

THE NANJINGER

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THE SUPERLATIVES
THE FAMOUS
THE LARGEST
THE OLDEST
THE LAST
THE BEST
THE FIRST
THE ORIGINAL
THE ONLY
THE TALLEST
THE BIGGEST
THE UNIQUE
THE LONGEST
THE TALLEST





By Misha Maruma

Chinese Bending it like Beckham?

In a triumph for Chinese football (or soccer to our American friends), Guangzhou Evergrande have become the first Chinese team to win the Asian Champions League. They are the first Chinese team to win a pan-Asian tournament since Liaoning's winning the Asian Club Championship in 1990.

Many hope that this victory will signal a resurgence in football after the recent corruption scandals that blighted the growth of the game in China. Fans from across China watched Guangzhou draw 1-1 at home to win the tournament on the away goals rule.

The final was played over two legs; the first away in South Korea against league champions FC Seoul. The score was 2-2 with goals scored away from home counting extra. Therefore as the second game finished 1-1, Guangzhou won overall by virtue of scoring more goals away from home than Seoul.

The game attracted the largest TV audience for a sporting event in China this year. Approximately 23.68 million people tuned into CCTV-5 on Saturday 9th November to watch the second leg as Evergrande came out victorious.

The Italian coach of Guangzhou, Macello Lippi, can add the AFC Asian Champions League to his already impressive list of achievements; In 1996 he won the UEFA Champions League with Juventus in 1996 and ten years later he celebrated Italy's victory at the FIFA World Cup as the national coach of the Mediterranean team.

With this victory Chinese football can look forward to a new era of popularity. Guangzhou Evergrande have won the Chinese league for the last two seasons confirming their dominance in the field. Fans will look forward to watching them compete as Asia's representative at the FIFA Club World Cup in Morocco next month in a chance of going up against the winners from Europe and South America.

If you are more of a player than a watcher,

you would previously have been able to enter a team into the Nanjing International football leagues. Unfortunately the leagues are not running this year. I spoke to Dan Aylward, last year's football league organiser, to find out what caused the disappearance of the

Nanjing league.

Dan Aylward is also the manager of the Nanjing Rockets, the local rugby team. This work is already keeping him quite busy, leaving little time for anything else. More importantly though, the main problem Dan has faced in the past was not finding the people to play but rather finding the people to play against.

"Nanjing doesn't have many expat run teams and it is difficult finding Chinese teams that are good enough to make the games competitive," Dan admits.

During the previous year the sports enthusiast managed to set up a league with eight expat teams and organise matches during the weekend at Zhengde College in Jiangning. At the end of the season there was even a trophy presentation. The big prize was claimed by the Nanjing Ligers for the second year in a row.

*While Dan has effectively retired from his footie duties, the post of football league organiser for Nanjing has yet to be filled. If you consider yourself the man or woman for the job, you are welcome to give it a try. Likewise, if you just want to play the game. The Nanjinger will put you in touch. **NJ***