

2007 Season Review

J.LEAGUE Division 1

Antlers Win the League!



Triumph for Antlers manager Oswaldo Oliveira.

Kashima Antlers won their last nine league matches to go top of J1 for the first time in 2007 at the end of the final day. That extraordinary triumph was also made possible by the faltering form of Urawa Reds, winless in their last 5 matches, and Gamba Osaka, winless in their last three. After Gamba had led for most of the first half of the season, 2006 champions Urawa were on top in the second and a win over bottom club Yokohama FC at the finish would still have secured them back-to-back J1 titles. Instead, Yokohama, inspired by such veterans as Kazuyoshi Miura, Norio Omura and Motohiro Yamaguchi, won 1-0 and Kashima made no mistake in a 3-0 win over fourth-place Shimizu S-Pulse.

It was Kashima's first championship since 2001 and record 10th title of the J. League era (consisting of 5 league championships, 3 League Cups and 2



Kashima captain Mitsuo Ogasawara scores from the spot against Shimizu.

Emperor's Cups). They lost no time in adding to that total by also winning the Emperor's Cup again on New Year's Day, 2008.

Sanfrecce Hiroshima and Ventforet Kofu were relegated together with Yokohama FC. Juninho of Kawasaki Frontale was top scorer with 22 goals.

J.LEAGUE Division 2

Sapporo Finish Top

Consadole Sapporo clinched the Division Two title on the final day of the season and Tokyo Verdy 1969 took the other automatic promotion slot. Third-place Kyoto Sanga F.C. also join them in J1 in 2008 after defeating Sanfrecce Hiroshima in the play-off. Brazilian striker Hulk, on loan from Kawasaki Frontale, was runaway top scorer in the division for Tokyo Verdy with 37 goals.



Sapporo, champions of J2.

AFC Champions League 2007

Urawa Reds won the AFC Champions League 2007 with a 3-1 aggregate victory over Sepahan of Iran. Goals either side of half time by Robson Ponte and Mahmoud Karimi produced a 1-1 draw in Iran and a goal in each half by Yuichiro Nagai and Yuki Abe then clinched the tie in front of 59,034 home supporters a week later on November 14th. "I am truly, frankly, overjoyed," said Urawa manager Holger Osieck. "It was a tremendous final and both teams played superbly."

As champions, Urawa join the tournament from the knock-out stage this year. The J. League is also represented from the group stage by Kashima Antlers and Gamba Osaka.



Keita Suzuki lifts the Champions League trophy.

FIFA Club World Cup Japan 2007 presented by TOYOTA



Urawa versus AC Milan (Abe, Soma, Nene and Kaka).

The following month, December, Urawa represented Asia at the FIFA Club World Cup in Japan. Their third place finish was the highest ever for an Asian team. The spotlight was on Urawa's brave semi-final performance against AC Milan. Clarence Seedorf eventually broke the deadlock in that match, which ended 1-0 to Milan, but Urawa bounced back three days later to edge Etoile Sportive du Sahel of Tunisia for third place, winning 4-2 on penalties at the end of a see-saw 2-2 draw.

2007 J.LEAGUE AWARDS



Robson Ponte, J. League Player of the Season.

Urawa Reds' Brazilian midfielder Robson Ponte was named the J. League's Player of the Season at the annual award ceremony in the Yokohama Arena on December 17th. He was one of 5 Reds players named on the league's Best XI and the second Reds player in a row to receive the top award, following Marcus Tulio Tanaka in 2006. Tulio was selected for the Best XI for his fourth time and Yasuhito Endo of Gamba Osaka for his fifth. Yokohama FC keeper Takanori Sugeno was named the best J1 rookie and Oswaldo Oliveira, of champion club Kashima Antlers, top manager. Gamba Osaka notably became only the second club ever to satisfy the stiff requirements set for winning the Prince Takamado Cup for Fair Play.



Front row (from left): Iwamasa, Tulio, Yamaguchi. Middle row: Abe, Suzuki, Nakamura, Endo. Back row: Bare, Juninho, Tsuzuki. (Ponte absent receiving treatment for injury)

Player of the Year	Robson PONTE	Urawa Reds
Best Eleven	Ryota TSUZUKI	Urawa Reds
	Daiki IWAMASA	Kashima Antlers
	Marcus TULLIO Tanaka	Urawa Reds
	Satoshi YAMAGUCHI	Gamba Osaka
	Yuki ABE	Urawa Reds
	Keita SUZUKI	Urawa Reds
	Robson PONTE	Urawa Reds
	Kengo NAKAMURA	Kawasaki Frontale
	Yasuhito ENDO	Gamba Osaka
	Carlos Alberto Carvalho Dos Anjos Junior (JUNINHO)	Kawasaki Frontale
	Jader Volnei Spindler (BARE)	Gamba Osaka
Top Scorer	Carlos Alberto Carvalho Dos Anjos Junior (JUNINHO)	Kawasaki Frontale
Best New Player	Takanori SUGENO	Yokohama FC
Manager of the Year	OSWALDO De OLIVEIRA Filho	Kashima Antlers

Gamba Osaka won the inaugural Pan-Pacific Championship between teams of the Japanese, U.S. and Australian leagues with a 6-1 victory over the 2007 MLS cup winners Houston Dynamo in Hawaii in February. Gamba Osaka qualified for the new tournament as winners of the 2007 J. League Yamazaki-Nabisco Cup and first had to get past 2007 MLS runners-up Los Angeles Galaxy, complete with David Beckham, to reach the semi-final. A goal by Bare was sufficient to secure a 1-0 win. Houston advanced to the final by defeating Sydney FC of the Hyundai A. League 3-0. Bare netted 4 more in the final at Honolulu's Aloha stadium, in front of 23,087 supporters, to finish as the tournament's top scorer with five. It was a telling demonstration of the strength of the Gamba squad even in the absence of their Olympic and national team players.



David Beckham (23) challenges Lucas (9) in the semi-final.



Celebrating the win over Houston Dynamo.

2008 J.LEAGUE schedule

	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
J.LEAGUE DIVISION 1 (J1)	DIVISION 1 J1: 3.8 Sat~5.18 Sun (6.28 Sat~12.6 Sat)										
	YAMAZAKI NABISCO CUP Preliminary Round: 1,2 (3.20 Thu), 3 (3.23 Sun), 4,5 (4.16 Wed), 6 (5.25 Sun), 6 (5.31 Sat), 6 (6.8 Sun) Quarter-finals: QF-1 (7.2 Wed), QF-2 (8.6 Wed) Semi-finals: SF-1 (9.3 Wed), SF-2 (9.7 Sun) Final: 11.1 Sat Pan-Pacific Championship (Hawaii) XEROX SUPER CUP: 2.20 (Wed), 2.23 (Sat), 3.1 (Sat) ALLSTAR SOCCER (provisional): 8.2 (Sat) J1/J2 Play Off: 1 (12.10 Wed), 2 (12.13 Sat)										
J.LEAGUE DIVISION 2 (J2)	DIVISION 2 J2: 3.8 Sat~12.6 Sat										
National Team	EAST ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP 2008 Final Competition (China PR): 2.17 (Sun), 2.20 (Wed), 2.23 (Sat) Beijing Olympics 2008: 8.8 Fri~8.24 Sun 2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa Asian Qualifying Round 3rd Round: H (2.6 Wed Thailand), A (3.26 Wed Bahrain), H A A H (6.2 Mon Oman, 6.7 Sat Oman, 6.14 Sat Thailand, 6.22 Sun Bahrain)										
	Final Round: 2008.9~2009.6 (provisional)										
AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE	Group Stage: 3.12 (Wed), 3.19 (Wed), 4.9 (Wed), 4.23 (Wed), 5.7 (Wed), 5.21 (Wed) Quarter-finals: 9.17 (Wed), 9.24 (Wed) Semi-finals: 10.8 (Wed), 10.22 (Wed) Final: 11.5 (Wed), 11.12 (Wed)										
Other Tournaments	FIFA Club World Cup Japan 2008 presented by TOYOTA December (provisional) Emperor's Cup: 2008.9~2009.1.1										

2008 J. LEAGUE KICK-OFF CONFERENCE

Managers and representative players from all 33 J. League clubs joined J. League partners, staff and some 750 members of the media for a kick-off pageant on the eve of the Xerox Super Cup, the curtain-raiser to the 2008 J. League season. The J. League Kick-off Conference is the revamped version of the J. League's longstanding pre-season Press Conference. Marking the second year of the 11 Million Project, J. League

Chairman Kenji Onitake welcomed last season's aggregate attendance of 8.59 million and declared that the league is aiming for 9.5 million in 2008, including both official J. League matches and AFC Champions League home games. Each club set up a booth for the manager and players to talk with the media and distributed team information.



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Players present the team colours for 2008.

The Eleven Million Project Logo



The 11 Million logo with plenty of colour and (mostly) smiling faces.

The J. League's Eleven Million Project is targeted at achieving an aggregate attendance of 11 million spectators at official matches in the 2010 season. A call for an official campaign logo was made in October and November last year. 522 proposals were sent in and the winning entry was this one by Shigeki Katayama from Saitama City. It shows the pleasure and thrill on the faces of the whole family at a truly colourful J. League match.

Average Attendances at Division One Matches

Year	Average
1993	17,976
1994	19,598
1995	16,922
1996	13,353
1997	10,131
1998	11,982
1999	11,658
2000	11,065
2001	16,548
2002	16,368
2003	17,351
2004	18,965
2005	18,765
2006	18,292
2007	19,081

Average home league attendances by club (2006/7)

	Kashima	Urawa	Omiya	Chiba	Kashiwa	FC Tokyo	Kawasaki	Yokohama FM	Yokohama FC	Kofu	Niigata	Shimizu	Iwata	Nagoya	G.Osaka	Kobe	Hiroshima	Oita
J1 (2007)																		
2006	15,433	45,573	10,234	13,393	8,328	24,096	14,340	23,663	5,119	12,213	38,709	14,302	18,002	14,924	16,259	6,910	11,180	20,350
2007	16,239	46,667	11,741	14,149	12,967	25,290	17,338	24,039	14,039	13,734	38,276	15,952	16,359	15,585	17,439	12,460	11,423	19,759
J2 (2007)																		
2006	10,478	14,453	5,085	3,017	3,736	5,705	5,365	9,781	13,026	3,477	4,139	13,780	7,465					
2007	12,112	14,685	4,243	2,415	3,808	7,327	4,677	6,629	6,627	3,289	3,317	9,529	6,114					

Growing up in England, away days were always special.

There was the journey, by bus, car or train, with scarves hanging out of the window to show passers-by your colours of allegiance. There was the buzz of excitement, and not a little apprehension, as you approached the outskirts of the town. And there was the thrill of the stadium finally coming into view, floodlights beckoning and the noise of the crowd drawing you closer, like a magnet.

Whoever you supported at whatever level, it was a once-in-a-season opportunity to visit a particular ground; a day out built around 90 minutes of football. Sometimes your travels would take you to a club playing in the league for the first time; sometimes you would be renewing acquaintances with an old foe relegated or promoted the previous season.

Wherever you were, two things remained constant. The first was the special camaraderie with your fellow supporters that only away games could foster. There was a stronger bond among fans on away days, and pride in your team was higher than for home games. As an away fan, you tended to show more patience with your own players, and remain loyal longer when things weren't going well on the pitch. At home, the same players would not enjoy the same level of tolerance or generosity. Goal celebrations, too, were always more exuberant -- not just for the players, but for the away fans, too, as you were more united on enemy territory.

The second constant was the nauseous, over-priced snacks on sale at the food kiosks. We all suffered together...soggy hot dogs, the bread soaked by spilt tea on the dirty counter, or tasteless hamburgers, salvaged only by the watery onions and plastic slice of cheese. (The safest snack was always the Wagon Wheel chocolate and marshmallow biscuit, even if it had been on the shelf for a couple of seasons).

Win, draw or lose, away days were always different, and provided a talking point for seasons to come.

What has impressed me most this season about the four J1 matches I have attended on the first two weekends is the volume of support for the away team.

The Consadole Sapporo fans at Kashima were in great voice on their return to J1. They never gave up on their team, the pride of Hokkaido, even when Kashima scored four times in the second half to win 4-0.

The following day came the Orange Derby, Omiya Ardija at home to Albirex Niigata. On a sunny afternoon, the rebuilt NACK5 Stadium was a splendid sight, with the

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visitors enjoying massive support, not only in the away end but also down the sides.

On the second weekend it was Urawa Reds-Nagoya Grampus at Saitama Stadium 2002, and the success-starved Grampus fans still turned out in numbers. After being rewarded with a 2-0 victory, the away fans were not forgotten by new manager Dragan Stojkovic in the official press conference.

"I would like to thank the great support from our supporters from Nagoya," he told the media. "They gave us really high support, so I am very glad they will go back home very happy."

The next journey was to Ajinomoto Stadium for Tokyo Verdy-Kashima Antlers, Verdy's first home game back in the top flight since relegation in 2005. Again the volume of support for the away team was impressive, boosting the attendance to almost 19,000.

This level of away support contributed significantly to high attendances around the country in both divisions for the first two weekends of the league season, and must give the J.League encouragement in their mission to attract 11 million spectators in 2010.

Last season that figure was 8.9 million, and the interim goal for 2008 is 9.5 million. After just two weekends the aggregate is well over half a million, so the early signs suggest that the J.League is on course to achieve those attendance targets.

Officials will appreciate, however, that interest is always high at the start of a new season, and the figures will stabilise as dreams of championships, cups and promotion are replaced by the reality of a relegation scrap, or by mid-table mediocrity.

The away day will always be there, though; the opportunity to plan and travel, to show pride in your team and your town around Japan; to celebrate three points or digest defeat with fellow travellers on the long journey home.

And don't forget at the food kiosk: Ask for the Wagon Wheel!