

"FIFA Club World Cup: Al-Ittihad vs Al Ahly 'Clash of the Arab Giants' Showcases Saudi Football Culture"

JEDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA, December 15, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The President of the Saudi Arabian Football Federation believes Friday night's FIFA Club World Cup fixture between local heroes Al-Ittihad and Egypt's Al Ahly will be the "perfect window" for the world into the passion driving the Kingdom's vast investment into football.

Yasser Al-Misehal shared his thoughts ahead of what will be an electric evening at Jeddah's King Abdullah Sports City stadium, where more than 60,000 fans will gather for what is being dubbed the 'clash of the Arab giants', with a FIFA Club World Cup semi-final place going to the winners.

With Jeddah being home to a large number of the estimated 1.5million Egyptians living in Saudi Arabia, a loud, partisan crowd is expected to pack out the Red Sea city's "Jewel" stadium, making for what promises to be feverous atmosphere.

That diversity will shape the stands a little differently to Tuesday night's opening fixture, which saw Al-Ittihad ease to a comfortable 3-0 win against tournament outsiders Auckland City of New Zealand in a stadium almost entirely full with yellow-



Saudi Arabian Football Federation President Yasser Al-Misehal previews all-Arab clash



Hopes world will see "fan passion" that is driving the Kingdom's vast football investment

fans in a stadium almost entirely full with yellow-

clad Al-Ittihad supporters.

That game saw superstar signings Karim Benzema and N'Golo Kanté score two of the Saudi Pro League champions three goals – big name acquisitions that have not only elevated Al-Ittihad's expectations in this Saudi-hosting of the FIFA Club World Cup, but which have also helped transform the wider status of Saudi football on a global stage.



Jeddah locals Al-Ittihad playing Egypt's Al Ahly on matchday two of FIFA Club World Cup

To Yasser Al-Misehal, President of the Saudi Arabian Football Federation, it is enormously exciting to see a Saudi club

compete at world football's top table. The victor of tonight's match tees-up a FIFA Club World Cup semi-final against South American champions Fluminense, with UEFA Champions League winners Manchester City lurking as a potential final opponent if they make it through that.

However, as much as the Saudi Arabian Football Federation enjoy seeing their clubs advancing, Al-Misehal insists that success on the pitch is not what is driving the considerable investment being made into Saudi football. For that, he says, you need to look to the stands.

He said: "There is so much excitement ahead of this match tonight. It is rare at this level of club football that you have the eyes of the world on a match between two Arab sides, but that is what we are lucky to have today, with Al-Ittihad against Al Ahly in the FIFA Club World Cup.

"The passion that both sets of supporters will bring to the match tonight will make for a truly memorable spectacle. As our own fans showed on matchday one, the love for football and the level of football fandom we have here can rival anywhere else in the world. Football is more than just a passing interest for fans here: it is an obsession, a lifetime commitment. For many people, it is everything. The atmosphere in the stadium tonight will pay testament to that.

"Saudi football has grown enormously in the last few years, giving our game truly global appeal and interest. We are often asked why we are putting this level of commitment into the game. The answer to that will in the stands tonight. This is the passion that drives everything we're doing. Having two massive Arab clubs compete in the FIFA Club World Cup here in Jeddah is the perfect window for the world into why we are doing everything we can to grow football. It's driven by our people and their passion for this sport."

The Saudi Arabian Football Federation seek to bring events like the FIFA Club World Cup to the Kingdom as a means of inspiring the next generation and getting more Saudis into sport, in line

with the goals of Saudi Vision 2030. As well as helping people live healthier and more active lifestyles, the growth of football has also helped create thousands of new jobs Kingdom-wide, a trend which is continuing at pace.

Friday will see matches two and three of the FIFA Club World Cup take place, with Mexico's Club León taking on Urawa Red Diamonds of Japan at 5.30pm local time (GMT +3), before Al-Ittihad versus Al Ahly at 9.30pm.

That has saw thousands of international fans descend on Jeddah, which has been brought to life with dedicated fan-zones popping-up across the city.

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