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The J. League's most-crowned team do it again. Toru Araiba lifts the shield.

Kashima Antlers clinched their sixth J. League championship and second in a row on the final day of a tightly fought league season. Antlers led from the start this year and also eased to the title from the front with three straight 1-0 wins in their final games. Kashima's Brazilian striker Marquinhos was

the league's top scorer with 21 goals. "It is no easy thing to win twice running," said Antlers manager Oswaldo Oliveira. "I will treasure this memory all my life." Kawasaki Frontale stormed into second place with 10 goals against no reply in their last 3 matches, and Nagoya Grampus came third.

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Only three points separated the top six teams in J1 with three matches left to play. All six had won exactly 15 out of 31 games. The leading pack included not only the last two champions, Urawa Reds and Kashima Antlers, but also such new faces to the title race as Oita Trinita and FC Tokyo. In the end, it was last season's champions, Kashima, who pulled away to secure their record sixth J. League championship but Nagoya Grampus and Kawasaki Frontale also remained in the hunt to the final day.

"I congratulate Kashima Antlers on their triumph," said J. League Chairman Kenji Onitake. "Antlers suffered injuries to many key players this year but Oswaldo Oliveira even so produced a fine blend of young and veteran players all season. I also sensed great bonds between the players. I wish them well not only in the league next season but also as the J. League champions in the AFC Champions League."

Kashima, Kawasaki and Nagoya all qualify for the AFC Champions League 2009 as the top three teams in J1. They will be joined by the winners of the Emperor's Cup or, if the cup is won by Nagoya (Kashima and Kawasaki are already out), by Oita for their fourth place finish in the league.

It was also a classic battle at the bottom, where Consadole Sapporo were relegated early but five other teams were still in danger of going down to the very last day. JEF United Chiba, second from bottom, two points behind the next teams up and two goals down to FC Tokyo with 16 minutes left on the clock, amazingly leapt to safety with 4 goals in 11 minutes to secure a 4-2 win. That escape act condemned Tokyo Verdy to the drop and sent Júbilo Iwata into the promotion and relegation play-off.



High drama at Chiba on the final day

Division One - Final Table

Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
1 Kashima Antlers	34	18	9	7	56	30	+26	63
2 Kawasaki Frontale	34	18	6	10	65	42	+23	60
3 Nagoya Grampus	34	17	8	9	48	35	+13	59
4 Oita Trinita	34	16	8	10	33	24	+9	56
5 Shimizu S-Pulse	34	16	7	11	50	42	+8	55
6 F.C. Tokyo	34	16	7	11	50	46	+4	55
7 Urawa Reds	34	15	8	11	50	42	+8	53
8 Gamba Osaka	34	14	8	12	46	49	-3	50
9 Yokohama F·Marinos	34	13	9	12	43	32	+11	48
10 Vissel Kobe	34	12	11	11	39	38	+1	47
11 Kashiwa Reysol	34	13	7	14	48	45	+3	46
12 Omiya Ardija	34	12	7	15	36	45	-9	43
13 Albirex Niigata	34	11	9	14	32	46	-14	42
14 Kyoto Sanga F.C.	34	11	8	15	37	46	-9	41
15 JEF United Chiba	34	10	8	16	36	53	-17	38
16 Júbilo Iwata	34	10	7	17	40	48	-8	37
17 Tokyo Verdy	34	10	7	17	38	50	-12	37
18 Consadole Sapporo	34	4	6	24	36	70	-34	18



Marquinhos (Kashima Antlers), top scorer in 2008

Scorers

Player	Team	Gls
1 MARQUINHOS	Kashima Antlers	21
2 DAVI	Consadole Sapporo	16
3 CHONG Tese	Kawasaki Frontale	14
4 Atsushi YANAGISAWA	Kyoto Sanga F.C.	14
5 ALESSANDRO	Albirex Niigata	13
6 Shingo AKAMINE	F.C.Tokyo	12
6 JUNINHO	Kawasaki Frontale	12
6 Frode JOHNSEN	Nagoya Grampus	12

Hiroshima and Yamagata Promoted

Sanfrecce Hiroshima secured their immediate return to J1 with more than two months to spare. Montedio Yamagata won the other automatic promotion slot and Vegalta Sendai advanced to the promotion and relegation play-off against Júbilo Iwata.

Division Two is set to expand again next year with the admission of three more teams: Tochigi SC, Kataller Toyama and Fagiano Okayama, which will bring J2 to 18 clubs, the same number as in J1.

AFC Champions League 2008

!!Gamba Osaka – Champions of Asia!!



Gamba make it two in a row for the J. League

Gamba Osaka won the AFC Champions League 2008 with a convincing 5-0 aggregate victory over Adelaide United of Australia. The final crowned a magnificent campaign in which Gamba came through the group stage unbeaten and knocked out the holders, Urawa Reds, 4-2 on aggregate on the strength of a fine 3-1 away win at Saitama Stadium in the semi-final second leg. Gamba's triumph thus made it two in a row for the J. League in Asia's premier club tournament.

Gamba established a powerful 3-0 lead over Adelaide in the home leg of the final thanks to goals by Lucas, Yasuhito Endo and Michihiro Yasuda. With away goals counting double, Lucas then put the tie beyond serious doubt with two goals in the first 15 minutes in Australia. Adelaide fought bravely to the final whistle but the day belonged to Osaka. Creative Gamba midfielder Yasuhito Endo was named player of the tournament.

"My heartfelt congratulations to Gamba Osaka,"

said J. League Chairman Kenji Onitake. "They started the second leg defensively but scored straight away on the counterattack and then earned a perfect victory with all of the skilful possession, technique and teamwork that we know to expect from Gamba. I applaud them all, the manager, players, staff and everyone involved at the club."

2008 has been year of unprecedented international glory for Gamba, starting with success at the Pan-Pacific Championship in Hawaii in February and culminating in December, thanks to this Asian triumph, in their appearance at the FIFA Club World Cup Japan 2008, presented by Toyota, where they now have the opportunity to test their might against the other continental champions, including Manchester United of England and Liga de Quito of Ecuador.

The Road to Asian Glory (Gamba scorers only)

Group stage

- H Chonburi Football Club (Thailand) 1-1 (Lucas)
- A Chunnam Dragons (Korea Rep.) 4-3 (Futagawa, Bando(2), M.Yasuda)
- A Melbourne Victory FC (Australia) 4-3 (Futagawa, Bare, Yamaguchi, Lucas)
- H Melbourne Victory FC 2-0 (Yamazaki(2))
- A Chonburi Football Club 2-0 (Yamazaki, Lucas)
- H Chunnam Dragons 1-1 (Futagawa)

Quarter-finals

- A Al Karama (Syria) 2-1 (Yamaguchi, Yamazaki)
- H Al Karama 2-0 (Yamazaki, Roni)

Semi-finals

- H Urawa Reds (Japan) 1-1 (Endo)
- A Urawa Reds 3-1 (Yamaguchi, Myojin, Endo)

Finals

- H Adelaide United (Australia) 3-0 (Lucas, Endo, M.Yasuda)
- A Adelaide United 2-0 (Lucas(2))



Lucas - Three goals in the final



The view from the Gamba end in Adelaide



Yasuhito Endo - Player of the Tournament