



**Entry Manual for
AFC Club Competitions
Edition 2021**

Entry Manual for AFC Club Competitions (2021 Edition)

CONTENTS

PREAMBLE.....	2
DEFINITIONS.....	3
SECTION 1: GENERAL PROVISIONS.....	5
1. Scope of Application.....	5
2. AFC Club Competitions Ranking	5
SECTION 2: AFC Champions League.....	6
3. ACL Regional Ranking and Slot Allocation.....	6
4. ACL Criteria.....	10
SECTION 3: AFC Cup	13
5. ACC Zonal Ranking and Slot Allocation	13
6. ACC Criteria.....	16
SECTION 4: ELIGIBILITY OF CLUBS	19
7. Eligibility of Clubs.....	19
8. Club Licensing Criteria.....	19
9. Sporting Criteria	20
10. Appeal	24
SECTION 5: CLOSING PROVISIONS.....	26
11. Draw Mechanism.....	26
12. Disciplinary Measures.....	26
13. Decisions	26
14. Amendments.....	26
15. Matters Not Provided For.....	26
16. Implementing Provisions	26
17. Enforcement	26
Appendix 1: Principles of the AFC Club Competitions Ranking System	28

PREAMBLE

This Entry Manual for AFC Club Competitions sets out the principles for allocating slots to Member Associations and their eligible clubs to participate in the AFC Club Competitions from the 2021 Sporting Season onwards.

This Entry Manual shall be read in conjunction with the relevant competition regulations and circulars. This Entry Manual forms an integral part of any such competition regulations and/or circulars.

On 1 December 2019, the AFC Executive Committee granted a mandate to the AFC General Secretariat to update the Entry Manual for AFC Club Competitions 2017-2020 in accordance with the decision taken by the AFC Competitions Committee on 23 November 2019.

DEFINITIONS

In this Entry Manual, capitalised terms shall have the following meanings, unless the context specifically indicates otherwise:

ACC	The AFC Cup.
ACC Criteria	The requirements to be fulfilled by Member Associations, as set out in this Entry Manual, in order to obtain direct slots to participate in ACC.
ACC Zonal Ranking	Five (5) zonal rankings for ACC which are determined by the AFC Club Competitions Ranking as set out in this Entry Manual, comprising the ACC West Ranking, ACC South Ranking, ACC Central Ranking, ACC ASEAN Ranking and ACC East Ranking.
ACL	The AFC Champions League.
ACL Criteria	The requirements to be fulfilled by Member Associations, as set out in this Entry Manual, in order to obtain direct slots to participate in ACL.
ACL Regional Ranking	Two (2) regional rankings for ACL which are determined by the AFC Club Competitions Ranking as set out in this Entry Manual, comprising the ACL West Ranking and ACL East Ranking.
AFC Club Competitions	The AFC Champions League and the AFC Cup.
AFC Club Competitions Ranking	A technical ranking which ranks each Member Association based on its clubs' sporting results in the AFC Club Competitions.
East Region	The ACL East Region, comprising Member Associations from the ASEAN zone and East zone as identified in the AFC Statutes.
Entry Manual	This Entry Manual for AFC Club Competitions.
Sporting Season	The period starting with the first official match of a competition and ending with the last official match of the relevant competition.
Standby Club	The next eligible club that will join the ACC Group Stage in case a club from the same Member Association advances to the ACL Group Stage from the ACL Preliminary Stage and/or ACL Playoff Stage in accordance with Article 5.12 of this Entry Manual.
West Region	The ACL West Region, comprising Member Associations from the West zone, South zone and Central zone as

identified in the AFC Statutes.

For the purposes of this Entry Manual, 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 its respective Member Associations and AFC Committees;
- (e) reference to the AFC Commercial Rights Partner or Commercial Affiliates shall include where advised by the AFC, its successors, and permitted assigns; and
- (f) all defined terms, unless otherwise stated herein shall bear the same meaning as ascribed in the AFC Statutes, relevant competition regulations, AFC Competition Operations Manual and AFC Club Licensing Regulations, unless the context indicates otherwise.

SECTION 1: GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. Scope of Application

- 1.1. This Entry Manual for AFC Club Competitions governs the entry of clubs into the AFC Champions League and AFC Cup.
- 1.2. This Entry Manual sets out the mechanism for allocating slots to Member Associations and their eligible clubs to participate in the AFC Club Competitions.
- 1.3. Any reference to the AFC Statutes and to AFC and FIFA regulations refer to those valid at the time of application.

2. AFC Club Competitions Ranking

- 2.1. The AFC Club Competitions Ranking is a technical ranking which ranks each Member Association based on their clubs' sporting results in the AFC Club Competitions over the previous four (4) Sporting Seasons.
- 2.2. The formula for determining the AFC Club Competitions Ranking is set out in Appendix 1. The calculations on the AFC Club Competitions Ranking by the AFC General Secretariat are final and binding and not appealable.
- 2.3. Following the determination of the AFC Club Competitions Ranking, Member Associations will be divided in the following:
 - 2.3.1. the ACL Regional Ranking; and
 - 2.3.2. the ACC Zonal Ranking,in accordance with the geographic zones identified in the AFC Statutes, which shall be used to determine the number of slots allocated to each Member Association.
- 2.4. The AFC General Secretariat shall publish the AFC Club Competitions Ranking which shall be used to determine the ACL Regional Ranking and ACC Zonal Ranking in accordance with the provisions set out in this Entry Manual.

SECTION 2: AFC Champions League

3. ACL Regional Ranking and Slot Allocation

ACL Regional Ranking

3.1. The ACL Regional Ranking shall consist of two (2) regional rankings in accordance with the geographic zones identified in the AFC Statutes as follows:

3.1.1. Member Associations from the West zone, South zone and Central zone shall form the “ACL West Ranking”.

3.1.2. Member Associations from the East zone and ASEAN zone shall form the “ACL East Ranking”.

3.1.3. For sporting reasons, the AFC General Secretariat may reallocate one (1) or more Member Associations from the ACL West Ranking to the ACL East Ranking and vice-versa.

Slot Allocation

3.2. Member Associations ranked 1st to 12th in each regional ranking shall be allocated the following position and slots for the ACL:

Rank	Direct Slots (GS)	Indirect Slots (PO/PS)	Note
1	3	1	* Clubs from Member Associations ranked 1st to 5th with an indirect slot shall be eliminated from AFC Club Competitions for that Sporting Season in case they lose in the ACL PS or PO.
2	3	1	
3	2	2	
4	2	2	
5	1	2	
6	1	1	* Clubs representing Member Associations ranked 6th or below with an indirect slot shall enter the ACC GS for that Sporting Season in case they lose in the ACL PS or PO.
7	1		
8	1		
9	1		* If a club representing Member Associations ranked 6th or below with an indirect slot advances to the ACL GS, the next eligible club (Standby Club) from the relevant Member Association will join the ACC GS.
10	1		
11		1	
12		1	
Total	16	11	* Each region (i.e. West Region and East Region) shall be awarded four (4) slots to the group stage in the PO.

* GS: Group Stage / PO: Playoff Stage / PS: Preliminary Stage

3.3. The AFC General Secretariat reserves the right to adjust the above slot allocation whenever it deems necessary. The adjusted slot allocation will be informed to the Member Associations by circular letter.

Maximum Number of Slots allocated to a Member Association

3.4. The maximum number of total slots including the direct and indirect slots allocated to a Member Association shall be limited to whichever number is

lower between the following:

- 3.4.1. a maximum of four (4); or
 - 3.4.2. one-third (1/3) of the total number of clubs in its domestic top division league.
 - 3.4.2.1. When determining the number of clubs in the domestic top division league of a Member Association, 'foreign' clubs shall not be considered.
 - 3.4.2.2. The AFC General Secretariat has sole discretion to determine whether a club shall be considered a 'foreign' club for the above purpose.
- 3.5. The number of direct slots allocated to a Member Association shall be limited to a maximum of three (3).

ACL and ACC Titleholders

- 3.6. The ACL and ACC titleholders from the preceding Sporting Season shall be entitled to an indirect slot for the succeeding ACL Sporting Season even if they do not qualify by sporting criteria as set out in Article 9.1.
- 3.7. Notwithstanding Article 3.6, the ACL and ACC titleholders shall meet the eligibility requirements set out in Article 7.
- 3.8. In case the ACL titleholder does not qualify for the ACL in the next Sporting Season by sporting criteria:
- 3.8.1. it shall replace the lowest seeded club from its Member Association (*cf.* Article 9.1) in case its Member Association is ranked between 1st and 6th in the ACL Regional Ranking; or
 - 3.8.2. one (1) additional Preliminary Stage slot shall be allocated to its Member Association for the ACL titleholder in case its Member Association is ranked between 7th and 12th in the ACL Regional Ranking. In such case, the ACL titleholder shall be the lowest seeded club in the Preliminary Stage except in case the ACC titleholder also does not qualify by sporting criteria.
- 3.9. In case the ACC titleholder does not qualify for the ACL in the next Sporting Season by sporting criteria:
- 3.9.1. it shall replace the lowest seeded club from its Member Association (*cf.* Article 9.1) in case its Member Association is ranked between 1st and 6th in the ACL Regional Ranking; or
 - 3.9.2. one (1) additional Preliminary Stage slot shall be allocated to its

Member Association for the ACC titleholder in case its Member Association is ranked between 7th and 12th in the ACL Regional Ranking. In such case, the ACC titleholder shall be the lowest seeded club in the Preliminary Stage.

- 3.10. In case the ACL or ACC titleholder is from a Member Association ranked lower than 12th in the ACL Regional Ranking, one (1) additional Preliminary Stage slot shall be allocated to its Member Association for the relevant titleholder. In such case, the relevant titleholder shall be the lowest seeded club in the Preliminary Stage.
- 3.11. In case both the ACL titleholder and ACC titleholder are from the same Member Association and do not qualify for the ACL in the next Sporting Season by sporting criteria:
 - 3.11.1. one (1) additional Preliminary Stage slot shall be allocated to the relevant Member Association for the ACC titleholder in case the Member Association has only one (1) indirect slot previously allocated to it in accordance with the ACL Regional Ranking. In such case, the ACL titleholder shall replace the lowest seeded club from its Member Association (*cf.* Article 9.1) and the ACC titleholder shall be the lowest seeded club in the Preliminary Stage; or
 - 3.11.2. two (2) additional Preliminary Stage slots shall be allocated to the relevant Member Association for the ACL and ACC titleholder in case there is no indirect slot previously allocated to it in accordance with the ACL Regional Ranking.
- 3.12. For the avoidance of doubt, in case both the ACL titleholder and ACC titleholder are allocated an additional Preliminary Stage slot, the ACC titleholder shall be the lowest seeded club in the Preliminary Stage. The ACL titleholder shall be the second lowest seeded club in the Preliminary Stage.

Member Associations ranked 1st to 6th that fail to fulfil any of the ACL Criteria (*cf.* Article 4)

- 3.13. Member Associations ranked between 1st and 6th in each regional ranking that fail to fulfil any of the ACL Criteria shall only be eligible to receive indirect slots.
- 3.14. The following redistribution shall occur should one (1) or two (2) Member Associations ranked between 1st and 6th in the same regional ranking fail to fulfil any of the ACL Criteria:
 - 3.14.1. the number of slots for the relevant Member Association(s) shall be wholly converted into indirect slots (e.g. 3+1 becomes 0+4);
 - 3.14.2. any direct slot(s) that were forfeited shall be redistributed to the highest eligible Member Association in the same regional ranking,

subject to the principles set out in Articles 3.4 and 3.5;

- 3.14.3. should a Member Association ranked between 3rd and 6th be redistributed a direct slot, they shall have an indirect slot annulled which will not be redistributed (e.g. 2+2 becomes 3+1);
 - 3.14.4. should a Member Association ranked 5th be redistributed two (2) direct slots, they shall have an indirect slot annulled which will not be redistributed (e.g. 1+2 becomes 3+1); and
 - 3.14.5. should a Member Association ranked 6th be redistributed two (2) direct slots, they shall have an indirect slot annulled which will not be redistributed (e.g. 1+1 becomes 3+0).
- 3.15. Should three (3) or more Member Associations ranked between 1st and 6th in the same regional ranking fail to fulfil any of the ACL Criteria, the AFC General Secretariat, taking into account all relevant sporting factors, shall decide upon the appropriate redistribution of direct slots.

Member Associations ranked 7th to 10th that fail to fulfil any of the ACL Criteria (cf. Article 4)

- 3.16. Member Associations ranked between 7th and 10th in each regional ranking that fail to fulfil any of the ACL Criteria shall only be eligible to receive indirect slots.
- 3.17. The following redistribution shall occur should one (1) or two (2) Member Associations ranked between 7th and 10th in the same regional ranking fail to fulfil any of the ACL Criteria:
- 3.17.1. the number of slots for the relevant Member Association(s) shall be wholly converted into indirect slots (e.g. 1+0 becomes 0+1);
 - 3.17.2. any direct slot(s) that were forfeited shall be redistributed to the next eligible Member Association ranked 11th or 12th in the same regional ranking;
 - 3.17.3. should a Member Association ranked 11th or 12th be redistributed a direct slot, they shall have an indirect slot annulled which will not be redistributed (e.g. 0+1 becomes 1+0). For the avoidance of doubt, they shall be redistributed a maximum of one (1) direct slot each; and
 - 3.17.4. should a Member Association ranked 11th or 12th not be eligible to be redistributed a direct slot, it shall be redistributed to the highest eligible Member Association in accordance with Articles 3.14.2 to 3.14.5.
- 3.18. Should three (3) or more Member Associations ranked between 7th and 10th in the same regional ranking fail to fulfil any of the ACL Criteria, the AFC

General Secretariat, taking into account all relevant sporting factors, shall decide upon the appropriate redistribution of direct slots.

Member Associations only allocated Indirect Slots

- 3.19. Member Associations allocated only indirect slots due to:
- 3.19.1. being ranked 11th or 12th in a regional ranking; or
 - 3.19.2. failing to meet the ACL Criteria and being subject to the operation of Articles 3.13 to 3.18;
- must, as a minimum, meet the following:
- 3.19.3. Stadia requirements in the ACL Criteria;
 - 3.19.4. Logistics, Visa and Accommodation requirements in the ACL Criteria; and
 - 3.19.5. their eligible club(s) should be licensed in accordance with Article 8.
- 3.20. Should a Member Association not meet the minimum conditions, the indirect slot(s) allocated to it shall be annulled.

4. ACL Criteria

- 4.1. Member Associations must meet all of the ACL Criteria as set out below in order to obtain direct slots for the ACL:
- 4.1.1. Technical Standard;
 - 4.1.2. Club Licensing System;
 - 4.1.3. Sport Integrity;
 - 4.1.4. Organisation of Professional Football League;
 - 4.1.5. Stadia; and
 - 4.1.6. Logistics, Visa and Accommodation.
- 4.2. The AFC General Secretariat is responsible for determining whether a Member Association meets the ACL Criteria.

Criterion 1: Technical Standard
1.1. The Member Association must be ranked 12th or higher in the ACL West Ranking or ACL East Ranking.

Criterion 2: Club Licensing System

The Member Association has:

- 2.1. established a Club Licensing Administration within the Member Association or League, evidenced by:
 - (i) a full-time Club Licensing Manager;
 - (ii) a First Instance Body and Appeal Body;
 - (iii) Club Licensing Regulations accredited by the AFC; and
- 2.2. Club Licensing requirements applied to at least the domestic top division league.

Criterion 3: Sport Integrity

The Member Association has:

- 3.1. an Integrity Officer appointed within the Member Association;
- 3.2. regulations or equivalent documents which regulates match manipulation;
- 3.3. a reporting mechanism; and
- 3.4. an education seminar for players and team officials.

Criterion 4: Organisation of Professional Football League

The Member Association has:

- 4.1. a minimum of twenty-seven (27) matches per club in the domestic top division (including the domestic top division league, domestic cup and any grand final if applicable);
- 4.2. a minimum of an eight (8)-month duration of the domestic top division (including the domestic top division league, domestic cup and any grand final if applicable);
- 4.3. a home and away league format for the domestic top division league with maximum two (2) clubs sharing a stadium;
- 4.4. an education programme for referees;
- 4.5. appointed referee assessors at matches;
- 4.6. appointed match commissioners at matches;
- 4.7. competition regulations;
- 4.8. national regulations for the status and transfer of players;
- 4.9. a national or league disciplinary code;
- 4.10. national or league safety and security guidelines;
- 4.11. appointed safety and security officers at matches;
- 4.12. accurate measurements of attendance and announcements of the figure at matches;

- 4.13. a highest decision-making body of the league (or for league matters), comprising members from relevant stakeholders who reflect the interest of different parties (e.g. representatives from clubs, the league, the football association, independent organisations and/or individuals);
- 4.14. a full-time dedicated official who oversees the operational matters for the league;
- 4.15. a dedicated management structure for the league;
- 4.16. an audited profit and loss statement and balance sheet for the league;
- 4.17. an independent auditor for the league;
- 4.18. centralised marketing for media rights;
- 4.19. frequency of delivery of a certain type of contents of league matches and broadcasting of league match itself through TV and/or other available communication platform(s); and
- 4.20. media opportunity to cover matches both on match days and non-match days.

Criterion 5: Stadia
<p>Based on the regional rankings, Member Associations ranked between 1st and 6th must have two (2) or more stadiums and Member Associations ranked 7th or below must have one (1) or more stadiums in the domestic top division league that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1. complies with the AFC Stadium Regulations; 5.2. complies with the AFC Safety and Security Regulations; and 5.3. has been approved by the AFC.

Criterion 6: Logistics, Visa and Accommodation
<p>The Member Association has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6.1. an easy visa obtaining process; 6.2. daily international flights within the respective region (i.e. West Region or East Region); 6.3. simplified airport procedure, easy immigration/customs process; 6.4. well-established local transportation infrastructure; and 6.5. teams and official hotels of suitable standard.

SECTION 3: AFC Cup

5. ACC Zonal Ranking and Slot Allocation

ACC Zonal Ranking

- 5.1. The ACC Zonal Ranking shall consist of five (5) zonal rankings in accordance with the geographic zones identified in the AFC Statutes, excluding those Member Associations ranked 1st to 6th in the ACL Regional Ranking, as follows:
- 5.1.1. Member Associations from the West zone shall form the “ACC West Ranking”.
 - 5.1.2. Member Associations from the South zone shall form the “ACC South Ranking”.
 - 5.1.3. Member Associations from the Central zone shall form the “ACC Central Ranking”.
 - 5.1.4. Member Associations from the ASEAN zone shall form the “ACC ASEAN Ranking”.
 - 5.1.5. Member Associations from the East zone shall form the “ACC East Ranking”.
 - 5.1.6. For sporting reasons, the AFC General Secretariat may reallocate one (1) or more Member Associations from their affiliated zonal ranking to another zonal ranking.

Slot Allocation

- 5.2. Member Associations in each zonal ranking shall be allocated the following position and slots for the ACC:

Slot Allocation for ACC West/ASEAN Ranking

Rank	Direct Slots (GS)	Indirect Slots (PO/PS)	Note
1	2		* In case there are any unallocated slots for the ACC, the AFC General Secretariat shall reallocate any direct slot(s) at its sole discretion to one (1) or more Member Associations from the same zonal ranking. Any unallocated indirect slot(s) shall be forfeited.
2	2		
3	2		
4	1	1	
5	1	1	
6	1	1	
7		1	* number of PS/PO slots shall be determined based on the number of entries that meet the minimum requirements of the ACC Criteria.
8		1	
9		1	
10		1	
11		1	
12		1	
Total	9	9	* Number of slots to the group stage awarded in the PO shall be determined in accordance with Article 5.3 and 5.4.

* GS: Group Stage / PO: Playoff Stage / PS: Preliminary Stage

Slot Allocation for ACC South/Central/East Ranking

Rank	Direct Slots (GS)	Indirect Slots (PO/PS)	Note
1	1	1	* In case there are any unallocated slots for the ACC, the AFC General Secretariat shall reallocate any direct slot(s) at its sole discretion to one (1) or more Member Associations from the same zonal ranking. Any unallocated indirect slot(s) shall be forfeited. * number of PS/PO slots shall be determined based on the number of entries that meet the minimum requirements of the ACC Criteria.
2	1	1	
3	1	1	
4		1	
5		1	
6		1	
7		1	
8		1	
9		1	
10		1	
Total	3	10	* Number of slots to the group stage awarded in the PO shall be determined in accordance with Article 5.3 and 5.4.

* GS: Group Stage / PO: Playoff Stage / PS: Preliminary Stage

- 5.3. In addition to the above ACC slot allocation, Member Associations ranked 6th in the “ACL West Ranking” and “ACL East Ranking” shall be allocated one (1) direct slot each to its relevant ACC zone.
- 5.4. To ensure equal opportunity in the respective ACC zones, one (1) or more groups shall be added to the ACC Group Stage as a consequence of the following allocation of slots:
- 5.4.1. four (4) direct slots (including any direct slot allocated in accordance with Article 5.3) are allocated to either one (1) of the Central, South or East zone; and/or
- 5.4.2. seven (7) or more indirect slots are allocated to either one (1) of the Central, South or East Zone.

In case any group is added pursuant to the above, the new direct slots added shall be awarded in the Playoff Stage of the relevant ACC zone. The Playoff Stage will be played in accordance with the competition system set out in the relevant competition regulations.

- 5.5. The AFC General Secretariat reserves the right to adjust the above slot allocation whenever it deems necessary. The adjusted slot allocation will be informed to the Member Associations by circular letter.

Maximum Number of Slots allocated to a Member Association

- 5.6. The maximum number of total slots including the direct and indirect slots allocated to a Member Association shall be limited to whichever number is lower between the following:
- 5.6.1. a maximum of two (2); or

5.6.2. one-third (1/3) of the total number of clubs in its domestic top division league.

5.6.2.1. When determining the number of clubs in the domestic top division league of a Member Association, 'foreign' clubs shall not be considered.

5.6.2.2. The AFC General Secretariat has sole discretion to determine whether a club shall be considered a 'foreign' club for the above purpose.

Member Associations allocated direct slots that fail to fulfil any of the ACC Criteria (cf. Article 6)

5.7. Member Associations ranked between 1st and 6th in the ACC West/ASEAN Ranking or between 1st and 3rd in the ACC South/Central/East Ranking that fail to fulfil any of the ACC Criteria shall only be eligible to receive indirect slots.

5.8. The following redistribution shall occur should one (1) or two (2) Member Associations that are allocated direct slots in the same zonal ranking fail to fulfil any of the ACC Criteria:

5.8.1. the number of slots for the Member Association(s) shall be wholly converted into indirect slots (e.g. 1+1 becomes 0+2);

5.8.2. any direct slot(s) that were forfeited shall be redistributed to the highest eligible Member Association, ranked 4th or lower in the same zonal ranking, subject to the principles set out in Article 5.6;

5.8.3. should a Member Association with a direct slot be redistributed another direct slot, they shall have an indirect slot annulled which will not be redistributed (e.g. 1+1 becomes 2+0); and

5.8.4. should a Member Association with no direct slot be redistributed a direct slot, they shall have an indirect slot annulled which will not be redistributed (e.g. 0+1 becomes 1+0).

5.9. Should three (3) or more Member Associations in the same zonal ranking fail to fulfil any of the ACC Criteria, the AFC General Secretariat, taking into account all relevant sporting factors, shall decide upon the appropriate redistribution of direct slots.

Member Associations only allocated Indirect Slots

5.10. Member Associations allocated only indirect slots due to:

5.10.1. being ranked 7th or lower in the ACC West/ASEAN Ranking; or

- 5.10.2. being ranked 4th or lower in the ACC South/Central/East Ranking; or
- 5.10.3. failing to meet the ACC Criteria and being subject to the operation of Articles 5.7 to 5.9;

must, as a minimum, meet the following:

- 5.10.4. Stadia requirements in the ACC Criteria;
 - 5.10.5. Logistics, Visa and Accommodation requirements in the ACC Criteria;
and
 - 5.10.6. their eligible club(s) should be licensed in accordance with Article 8.
- 5.11. Should a Member Association not meet the minimum conditions, the indirect slot(s) allocated to it shall be annulled.

Standby Club

- 5.12. In accordance with Article 3.2, clubs representing Member Associations ranked 6th or below in the ACL Regional Ranking with an indirect slot shall enter the ACC Group Stage for that Sporting Season if they are eliminated in the ACL Preliminary Stage or Playoff Stage. Should such club qualify for the ACL Group Stage, the next eligible club (Standby Club) from the same Member Association will join the ACC Group Stage in accordance with Article 9.1. Article 5.12 shall not apply in case the relevant club has been allocated an additional ACL Preliminary Stage slot in accordance with Articles 3.8 to 3.11.

6. ACC Criteria

- 6.1. Member Associations must meet all of the ACC Criteria as set out below in order to obtain direct slots for the ACC:
- 6.1.1. Technical Standard;
 - 6.1.2. Club Licensing System;
 - 6.1.3. Sport Integrity;
 - 6.1.4. Organisation of Professional Football League;
 - 6.1.5. Stadia; and
 - 6.1.6. Logistics, Visa and Accommodation.
- 6.2. The AFC General Secretariat is responsible for determining whether a Member Association meets the ACC Criteria.

Criterion 1: Technical Standard

- 1.1. The Member Association must be ranked 6th or lower in the ACL West Ranking or ACL East Ranking.

Criterion 2: Club Licensing System

The Member Association has:

- 2.1. established a Club Licensing Administration within the Member Association or League, evidenced by:
 - (i) a full-time Club Licensing Manager;
 - (ii) a First Instance Body and Appeal Body;
 - (iii) Club Licensing Regulations accredited by the AFC; and
- 2.2. Club Licensing requirements applied to at least the domestic top division league.

Criterion 3: Sport Integrity

The Member Association has:

- 3.1. an Integrity Officer appointed within the Member Association;
- 3.2. regulations or equivalent documents which regulates match manipulation;
- 3.3. a reporting mechanism; and
- 3.4. an education seminar for players and team officials.

Criterion 4: Organisation of Professional Football League

The Member Association has:

- 4.1. an existing domestic top division (including the domestic top division league, domestic cup and any grand final if applicable);
- 4.2. a home and away league format for the domestic top division league with maximum two (2) clubs sharing a stadium;
- 4.3. an operational referee department
- 4.4. appointed match commissioners at matches;
- 4.5. competition regulations;
- 4.6. national regulations for the status and transfer of players;
- 4.7. a national or league disciplinary code;
- 4.8. national or league safety and security guidelines;
- 4.9. appointed safety and security officers at matches;
- 4.10. a highest decision-making body of the league (or for league matters), comprising members from relevant stakeholders who reflect the interest of different parties (e.g. representatives from clubs, the league, the football association, independent organisations and/or individuals);

- 4.11. a dedicated management structure for the league;
- 4.12. an audited profit and loss statement and balance sheet for the league; and
- 4.13. media opportunity to cover matches both on match days and non-match days.

Criterion 5: Stadia

Member Associations must have more than one (1) stadium in the domestic top division league that:

- 5.1. complies with the AFC Stadium Regulations;
- 5.2. complies with the AFC Safety and Security Regulations; and
- 5.3. has been approved by the AFC.

Criterion 6: Logistics, Visa and Accommodation

The Member Association has:

- 6.1. an easy visa obtaining process;
- 6.2. daily international flights within the respective zone (i.e. ACC West/South/Central/ASEAN/East zone);
- 6.3. simplified airport procedure, easy immigration/customs process;
- 6.4. well-established local transportation infrastructure; and
- 6.5. teams and official hotels of suitable standard.

SECTION 4: ELIGIBILITY OF CLUBS

7. Eligibility of Clubs

- 7.1. To be eligible to participate in AFC Club Competitions, a club must:
 - 7.1.1. be awarded a license in accordance with Article 8; and
 - 7.1.2. meet the sporting criteria in accordance with Article 9.

8. Club Licensing Criteria

- 8.1. Member Associations are required to implement a national club licensing system for all the clubs within their domestic top division league.
- 8.2. Clubs that meet the sporting criteria set out in Article 9 must have received a license from the relevant national licensor. Should a club that meets the sporting criteria fail to receive a license, Article 9.4 applies, subject to the operation of Articles 3.4 and 3.5 (for ACL) or Article 5.6 (for ACC), read together with Article 9.5.
- 8.3. Where a Member Association has less licensed clubs than slots allocated to it:
 - 8.3.1. any direct slot(s) shall be redistributed in accordance with Articles 3.14 and 3.17 (for ACL) or Article 5.8 (for ACC); and
 - 8.3.2. any indirect slot(s) shall be annulled.

Extraordinary Application

- 8.4. Where an eligible club has not acquired a license from the relevant national licensor, the licensor of the club concerned may on behalf of such a club request an extraordinary application of the club licensing system in accordance with Annex 4 of the AFC Club Licensing Regulations.
- 8.5. Member Associations who do not have an approved national licensing process shall be limited to requesting an extraordinary application on behalf of each relevant club only once. This provision incorporates and includes all requests undertaken in previous Sporting Seasons.
- 8.6. The process shall be undertaken in accordance with Annex 4 of the AFC Club Licensing Regulations.

AFC Entry Control Body

- 8.7. The AFC Club Licensing Regulations set out which matters relating to the club licensing criteria may be lodged or appealed before the AFC Entry Control Body. Such decisions shall be made in accordance with the Procedural Rules Governing the AFC Entry Control Body.

9. Sporting Criteria

- 9.1. To meet the sporting criteria, a club must have earned one (1) of the following (which shall be applied in descending order to determine the representative clubs of a Member Association):
 - 9.1.1. winner of the domestic top division league;
 - 9.1.2. winner of the domestic cup;
 - 9.1.3. runner-up of the domestic top division league;
 - 9.1.4. third place of the domestic top division league;
 - 9.1.5. fourth place of the domestic top division league (only if there is no domestic cup applicable for Article 9.1.2).
- 9.2. Where a Member Association has more than one (1) domestic cup, it shall inform the AFC and its clubs of the 'domestic cup' for the purposes of Article 9.1.
- 9.3. Where the winner of the domestic cup also meets the sporting criteria through its finishing position in the domestic top division league:
 - 9.3.1. if it is the winner of the domestic top division league, it shall be the first seed. The runner-up of the domestic top division league shall be the second seed. The third place of the domestic top division league shall be the third seed. The fourth place of the domestic top division league shall be the fourth seed;
 - 9.3.2. if it is the runner-up of the domestic top division league, it shall be the second seed. The third place of the domestic top division league shall be the third seed. The fourth place of the domestic top division league shall be the fourth seed;
 - 9.3.3. if it is the third place in the domestic top division league, it shall be the second seed. The runner-up of the domestic top division league shall be the third seed. The fourth place of the domestic top division league shall be the fourth seed.
- 9.4. Where a club that meets the sporting criteria does not receive a license, the club which finished in the next highest position in the domestic top division league which is licensed shall replace it, subject to the operation of Articles 3.4 and 3.5 (for ACL) or Article 5.6 (for ACC), read together with Article 9.5.
- 9.5. Only clubs whose final finishing position in the domestic top division league

is in the top fifty percent (50%) of the number of clubs that participated on its first match day are eligible to meet the sporting criteria. For the avoidance of doubt, this Article 9.5 shall not apply to the winner of the domestic cup (*cf.* Article 9.1.2).

- 9.5.1. For the avoidance of doubt, in a domestic top division league of (e.g.) twelve (12) clubs, only the top six (6) are eligible to participate in AFC Club Competitions on the basis of their finishing position.
 - 9.5.2. For the avoidance of doubt, if the same domestic top division league commenced the Sporting Season with twelve (12) clubs, but only ten (10) completed the full Sporting Season for whatever reason, the top six (6) are eligible to participate in AFC Club Competitions on the basis of their finishing position.
 - 9.5.3. For the avoidance of doubt, when calculating the number of clubs that participated on the first match day of a domestic top division league, 'foreign clubs' shall not form part of that number.
- 9.6. This Article 9 shall only take into consideration the domestic top division league and domestic cup ending in the domestic Sporting Season immediately preceding the AFC Club Competitions.
- 9.6.1. Where there was no domestic top division league and/or domestic cup(s) held in the domestic Sporting Season immediately preceding the AFC Club Competitions, the AFC General Secretariat shall decide which domestic Sporting Season (if any) the sporting criteria shall apply to.

Clubs directly or indirectly involved in Match Manipulation

- 9.7. If, on the basis of all the factual circumstances and information available to the AFC, the AFC concludes to its comfortable satisfaction that a club has been directly and/or indirectly involved, since the entry into force of Article 73.6 of the AFC Statutes on 8 June 2010 (or its future equivalents), in any activity aimed at arranging or influencing the outcome of a match at national or international level, such club shall be declared ineligible to participate in AFC Club Competitions. Such ineligibility is effective for only one (1) Sporting Season.
- 9.7.1. When making this administrative decision, the AFC can rely on, but is not bound by, a decision of a national or international sporting body, arbitral tribunal or state court.
 - 9.7.2. The AFC can refrain from declaring a club ineligible to participate in the competition if the AFC is comfortably satisfied that the impact of a decision made in connection with the same factual circumstances by a national or international sporting body, arbitral tribunal or state court has already had the effect to prevent that club from

participating in an AFC Club Competition.

9.7.3. Where a club is declared ineligible, it is considered to have not met the sporting criteria. Accordingly, the club that finished in the next highest position in the domestic top division league and is licensed shall replace it, subject to the operation of Articles 3.4 and 3.5 (for ACL) or Article 5.6 (for ACC), read together with Article 9.5.

9.8. The AFC Entry Control Body shall make all final decisions in this regard. Such decisions shall be made in accordance with the Procedural Rules Governing the AFC Entry Control Body.

9.8.1. In addition to the administrative measure of declaring a club ineligible, the AFC may, if the circumstances so justify, initiate disciplinary proceedings in accordance with the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code.

Member Association allocated more Slots than Clubs who meet the Sporting Criteria

9.9. Should a Member Association, as a result of the operation of Article 9.5, have more slots allocated to it than eligible clubs which meet the sporting criteria, any vacant direct slot(s) shall be redistributed in accordance with the procedure set out in Articles 3.14 and 3.17 (for ACL) or Article 5.8 (for ACC). Any vacant indirect slot(s) shall be annulled.

Member Association allocated more Slots than one-third (1/3) of the Domestic Top Division League

9.10. Should a Member Association, as a result of the operation of Article 3.2 or 5.2, have more slots allocated to it than the number of clubs it is permitted to enter in the AFC Club Competitions, any vacant direct slot(s) shall be redistributed in accordance with the procedure set out in Articles 3.14 and 3.17 (for ACL) or Article 5.8 (for ACC). Any vacant indirect slot(s) shall be annulled.

Eligible Club refuses to enter AFC Club Competition

9.11. If an eligible club refuses to enter an AFC Club Competition, despite being licensed and meeting the sporting criteria, the slot allocated to its Member Association shall be annulled, regardless of whether it is a direct slot or indirect slot.

Control or Influence of Clubs

9.12. To ensure the integrity of an AFC Club Competition:

9.12.1. no participating club may, either directly or indirectly:

9.12.1.1. hold or deal in the securities or shares of any other participating club;

- 9.12.1.2. be a member of any other participating club;
 - 9.12.1.3. be involved in any capacity whatsoever in the management, administration and/or sporting performance of any other participating club; or,
 - 9.12.1.4. have any power whatsoever in the management, administration and/or sporting performance of any other participating club;
- 9.12.2. no one may simultaneously be involved, either directly or indirectly, in any capacity whatsoever in the management, administration and/or sporting performance of more than one (1) participating club;
- 9.12.3. no individual or legal entity may have control or influence over more than one (1) participating club, such control or influence being defined in this context as:
- 9.12.3.1. holding a majority of the shareholders' voting rights;
 - 9.12.3.2. having the right to appoint or remove a majority of the members of the administrative, management, or supervisory body of the club;
 - 9.12.3.3. being a shareholder and alone controlling a majority of the shareholders' voting rights pursuant to an agreement entered into with other shareholders of the club; or
 - 9.12.3.4. being able to exercise by any means a decisive influence in the decision-making of a club.

Control or Influence determined prior to Commencement of AFC Club Competition

- 9.13. In the event that the AFC determines, prior to the commencement of an AFC Club Competition, that there exists a breach of the eligibility criteria in Article 9.12, only one (1) of the breaching clubs may be admitted, in accordance with the following (in descending order):
- 9.13.1. the eligible club which is affiliated to the Member Association with the higher ranking in the AFC Club Competitions Ranking; or
 - 9.13.2. if affiliated to the same Member Association, the eligible club which is the higher seed.
- 9.14. The AFC Entry Control Body shall make all final decisions in this regard. Such decisions shall be made in accordance with the Procedural Rules Governing the AFC Entry Control Body.

9.14.1. Where a club is declared ineligible, it is considered to have not met the sporting criteria. Accordingly, the club that finished in the next highest position in the domestic top division league and is licensed shall replace it, subject to the operation of Articles 3.4 and 3.5 (for ACL) or Article 5.6 (for ACC), read together with Article 9.5.

9.14.2. In the event that AFC Entry Control Body determines that the scenario in Article 9.13.2 has occurred, a prima facie breach of the AFC Club Licensing Regulations has occurred and the matter shall also be referred to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee.

Control or Influence determined during AFC Club Competition

9.15. In the event that the AFC determines, during an AFC Club Competition, that there exists (or has come into existence) a breach of the eligibility criteria in Article 9.12:

9.15.1. the participating clubs shall be permitted to complete the AFC Club Competition;

9.15.2. the participating clubs shall be declared ineligible to participate in AFC Club Competitions for the following two (2) Sporting Seasons.

9.16. The AFC Entry Control Body shall make all final decisions in this regard. Such decisions shall be made in accordance with the Procedural Rules Governing the AFC Entry Control Body.

9.16.1. Where a club is declared ineligible, it is considered to have not met the sporting criteria. Accordingly, the club that finished in the next highest position in the domestic top division league and is licensed shall replace it, subject to the operation of Articles 3.4 and 3.5 (for ACL) or Article 5.6 (for ACC), read together with Article 9.5.

9.16.2. In the event that AFC Entry Control Body considers that such violation involves dishonest conduct, the matter shall also be referred to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee.

10. Appeal

10.1. Any administrative decision by the AFC Entry Control Body to refuse the admission of a club to an AFC Club Competition made in accordance with this Entry Manual may be lodged exclusively and directly with the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in accordance with the Procedural Rules Governing the AFC Entry Control Body and entry forms submitted to the AFC General Secretariat.

10.2. Appeals shall be subject to the following conditions, without limitation, which are reflected in the Procedural Rules Governing the AFC Entry Control Body:

- 10.2.1. the language of arbitration shall be English;
- 10.2.2. the matter shall be heard by three (3) arbitrators;
- 10.2.3. the appeal shall be subject to an expedited procedure; and
- 10.2.4. any hearings (if required) shall be undertaken at the CAS Alternate Hearing Centre in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

SECTION 5: CLOSING PROVISIONS

11. Draw Mechanism

- 11.1. The draw mechanism for the AFC Club Competitions shall be published by the AFC in advance of any draw.

12. Disciplinary Measures

- 12.1. All disciplinary measures in relation to this Entry Manual shall be undertaken in accordance with the current AFC Statutes, AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code, and any relevant AFC circular.

13. Decisions

- 13.1. All decisions made in accordance with this Entry Manual, except where expressly identified otherwise, are final and binding and not appealable in accordance with the AFC Statutes.

14. Amendments

- 14.1. The AFC reserves the right to make amendments to any part of this Entry Manual for any reason whatsoever. Such amendments shall be duly communicated to the Member Associations and clubs in due course.

15. Matters Not Provided For

- 15.1. Matters not provided for in this Entry Manual shall be decided by the AFC Competitions Committee. Such decisions are final and binding and not appealable.

16. Implementing Provisions

- 16.1. The AFC General Secretariat is entrusted with the operational management of the AFC Club Competitions and is therefore entitled to make decisions and adopt the detailed provisions necessary for implementing this Entry Manual.

17. Enforcement

- 17.1. The Entry Manual for AFC Club Competitions 2017-2020 was ratified by the AFC Executive Committee on 3 July 2017 and came into force immediately.

17.2. The Entry Manual for AFC Club Competitions 2017–2020 was updated by the AFC General Secretariat on 22 July 2020 in accordance with the decisions of the AFC Competitions Committee on 23 November 2019 and the AFC Executive Committee on 1 December 2019.

17.3. This Entry Manual (2021 Edition) came into force immediately.

For the AFC Executive Committee

President:

Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa

AFC General Secretary:

Dato' Windsor John



AFC Club Competitions Ranking

How the points are calculated?

Based on the performance of last four years of Club Teams at the AFC Club Competitions



The following points to be given to AFC Championship League Match results:

- 3 points for 'WIN', 1 point for 'DRAW' and 0 point for 'LOSE'
- 3 additional points to be given to each club that advances to the Knockout Stage
- ACL Preliminary 1 & 2 and Playoff Stage - Bonus points for entry 0.3, each win (except by Penalty kick) 0.3 and each draw 0.15
- In case MA has more than 1 club in the Group Stage, then average points of clubs will be the final points for the respective MA



The following points to be given to AFC Cup Match results:

- 3 points for 'WIN', 1 point for 'DRAW' and 0 point for 'LOSE' in the Group Stage
- 3 additional points to be given to each club that advances to the Knockout Stage
- AFC Cup Preliminary 1 & 2 and Playoff Stage - Bonus points for entry 0.3, each win (except by Penalty kick) 0.3 and each draw 0.15
- AFC Cup (West/Central/South/East) 4.8 points for each WIN and 1.6 points for each DRAW in the Knockout Stage
- AFC Cup (ASEAN) 2.67 points for each WIN and 0.89 points for each DRAW in the Knockout Stage
- In case MA has more than 1 club in the Group Stage, then average points of clubs will be the final points for the respective MA
- 1 AFC Cup point is equivalent to 1/3 of the AFC Champions League point

The MA ranked number 1 in the Club Teams' performance will receive full marks (i.e. 100 points). The other MAs will receive points proportionally less (based on the number of points obtained from the results of Club Teams at the AFC Club Competitions) compared to the MA ranked 1.



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