIFA Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes.

27.5. Any Participating Player who does not meet the relevant requirements stipulated above shall not be eligible to take part in the Competition utilising that nationality.

27.6. A Participating Player cannot change his nationality of registration for the duration of the Competition.

27.7. A Participating Player shall only be registered to one (1) Participating Club per registration window.

27.8. A Participating Player shall not be eligible to represent more than one (1) Participating Club per stage of the Competition. A Participating Player that has been fielded by a Participating Club in a stage of the Competition cannot be registered for another Participating Club in that same stage.

27.9. If a violation of Article 27.7 or Article 27.8 occurs:

- 27.9.1. the Participating Player may be sanctioned with a ban on participating in a minimum of one (1) future season of AFC club competitions, unless he can demonstrate that extenuating circumstances existed;
- 27.9.2. the Participating Club shall forfeit any Match in which the Participating Player has been fielded in accordance with the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code;
- 27.9.3. the Participating Club shall be considered to have withdrawn from the Competition and be subject to Article 5; and
- 27.9.4. the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

27.10. For the purposes of the contract of a Participating Player, his date of registration with a Participating Club shall be:

- 27.10.1. for Participating Players who transferred internationally to the Participating Club: the date of issuance of the International Transfer Certificate ("ITC") or the date of provisional registration with the Participating Club's Member Association pursuant to the FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players, submitted in accordance with Article 26; and

27.10.2. for Participating Players who transferred domestically to the Participating Club or are 'homegrown' players: the official date of the contract submitted in accordance with Article 26.

27.11. An ITC or proof of the provisional registration shall only be accepted after the close of a registration window where:

27.11.1. the Participating Club entered into a valid contract with the player prior to the close of the registration window and submitted this to the AFC; and

27.11.2. Registration Window 1, 2 or 3: a copy of the ITC or evidence to demonstrate that an ITC has been issued or proof of the provisional registration in accordance with the FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players is submitted via AFCAS no later than seven (7) days prior to its first Match in the relevant stage of the Competition.

## 28. Registration Window 1

28.1. Each Participating Club shall submit its registration of Participating Players and supporting documents in accordance with Article 26 via AFCAS.

28.2. Each Participating Club shall submit a registration of a minimum of eighteen (18) and a maximum of thirty-five (35) Participating Players.

28.2.1. Each Participating Club must register a minimum of three (3) goalkeepers in its registration.

28.2.2. Participating Players must be allocated a playing number from 1 to 99. Playing number 1 shall be reserved for a goalkeeper. Each Participating Player shall wear the same playing number allocated in his first registration during all Matches in the Competition. Participating Players registered as replacements (cf. Article 28.4) may only be allocated a new playing number.

28.3. If a Participating Club fails to register a minimum of eighteen (18) Participating Players by the stipulated deadline, it shall be considered to have withdrawn from the Competition prior to its commencement and be subject to Article 5. Proof of submission by facsimile, courier and/or email will not be accepted.

28.4. Once the registration of Participating Players has been received by the AFC and after the stipulated deadline has passed, Participating Clubs may:

### Preliminary Stage and Playoff Stage

28.4.1. no later than seven (7) days prior to their first Match in the Competition, replace or add up to eight (8) Participating Players for any reason provided that the maximum number of registered players is not exceeded; and

Group Stage (if qualified)

28.4.2. no later than seven (7) days prior to MD1 of the Group Stage, replace or add up to eight (8) Participating Players for any reason provided that the maximum number of registered players is not exceeded.

28.5. Notwithstanding the foregoing replacement provisions (*qf.* Articles 28.4.1 and 28.4.2), if at any stage during the Preliminary Stage, Playoff Stage and/or Group Stage, two (2) or more Participating Players who are registered as goalkeepers suffer long-term injuries or illness, the relevant Participating Club may request to replace one (1) or more of these goalkeeper(s) by registering one (1) or more new Participating Players as goalkeepers (as appropriate).

28.5.1. An injury or illness shall be considered long-term for the purposes of this Article if it will or can reasonably be expected to last for thirty (30) days or longer (as from the date of the request).

28.5.2. A medical report, in English, must be submitted to the AFC detailing the extent of the injury or illness to the relevant Participating Player(s) before any replacement(s) can be approved by the AFC.

28.5.3. Any replacement must be requested no later than twenty-four (24) hours before the kick-off time of the Participating Club's next Match.

28.5.4. The AFC shall decide on any replacement(s) at its sole discretion, and any such decisions shall be final and binding and not appealable.

28.5.5. Incidents involving the provision of false or misleading evidence or information to the AFC in connection with any replacement under this Article (as regards the provision of medical reports or otherwise) may be referred to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee.

28.5.6. For the avoidance of doubt, once a Participating Player has been replaced, such player cannot be re-registered in the Competition (including as a replacement) until registration window 3 opens.

28.6. Participating Players registered pursuant to the replacement provisions set out in Article 28 shall only be eligible to participate in the Competition after receiving their Accreditation Cards.

## 29. Registration Window 2

29.1. Each Participating Club shall submit its registration of Participating Players and supporting documents in accordance with Article 26 via AFCAS.

29.2. Each Participating Club shall submit a registration of a minimum of eighteen (18) and a maximum of thirty-five (35) Participating Players.

29.2.1. Each Participating Club must register a minimum of three (3) goalkeepers in its registration.

29.2.2. Participating Players must be allocated a playing number from 1 to 99. Playing number 1 shall be reserved for a goalkeeper. Each Participating Player shall wear the same playing number allocated in his first registration during all Matches in the Competition. Participating Players registered as replacements (cf. Article 29.4) may only be allocated a new playing number.

29.3. If a Participating Club fails to register the minimum eighteen (18) Participating Players by the stipulated deadline, it shall be considered to have withdrawn from the Competition prior to its commencement and be subject to Article 5. Proof of submission by facsimile, courier and/or email will not be accepted.

29.4. Once the registration of Participating Players has been received by the AFC and after the stipulated deadline has passed, Participating Clubs may:

29.4.1. **Group Stage**  
no later than seven (7) days prior to MD1 of the Group Stage, replace or add up to eight (8) Participating Players for any reason provided that the maximum number of registered players is not exceeded.

29.5. Notwithstanding the foregoing replacement provision (cf. Article 29.4.1), if at any stage during the Group Stage, two (2) or more Participating Players who are registered as goalkeepers suffer long-term injuries or illness, the relevant Participating Club may request to replace one (1) or more of these goalkeeper(s) by registering one (1) or more new Participating Players as goalkeepers (as appropriate). The provisions of Articles 28.5.1 to 28.5.6 shall apply equally to registration window 2.

29.6. Participating Players registered pursuant to the replacement provisions set out in Article 29 shall only be eligible to participate in the Competition after receiving their Accreditation Cards.

## 30. Registration Window 3

30.1. Each Participating Club shall submit its registration of Participating Players and supporting documents in accordance with Article 26 via AFCAS.

30.2. Each Participating Club shall submit a registration of a minimum of eighteen (18) and a maximum of thirty-five (35) Participating Players.

30.2.1. Each Participating Club must register a minimum of three (3) goalkeepers in its registration.

30.2.2. Participating Players must be allocated a playing number from 1 to 99, which shall be the same playing number allocated during registration window 1 or registration window 2 (as applicable). Playing number 1 shall be reserved for a goalkeeper. Each Participating Player shall wear the same playing number allocated in his first registration during all Matches in the Competition. Participating Players registered as replacements (cf. Article 30.4) or newly registered Participating Players may only be allocated a new playing number.

30.3. If a Participating Club fails to submit its registration of Participating Players by the stipulated deadline, it shall be considered to have registered the same Participating Players registered for registration window 1 or registration window 2 (as applicable). Proof of submission by facsimile, courier and/or email will not be accepted.

30.3.1. In such cases, the AFC shall send an official confirmation form to the Participating Club to confirm the registration of the Participating Players for registration window 3.

30.3.2. The Participating Club shall indicate which registered Participating Players are no longer validly registered with the Participating Club (e.g. they have retired). In case any supporting documentation submitted for a Participating Player's initial registration has expired, the Participating Club shall submit valid documentation to that effect.

30.4. Once the registration of Participating Players has been received by the AFC, and after the stipulated deadline has passed, Participating Clubs may:

30.4.1. no later than seven (7) days prior to their first match of the Knockout Stage, replace or add up to eight (8) Participating Players for any reason provided that the maximum number of registered players is not exceeded.

30.5. Notwithstanding the foregoing replacement provision (*cf.* Article 30.4.1), if at any stage during the Knockout Stage, two (2) or more Participating Players who are registered as goalkeepers suffer long-term injuries or illness, the relevant Participating Club may request to replace one (1) or more of these goalkeeper(s) by registering one (1) or more new Participating Players as goalkeepers (as appropriate). The provisions of Articles 28.5.1 to 28.5.5 shall apply equally to registration window 3. For the avoidance of doubt, once a Participating Player has been replaced, such player cannot be re-registered in the Competition at any stage.

30.6. No further replacement or addition of Participating Players shall be permitted.

30.7. Participating Players registered pursuant to the replacement provisions set out in Article 30 shall only be eligible to participate in the Competition after receiving their Accreditation Cards.

## 31. Player Selection List

31.1. Each Participating Club shall mark the starting eleven (11), including the team captain and up to twelve (12) substitutes, on the 'Player Selection List'.

31.1.1. Each Participating Club may select up to six (6) foreign Participating Players. In case more than five (5) foreign Participating Players are registered, then at least one (1) of these foreign Participating Players must hold the nationality of a Member Association.

31.1.2. Each Participating Clubs shall identify at least two (2) players as goalkeepers on its 'Player Selection List'.

31.2. Each Participating Club must hand its 'Player Selection List' signed by the Head Coach or the Team Manager, together with the 'Officials on the Substitution Bench' form with the names of the eleven (11) Participating Officials who shall be entitled to sit on the team bench, to the AFC Match Commissioner at least ninety (90) minutes prior to the commencement of each Match.

## 32. Registration of Officials

32.1. Each Participating Club shall submit its registration of Participating Officials and the supporting documents in accordance with Article 33 by the deadline provided by the AFC for the relevant registration window.

32.2. Each Participating Club shall submit a registration of a minimum of two (2) and a maximum of twenty (20) Participating Officials.

32.3. Each Participating Club must include the following two (2) Participating Officials in the registration list:

32.3.1. Head Coach; and

32.3.2. Team Manager (who shall also act as the Team Media Officer in accordance with the Manual in case there is no dedicated Team Media Officer).

32.4. Up to eleven (11) Participating Officials may sit on the team bench for each Match. The following two (2) Participating Officials must be registered on the 'Officials on the Substitution Bench' form:

32.4.1. Head Coach; and

32.4.2. Team Manager.

32.5. Each Participating Club is entitled to register up to two (2) 'Video Analysts' who shall be the only members of a Team Official Delegation entitled to record Matches in the relevant stage of the Competition using only one (1) lightweight amateur camera each. This recording shall be strictly for technical purposes and should not interfere with Match operations or be utilised by any Broadcast Partner or otherwise distributed.

32.6. The Team Manager and/or Team Media Officer (as applicable) of each Participating Club shall be responsible for coordinating all Participating Club and media-related matters with the AFC. They shall work in a full-time, exclusive capacity from two (2) days prior to each Match until one (1) day after the Match. They shall participate in all Official Functions related to Matches in the Competition, including without limitation the match coordination meeting and all press conferences.

32.7. Should the Participating Club nominate less than eleven (11) Participating Officials on the 'Officials on the Substitution Bench' form, or the AFC does not approve the registration of any person(s) nominated, the number of Participating Officials permitted on the team bench shall reduce proportionately.

32.8. Should the AFC not receive all required documents by the stipulated deadline, the Participating Club shall be considered to:

32.8.1. Registration Windows 1 and 2  
have withdrawn from the Competition prior to its commencement and be subject to Article 5. Proof of submission by facsimile, courier and/or email will not be accepted.

32.8.2. Registration Window 3  
have registered the same Participating Officials registered for registration window 1 or registration window 2 (as applicable). Proof of submission by facsimile, courier and/or email will not be accepted.

32.8.2.1. In such cases, the AFC shall send an official confirmation form to the Participating Club to confirm the registration of the Participating Officials for registration window 3.

32.8.2.2. The Participating Club shall indicate which registered Participating Officials are no longer validly registered with the Participating Club (e.g. they have had their employment terminated or retired). In case any supporting documentation submitted for a Participating Player's initial registration has expired, the Participating Club shall also submit valid documentation to that effect.

32.9. Once the registration of Participating Officials has been received by the AFC and after the stipulated deadline has passed, Participating Clubs may replace any of the listed Participating Officials at any stage with twenty-four (24) hours' notice to the AFC by submitting the documents set out in Article 33 via AFCAS. Such Participating Officials registered as replacements shall only be eligible to participate in the Competition after receiving their Accreditation Card.

### 33. Documents for Registration of Officials

33.1. Participating Officials must be registered via AFCAS with the supporting documents set out in the Manual.

## SECTION 6 : MEDIA

### 34. Media Access

- 34.1. Each Host Club and its Member Association shall ensure that the AFC, AFC Commercial Rights Partners, Commercial Affiliates, the Host Broadcaster, and all Broadcast Partners have free access to the Stadium from two (2) days prior to each Match in the Stadium until one (1) day after the Match in the Stadium to allow for the resolution of any technical issues and for the assembly and/or disassembly of the relevant infrastructure required to execute the Media Rights.

### 35. Press Conferences

- 35.1. The Host Club is responsible for the organisation of a pre-Match press conference to be conducted under the supervision of the Local Media Officer at least one (1) day prior to each Match it hosts in the Competition.
- 35.2. The Head Coach and a minimum of one (1) of the key Participating Players of each Participating Club must attend a pre-Match press conference for each Match in which they participate. The AFC shall decide the final timing of the pre-Match press conference in the absence of an agreement on timing by the Participating Clubs.
- 35.3. The Head Coach of each Participating Club must attend a post-Match press conference for each Match in which they participate, commencing no later than fifteen (15) minutes after the Match. If requested by the AFC, the Player of the Match of each Match must also attend the post-Match press conference. Where additional awards are granted, the winner of such awards must also attend the post-Match press conference if requested by the AFC.
- 35.4. Each Participating Club is responsible for the language interpretation and translation of its Participating Players and Participating Officials into English. Interpretation and translation into the local language (if applicable) shall be the responsibility of the Host Club.
- 35.5. Any individual who fails to attend an obligatory press conference shall be fined at least USD5,000. The relevant Participating Club shall also be held liable for any failure to attend a press conference in accordance with Article 3.3.9. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

### 36. Mixed Zone

- 36.1. All Participating Players of each Participating Club shall pass through the mixed zone on their way from their team dressing room to their bus after each Match. The Head Coach shall be required to pass through the mixed zone on the way from the team dressing room to the bus after each Match only in the event that there is no post-Match press conference held after the Match.

36.2. Any individual who fails to pass through the mixed zone shall be fined at least USD5,000. The relevant Participating Club may also be held liable for any failure to pass through the mixed zone in accordance with Article 3.3.9. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

## 37. Interviews

37.1. If requested by the AFC, Participating Clubs shall make their Head Coach and selected Participating Players available for an interview of up to ten (10) minutes, to be recorded by the Host Broadcaster or any other Broadcast Partner, any Commercial Affiliate and/or the AFC. All interview locations shall be designated by the Local Media Officer or AFC Match Commissioner.

37.1.1. For the Preliminary Stage, Playoff Stage and Group Stage, any such interview shall be conducted one (1) day prior to the Match.

37.1.2. For the Knockout Stage, any such interview shall be conducted one (1) or two (2) days prior to the Match.

37.2. If requested by the AFC, Participating Clubs shall make their Head Coach available on Match day for an interview of not more than ninety (90) seconds at their point of arrival at the Stadium for the Match.

37.3. Any individual who fails to conduct an interview when requested shall be fined at least USD5,000. The relevant Participating Club may also be held liable for any failure to conduct an interview when requested in accordance with Article 3.3.9. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

## 38. Flash Interviews

38.1. Participating Players and Participating Officials are not permitted to give interviews at the Stadium without the express permission of the AFC.

38.2. The Local Media Officer may designate an area for multilateral and unilateral flash interviews to be conducted by the Host Broadcaster and the Broadcast Partners (as applicable) following each Match.

38.3. If requested by the AFC, a maximum of three (3) Participating Players and/or one (1) Participating Official from each Participating Club shall participate in a 'flash interview' following each Match.

38.4. Any individual who fails to conduct a 'flash interview' when requested shall be fined at least USD5,000. The relevant Participating Club may also be held liable for any failure to conduct a 'flash interview' when requested in accordance with Article 3.3.9. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

### 39. Recording of Matches

- 39.1. Immediately after each Match in the Preliminary Stage and Playoff Stage, the relevant Host Club shall provide four (4) copies of the full Match recording to the AFC Match Commissioner.
- 39.2. Any Host Club that fails to comply with Article 39.1 shall be fined at least USD3,000. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

## SECTION 7 : TICKETING

### 40. General Requirements

- 40.1. Tickets, electronic or hard copy, shall include seat numbering and serial numbering, and only include AFC Marks, Competition Marks, and/or marks of Commercial Affiliates approved by the AFC.
- 40.2. The AFC reserves the right at its sole discretion to substitute the seating area or the gate entrance identified on a Ticket with another, if deemed appropriate for security or technical reasons.
- 40.3. The Host Club and its Member Association must ensure that access to the Stadium is granted to the AFC Delegation, Away Club Team Official Delegation, AFC Commercial Rights Partner, Commercial Affiliates, Media and travelling supporters without any discrimination.
- 40.4. The AFC General Secretariat shall determine the Ticketing policy for the Final.

### 41. Terms and Conditions

- 41.1. Unless otherwise advised by the AFC in writing, each Host Club shall be responsible at its own cost for the production, distribution, and sales of all Tickets. Such matters are subject to the approval of the AFC. The AFC shall provide a Ticket template design to all Participating Clubs.
- 41.2. The AFC shall, in collaboration with each Host Club and/or Host Association, issue special Ticketing terms and conditions which are applicable to all Ticket holders.
- 41.3. The AFC may change the terms and conditions and shall advise the Host Club on any requirements relating to Ticket production, distribution and/or sales.

### 42. Complimentary Tickets

- 42.1. Each Host Club shall provide Complimentary Tickets to the AFC and/or AFC Commercial Rights Partner for each Match in the Competition in the quantities and categories as instructed by the AFC, in accordance with the following deadlines:
  - 42.1.1. Preliminary Stage: by latest seven (7) days before the Match;
  - 42.1.2. Playoff Stage: by latest seven (7) days before the Match;
  - 42.1.3. Group Stage: by latest thirty (30) days before the Match;
  - 42.1.4. Zonal Semi Finals: by latest ten (10) days before the Match;
  - 42.1.5. Zonal Finals: by latest ten (10) days before the Match;

- 42.1.6. Inter-Zone Semi Finals: by latest ten (10) days before the Match;
- 42.1.7. Inter-Zone Final: by latest ten (10) days before the Match; and
- 42.1.8. Final: by latest ten (10) days before the Match.

- 42.2. All Complimentary Tickets shall be provided in a continuous block.
- 42.3. For the avoidance of doubt, where necessary (e.g. in circumstances where the relevant Away Club has not been determined by the deadline set out in Article 42.1), a Host Club may provide Complimentary Tickets to the AFC, AFC Commercial Rights Partner and/or Commercial Affiliates which identify the Away Club using generic terms (e.g. "Winner of Preliminary Stage 2").
- 42.4. In the event that a Participating Club qualifies for any stage of the Competition and the time period between the confirmation of such qualification and the scheduled home Match in the relevant stage is less than the deadlines set out in Articles 42.1.3 to 42.1.8, such Participating Club must provide the AFC, AFC Commercial Rights Partner and/or Commercial Affiliates with the relevant Complimentary Tickets for the home Match no later than seven (7) days after the confirmation of its qualification.
- 42.5. The AFC reserves all Ticketing rights relating to the Final. The AFC is entitled to request any additional Tickets, the number of which shall be communicated to the Host Club and/or its Member Association at the appropriate time.
- 42.6. Each Host Club shall provide the following Complimentary Tickets to the Away Club no later than at the match coordination meeting (which shall take place no later than one [1] day prior to the Match):
  - 42.6.1. two (2) VVIP Tickets;
  - 42.6.2. five (5) VIP Tickets; and
  - 42.6.3. twenty (20) Tickets of the next-best category (as determined by the AFC).

### 43. Purchasable Tickets

- 43.1. Each Host Club and/or its Member Association must make at least five percent (5%) of the net saleable capacity of the Stadium available exclusively to the supporters of the Away Club in a segregated, safe area to be determined by the Host Club and the AFC General Secretariat.
- 43.2. The number of Tickets to be purchased must be declared to the Host Club no later than two (2) weeks prior to the Match with full payment by the Away Club to the Host Club. The Away Club is responsible for all Tickets purchased, even if the Tickets are not utilised. The price of the Tickets shall not exceed the price of comparable Tickets that are sold to the supporters of the Host Club.

- 43.3. Each Host Club shall provide the AFC Commercial Rights Partner with the opportunity to buy Tickets at face value for each Match as instructed by the AFC. The number of Tickets to be purchased must be declared at a time to be mutually agreed between the AFC Commercial Rights Partner and the Host Club.
- 43.4. The AFC shall be able to purchase Tickets at face value and on an individual Match basis from each Host Club for itself and its Commercial Affiliates.

## SECTION 8 : COMMERCIAL

### 44. Commercial Rights

- 44.1. The AFC is the owner of all the Commercial Rights emanating from the Competition as well as from any other related events under its jurisdiction, without any restrictions as to content, time, place and law. The AFC may grant the Host Clubs the Commercial Rights, in whole or in part, in accordance with the Manual which governs the rights, duties, and responsibilities of all parties regarding the Commercial Rights.
- 44.2. Each Host Club and its Member Association shall use its best efforts/endeavours in seeking political and administrative support from all local, regional and national governmental authorities to ensure the effective exploitation and protection of the Commercial Rights (including through the implementation of government guarantees and tabling of supplementary legislation).
- 44.3. Each Host Club and its Member Association shall appoint a reasonable number of personnel to assist the AFC in the implementation and enforcement of its rights protection programme.

### 45. Clean Stadium

- 45.1. Except where instructed or communicated by the AFC, the Host Club and its Member Association shall deliver the Stadium and Official Training Site as a Clean Stadium two (2) days before each Match or official training at the Official Training Site until the completion of the Match.

### 46. Advertising and Branding

- 46.1. Except where stipulated otherwise by the AFC, each Host Club and its Member Association shall ensure that all relevant approvals are secured and unrestricted access for the placement and publishing of advertising or branding of the Competition shall be available to the AFC two (2) days before each Match at the Stadium or official training at the Official Training Site.

## SECTION 9 : SAFETY AND SECURITY

### 47. General Principles

- 47.1. All matters relating to safety and security shall be undertaken in compliance with the AFC Stadium Regulations and AFC Safety and Security Regulations.
- 47.2. Each Host Club and its Member Association shall, in cooperation with the relevant government authorities and/or Stadium owners, devise, plan, and implement adequate security and safety measures for the Competition at all Controlled Access Areas within the Venue and other relevant locations to protect all relevant persons, including without limitation the AFC Delegation, Team Official Delegations, AFC Commercial Rights Partner, Commercial Affiliates, Media, spectators, all goods brought in by the AFC, Team Official Delegations, AFC Commercial Rights Partner and Commercial Affiliates.
- 47.3. Each Host Club and its Member Association shall issue a detailed security plan in the form of a binding agreement with, without limitation, the management of the Stadium, Official Training Site(s) and the Accommodation of the AFC Delegation and Team Official Delegations. This security plan shall be based upon the principles set out in the AFC Stadium Regulations and AFC Safety and Security Regulations.
- 47.4. Each Host Club and its Member Association shall discharge the AFC and hold it harmless from all responsibility and relinquish any claim against the AFC and the members of its delegation for any damages resulting from any act or omission relating to the organisation of the Competition to the exclusion of damages caused by the AFC or the members of its delegation acting with intent or gross negligence.

## SECTION 10 : MEDICAL AND ANTI-DOPING

### 48. Pre-Competition Medical Assessment

- 48.1. Each Participating Club and its Member Association shall ensure that each Participating Player undergoes a Pre-Competition Medical Assessment ("PCMA") at least thirty (30) days prior to its first Match of the Competition.
  - 48.1.1. Participating Players that have undertaken a PCMA for a FIFA or other AFC competition may provide the AFC with the physician and player's declaration form originally provided to FIFA or the AFC, provided that the PCMA was conducted within one (1) year of the Competition.
  - 48.1.2. The AFC shall provide all Participating Clubs and its Member Association with the PCMA form setting out the necessary matters to be tested, which shall include testing to prevent players from experiencing sudden cardiac death during any Match.
  - 48.1.3. Each Participating Club and its Member Association must submit to the AFC by latest ten (10) days prior to the first Match of the Competition the following signed documents:
    - 48.1.3.1. 'Member Association Declaration of Agreement to the PCMA'; and
    - 48.1.3.2. for each Participating Player, the 'Player and Examining Physician Declaration for PCMA'.
  - 48.1.4. Any player for whom the required documents are not provided is not eligible to be registered for the Competition.
- 48.2. The AFC Medical Committee may, at its sole discretion, order any further medical evaluation of a Participating Player that it deems necessary. The cost of such further testing shall be borne by the AFC.

### 49. Facilities and Personnel

- 49.1. Each Host Club shall provide a medical room and doping control room fully equipped with all items stipulated in the Manual.
- 49.2. A Host Club shall be fined:
  - 49.2.1. at least USD20,000 for failing to fully equip the medical room; or
  - 49.2.2. at least USD10,000 for failing to fully equip the doping control room; or
  - 49.2.3. at least USD40,000 for failing to fully equip both rooms.

- 49.2.4. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.
- 49.3. Each Host Club shall provide all medical personnel and doping control personnel stipulated in the Manual.
- 49.4. A Host Club shall be fined:
  - 49.4.1. at least USD10,000 for failing to provide all required doping control personnel; or
  - 49.4.2. at least USD20,000 for failing to provide all required medical personnel.
  - 49.4.3. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

## 50. Anti-Doping

- 50.1. Doping is strictly prohibited. The AFC Anti-Doping Regulations, the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code, and all relevant AFC directives in relation to anti-doping are applicable to the Competition.
- 50.2. The AFC shall inform each Host Club and its Member Association by means of a circular of the doping control procedure for the Competition.
- 50.3. The AFC Anti-Doping Unit (mandated by the AFC Medical Committee to handle the organisation and administration of anti-doping activities) shall be responsible for the approval of the WADA-accredited laboratory which shall carry out the analysis of all doping samples.

## SECTION 11: FINANCIAL PROVISIONS

### 51. Responsibilities

- 51.1. Any financial payments to be made by the AFC in accordance with these Regulations shall be subject to all applicable laws, regulations, orders, by-laws and international sanctions.
- 51.2. Participating Clubs shall settle all logistical costs among themselves. The following conditions shall apply during the official period of two (2) days prior to each Match until one (1) day after the Match:
  - 51.2.1. the Away Club shall cover its international and domestic travel costs to the Venue or the nearest airport, as well as board, lodging costs and incidental expenses;
  - 51.2.2. the Host Club shall cover domestic transport costs at the Venue for the entire Team Official Delegation of the Away Club, subject to flight connections;
  - 51.2.3. the Host Club shall provide the Away Club with a liaison officer for the Away Club's entire stay at the Venue;
  - 51.2.4. subject to the relevant national law and policies, where requested by the AFC or the AFC Match Commissioner, a police escort shall be provided by the Host Club to the Team Official Delegation of the Away Club for its travel to training, Matches, Official Functions, and airport transfers;
  - 51.2.5. the Participating Clubs are not permitted to stay at the same hotel or at the hotel chosen for the AFC Delegation;
  - 51.2.6. details of the logistical arrangements relating to a Match (including the matters set out above) shall be notified to the AFC by the relevant Participating Clubs in advance of the Match; and
  - 51.2.7. any disputes arising regarding the financial provisions under this Article 51 shall be resolved amongst the relevant Participating Clubs and/or their Member Associations but may be submitted to the AFC Competitions Committee for a final decision.

### 52. Accommodation, Meals and Refreshments

- 52.1. From their arrival at the Venue until one (1) day after the Match or until the day required by the AFC, each Host Club must provide at its own cost, for the AFC Delegation:
  - 52.1.1. Accommodation in an international five-star hotel different from the Team Official Delegations unless approved by the AFC (or an international four-star hotel if there are no international five-star hotels at the Venue);

- 52.1.2. three (3) meals per day (international buffet style) and one (1) additional light meal on Match day;
- 52.1.3. minimum six (6) litres of water per person per day, as well as ice and refreshments, at the Accommodation, Referee training, and the Stadium;
- 52.1.4. daily laundry services (but no dry cleaning or pressing) of eight (8) pieces per person per day for the Match Officials (except for the Referee Assessor who shall be subject to Article 52.1.5);
- 52.1.5. daily laundry services (but no dry cleaning or pressing) of six (6) pieces per person per day and dry cleaning of two (2) pieces per person on alternate days for the other members of the AFC Delegation;
- 52.1.6. a Club official or representative of the Host Club should be assigned to coordinate airport reception, immigration and customs, airport transfers, domestic transportation and Accommodation for all Match Officials and the members of the AFC Delegation; and
- 52.1.7. liaison officers proficient in English.

### 53. Domestic Transportation

- 53.1. From their arrival at the Venue until one (1) day after the Match or until the day required by the AFC, each Host Club must provide at its own cost, for the AFC Delegation:
  - 53.1.1. one (1) sedan for the AFC Match Commissioner;
  - 53.1.2. one (1) multipurpose vehicle with a minimum of seven (7) seats for the Match Officials; and
  - 53.1.3. additional vehicles upon request of the AFC General Secretariat for other officials appointed by the AFC.

### 54. Prize Money

- 54.1. The AFC will pay the following prize money:
  - 54.1.1. Champion : USD1,500,000;
  - 54.1.2. Runner-Up : USD750,000; and
  - 54.1.3. Zonal Champion : USD100,000.

54.2. Five percent (5%) of the prize monies from the Champion and runner-up shall be retained and allocated to the AFC Dream Asia Foundation to fund social responsibility activities proposed by the Champion and runner-up respectively. The Champion and runner-up will be required to submit their social responsibility activity proposal to the AFC within twelve (12) months from the date of the Final, failing which the allocated percentage shall be retained by the AFC for use at its discretion in support of the AFC's social responsibility activities.

### 55. Match Contribution

55.1. The Match Contribution for Participating Clubs shall be the travel contribution.

55.2. Match Contributions shall be sent directly to the Member Association of the Participating Club(s), unless otherwise directed by the Member Association or decided by the AFC at its discretion.

55.3. All Match Contributions (including any prize money) shall be withheld should a Participating Club have any outstanding payment to be made to the AFC or another Participating Club (and/or its Member Association) and/or any unfulfilled financial obligations under the relevant Articles of these Regulations until the payment is made in full.

#### Travel Contribution

55.4. For each Match of the relevant stage of the Competition set out below, the Away Club(s) shall receive the corresponding travel contribution:

55.4.1. Preliminary Stage : USD40,000;

55.4.2. Playoff Stage : USD40,000;

55.4.3. Group Stage : USD40,000; and

55.4.4. Knockout Stage : USD40,000.

### 56. Disciplinary Action

56.1. A Host Club that fails to provide for any of the matters set out in Articles 51 to 53 shall forfeit its Match Contribution. In the event that the Host Club did not receive a Match Contribution for the particular Match, the Host Club shall be fined accordingly.

56.2. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may impose further sanctions at its discretion.

## SECTION 12 : AWARDS

### 57. Trophy, Awards and Medals

- 57.1. The original trophy of the Competition shall be presented as a formality to the Champion during the prize presentation ceremony after the Final. Following the conclusion of the ceremony, the original trophy shall be returned to the AFC and remain in the possession of the AFC at all times. The Champion shall subsequently be awarded a replica by the AFC for its permanent possession.
- 57.2. The replica trophy awarded to the Champion must remain within its control at all times and must not leave its region or territory of its Member Association without the prior written consent of the AFC. The Champion must not permit the replica trophy to be used in any context where a third-party (including without limitation, their sponsors and other commercial partners) is granted visibility or in any other way which could lead to an association between any third-party and the trophy and/or the Competition. The AFC may issue additional trophy guidelines which the Champion must comply with from time to time.
- 57.3. The following awards of the Competition shall be presented in accordance with the Manual:
  - 57.3.1. Player of the Match (for each Match);
  - 57.3.2. Most Valuable Player;
  - 57.3.3. Top Goal Scorer; and
  - 57.3.4. AFC Fair Play Award.
- 57.4. Goals scored in the Preliminary Stage and Playoff Stage are not taken into account for determining the Top Goal Scorer.
- 57.5. The AFC shall award the following medals:
  - 57.5.1. fifty-five (55) medals to the Champion; and
  - 57.5.2. fifty-five (55) medals to the runner-up.
- 57.6. Additional medals may be produced upon request and at the cost of the requesting Participating Club.
- 57.7. The AFC Competitions Committee may decide to introduce additional awards.

## 58. Prize Presentation Ceremony

- 58.1. A prize presentation ceremony, managed and controlled by the AFC and coordinated with the Host Club, its Member Association, and the AFC Commercial Rights Partner, shall be held immediately after the final Match of the Competition to present the trophy, awards and medals listed in Article 57.
- 58.2. The Participating Players and Participating Clubs that qualify to receive the trophy, awards and medals are required to attend the relevant prize presentation ceremony. Relevant Participating Clubs shall be represented by the twenty-three (23) Participating Players and eleven (11) Participating Officials registered in the Team Official Delegation for the final Match of the Competition. No other officials, players, or staff of the Participating Clubs may participate in the prize presentation ceremony.

## SECTION 13 : DISCIPLINARY

### 59. Disciplinary Measures

- 59.1. All disciplinary measures in relation to the Competition shall be undertaken in accordance with the current AFC Statutes, AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code, and all relevant AFC regulations and circulars.
- 59.2. The AFC may introduce new disciplinary rules and sanctions for the duration of the Competition. Such rules shall be communicated to the Participating Clubs and their Member Associations thirty (30) days before the first Match of the Competition at the latest.
- 59.3. Only Participating Players and Participating Officials may serve Match suspensions in the Competition. For the avoidance of doubt, this requires the registration of the relevant individual within a registration window in accordance with the deadlines set out in these Regulations.
- 59.4. All Participating Players agree to:
  - 59.4.1. comply with the provisions of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code, in particular by respecting the spirit and principles of fair play, not engaging in violent behaviour, respecting the authority of the Match Officials, not making bets in connection with any Match and not engaging in any activities linked to the manipulation of Matches; and
  - 59.4.2. refrain from doping and comply with the provisions of the AFC Anti-Doping Regulations.

### 60. Good Conduct

- 60.1. Each Participating Club is liable for the improper conduct of:
  - 60.1.1. any member of its Team Official Delegation; and/or
  - 60.1.2. any person affiliated to it and/or carrying out duties on its behalf throughout the Competition.
- 60.2. For any violation of Article 60.1, the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may issue any sanction listed in the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.

### 61. Administrative Procedure

- 61.1. Subject to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code, for any offence set out in these Regulations with a listed minimum fine, where it is the first such offence committed by a party:

- 61.1.1. the AFC, after completing its investigation but prior to opening disciplinary proceedings, may write to the party and make an offer to compound the offence and reduce the listed fine by twenty percent (20%) should the party admit to the offence;
- 61.1.2. if the offence is admitted, the AFC shall submit the compounded offence to the Chairperson of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee for approval;
  - 61.1.2.1. should the party deny the offence, the AFC shall open disciplinary proceedings;
- 61.1.3. upon approval of the Chairperson of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee, the sanction shall be notified and applied administratively by the AFC;
- 61.1.3.1. should the Chairperson of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee not approve the compounded offence, the AFC shall open disciplinary proceedings;
- 61.1.4. by agreeing to compound the offence, the party waives its right to request a motivated decision or appeal the sanction issued; and
- 61.1.5. any sanction issued administratively comes into force immediately upon notification in accordance with the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.

## 62. Cautions and Expulsions

- 62.1. All matters relating to cautions and/or expulsions, including the carrying forward of cautions between stages of the Competition, shall be undertaken in accordance with the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code except where expressly set out below.
  - 62.1.1. Subject to Article 62.1.2 to Article 62.1.7, if a Participating Player receives a caution in three (3) separate Matches in the Competition, he is automatically suspended from the next Match in the Competition.
  - 62.1.2. Any Participating Player or Participating Official who completes the Preliminary Stage having received one (1) or two (2) caution(s) in separate matches shall carry-over the caution(s) to the Playoff Stage.
  - 62.1.3. Any Participating Player or Participating Official who completes the Playoff Stage having received one (1) or two (2) caution(s) in separate matches shall not carry-over that caution to the Group Stage.
  - 62.1.4. Any Participating Player or Participating Official who completes the Group Stage having received one (1) or two (2) caution(s) in separate matches shall not carry-over that caution to the Knockout Stage.

Zonal Semi Finals

62.1.5. Any Participating Player or Participating Official who completes the Zonal Semi Final having received one (1) or two (2) caution(s) in separate matches shall not carry-over that caution to the Zonal Final.

Zonal Finals

62.1.6. Any Participating Player or Participating Official who completes the Zonal Final having received one (1) or two (2) caution(s) in separate matches shall not carry-over that caution to the Inter-Zone Semi Final.

Inter-Zone Semi Finals

62.1.7. Any Participating Player or Participating Official who completes the Inter-Zone Semi Final having only received one (1) or two (2) caution(s) in separate matches shall not carry over that caution to the Inter-Zone Final.

## 63. Protest

63.1. For the purpose of these Regulations, a protest is an objection of any kind related to any event and/or matter that has a direct effect on a Match.

63.2. Unless otherwise stipulated in these Regulations, to be considered valid, a protest must be:

63.2.1. submitted in writing (using the appropriate Protest Form issued by the AFC General Secretariat) to the AFC Match Commissioner for the relevant Match within two (2) hours of the end of the relevant Match;

63.2.2. followed up with a full written report (including a copy of the original Protest Form) which must be sent to the AFC General Secretariat within twenty-four (24) hours of the end of the relevant Match; and

63.2.3. accompanied by a non-refundable fee of USD1,000 (non-inclusive of any bank charges) which must be transmitted to the bank account nominated by the AFC General Secretariat within twenty-four (24) hours of the end of the relevant Match.

63.3. No protest shall be lodged relating to the Referee's decisions regarding facts connected with play. Such decisions are final and binding and not subject to appeal, unless otherwise stipulated in the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code. The same applies to any potential issue concerning the use and/or operation of any goal-line technology (GLT) and/or video assistant referee (VAR) system.

63.4. If any of the formal requirements set out in Article 63.2 are not met, the relevant protest shall be disregarded. The AFC General Secretariat decides whether or not such formal requirements have been met. Such decisions are final and binding and not appealable.

63.5. Subject to Article 63.4 and any other exceptions set out in these Regulations, the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code, the AFC Statutes and/or any other applicable AFC regulation, the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee shall make decisions on protests. Should the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee determine that a protest is unfounded or irresponsible, it may impose a fine. The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may transfer a protest to the AFC Competitions Committee for its decision if it is deemed to be purely operational in nature.

## 64. Arbitration

- 64.1. Any dispute in connection with the Competition shall be promptly settled by negotiation.
- 64.2. In compliance with the AFC Statutes, Participating Clubs, Member Associations, Participating Players and Participating Officials are prohibited from initiating disputes in an ordinary court of law and must submit to the exclusive jurisdiction of the AFC.
- 64.3. Participating Clubs, Member Associations, Participating Players and Participating Officials acknowledge and accept that, once all internal channels have been exhausted at the AFC, their sole recourse shall be the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). The Code of Sports-related Arbitration shall be applicable. The language of arbitration shall be English. Any hearing, if required, shall take place at the CAS Alternate Hearing Centre in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

## SECTION 14 : CLOSING PROVISIONS

### 65. Final

- 65.1. The Final shall be organised and managed by the AFC in collaboration with the AFC Commercial Rights Partner, the Host Club and its Member Association, including without limitation:
  - 65.1.1. Tickets and Ticketing in accordance with Articles 40.4 and 42.5;
  - 65.1.2. protocol;
  - 65.1.3. Match organisation;
  - 65.1.4. commercial operations; and
  - 65.1.5. media operations.
- 65.2. Any additional events planned before, during and after the Final by a Participating Club shall be communicated at least seven (7) days prior to the Final and be approved by the AFC.

### 66. Special Instructions

- 66.1. The AFC and/or AFC Competitions Committee (as appropriate) shall, in conjunction with the Host Associations, issue any instructions necessitated by special circumstances which might arise in the organisation of Matches.
- 66.2. These instructions shall form an integral part of these Regulations.

### 67. Decisions

- 67.1. All decisions made in accordance with these Regulations, except where expressly identified otherwise, are final and binding and not appealable in accordance with the AFC Statutes.

### 68. Amendments

- 68.1. The AFC reserves the right to make amendments to any part of these Regulations for any reason whatsoever. Such amendments shall be duly communicated in due course.

### 69. Force Majeure

- 69.1. The AFC Competitions Committee is the only body capable of declaring a Force Majeure event.

## 70. Matters Not Provided For

70.1. Matters not provided for in these Regulations shall be decided by the AFC Competitions Committee. Such decisions are final and binding and not appealable.

## 71. Implementing Provisions

71.1. The AFC General Secretariat is entrusted with the operational management of the Competition and is therefore entitled to make decisions and adopt the detailed provisions necessary for implementing these Regulations.

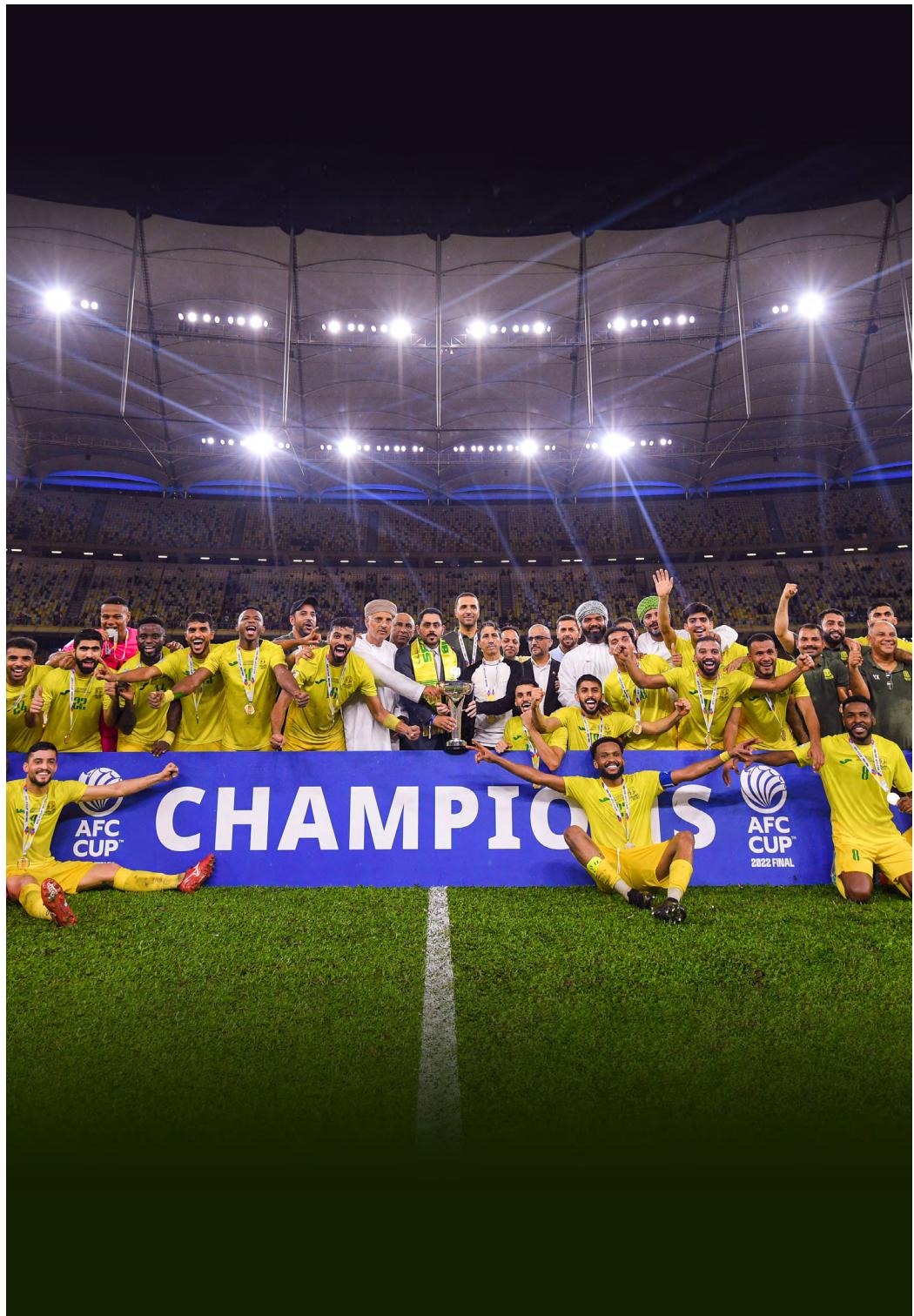
## 72. Enforcement

72.1. These Regulations were ratified by the AFC Executive Committee on 30 December 2022 and came into force immediately.

For the AFC Executive Committee

**Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa**  
President

**Datuk Seri Windsor John**  
General Secretary





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