

# Season Review 2018/19

## 2018/19 賽季回顧



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**H**ong Kong was certainly green this year. Not only did Tai Po clinch a stunning league title win in one of the most hotly contested races in years, but Happy Valley won Division 1, completing their march of redemption from the fourth tier.

At the time of going to press, the Valley were set to join the Premier League for next season, though of course in Hong Kong football nothing is ever certain.

We've got a story on that remarkable return, plus one on how Tai Po toppled all comers in the top flight, as Hong Kong fans were treated to a true four-horse race after last year's Kitchee procession.

We'll also give our views on the best players, coaches and goals of the season, talk about the all-too-brief tenure of Gary White at the national team, and take a look at the problems facing local teams in the AFC Cup.

Read on, and we'll see you next season.

# 香

港今年絕對是綠色的。除了大埔在近年其中一個熱血刺激的賽季內贏得震撼的聯賽冠軍，還有愉園在甲組奪標，完成了從丙組重反頂級聯賽的目標。

在印製本刊期間，愉園正準備來季升班上港超，但在香港足球中，一切都仍是未知之數。

我們寫了一篇關於愉園回歸的文章；還有關於大埔如何在眾球隊中脫穎而出。經過傑志在去年的壟斷後，香港球迷今季能夠看到群雄四起爭奪成為聯賽冠軍。

我們亦分享了對最佳球員、教練和入球的想法，談及前香港主帥加利韋特的簡短任期，細說本地球隊在亞協盃中遇到的問題。

現在請你細心閱下去，我們來季再見。



It's your bi-weekly round-up of news, scores and chit-chat from around local football. It is out every other Wednesday, and has just completed its third full season. You can subscribe by scanning the codes on the back of this magazine, or googling "Hong Kong Football Podcast".

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# For the record

*News bites from the season just finished*

## Blown away

When it hit in September 2018, Typhoon Mangkhut not only flooded streets, smashed windows and tore up loads of trees; it also left a mark on Hong Kong football. Kitchee's Shek Mun training ground – the best club facilities in the city – was wrecked by floods and gales, leaving the reigning champions homeless. And the damage to Aberdeen Sports Ground's west stand (pictured, top) was so bad that it had to be closed down, forcing Southern to relocate to Mong Kok for a few matches. Even when the ground was safe, fans had to move to the other stand for the rest of the season. While Southern's results seemed unaffected by the weather-beating, the same cannot be said of Kitchee.

破壞力驚人的颱風「山竹」去年九月襲港，它不只淹浸街道、吹破窗戶和吹倒不少樹木，更重創香港足球。擁有最齊全設備的傑志石門訓練中心被洪水和強風蹂躪，令要衛冕的傑志一夜之間變得無家可歸。香港仔運動場也不能倖免，「山竹」吹散了西看台的上蓋，令南區因球場必須關閉進行維修而被迫暫時到旺角作賽。儘管球場草地最後能回復正常運作，但球迷在球賽餘下的比賽都需到另一邊的看台觀戰。幸好南區的成績未因天氣而受影響，相反傑志則未能保持水準。

## Russell's hustle

Six years ago Andy Russell (pictured, centre) was playing non-league football in the UK with Fylde. But now, after stints with South China and Tai Po, a sojourn in Malaysia, breaking into the Hong Kong side and moving to China League One with Liaoning Whowin, he has signed with Hebei China Fortune in the Chinese Super League, joining players such as Javier Mascherano and Ezequiel Lavezzi, and playing at probably the highest level of any Hongkonger. Also new to the CSL is Alex Akande, who moved to Dalian Yifang after his previous club, Yanbian Funde, folded. But neither of them will face compatriot Festus Baise, whose side Guizhou Hengfeng dropped into China League One, where he joins Meizhou Hakka's 21-year-old Hongkonger Tsui Wang-kit.

六年前，羅素曾效力英國低組別聯賽球隊菲爾德。後來轉會到南華和大埔，又加盟過馬來西亞球隊，再為港隊披上戰衣之後，現時他與河北華夏幸福簽約轉戰中超，與馬斯查蘭奴及拿維斯成為隊友，比賽水平可能高過任何一位香港球員。剛登陸中超球隊的還有艾力士，自延邊富德散班後便轉投大連一方。不過這兩位外援都不會遇到效力剛降班的貴州恆豐法圖斯，他現時與二十一歲港將徐宏傑的梅州客家角逐中甲。



Photos: KC Southern, HKFA

## Fan fury

Following Kitchee has never been a budget option. Tickets for their home league matches cost up to \$150, compared with \$60 at clubs such as Lee Man or Dreams. They are also the only side to charge for online streams. But the club appeared to reach a tipping point when it charged \$180 for AFC Cup group-stage matches at the Mong Kok Stadium. Fans voiced discontent online. Some turned up with posters reading "Supporters not customers" (pictured, bottom). The attendance for the Kitchee v Tai Po group game – 2,841 – should have been much higher, and was almost certainly affected by the cost. We'll see how many watch the two teams play Tai Po's home fixture at the same stadium in June, when tickets will be \$80.

追捧傑志從來都不是一個便宜的選擇。他們今季的主場賽事票價高達 150 元，相比一下，理文和夢想的定價只是 60 元。傑志亦是唯一一枝球隊向球迷提供收費網上正播。不過，傑志將亞協盃主場賽事的門票定價為 180 元，令球迷對票價的反應終於到達一個臨界點。不少球迷在網上表示不滿，更有球迷在場內展示「Supporters not customers」的橫額。在傑志對大埔的分組賽賽事中只有 2841 人進場觀賽；原先應能吸引更多球迷入場，但票價絕對是趕客的原因。在六月，大埔同樣會在旺角迎戰傑志，而票價只是 80 元，我們來看看到時會否有多少人入場吧。

# Evergreen

*Tai Po's title win will live long in the memory*

By James Legge



**W**hen the final whistle blasted in Guangzhou on Saturday May 4, and Tai Po clinched a 2-1 win over R&F, their players ran over to the travelling fans. The only person to outrun them was coach Lee Chi-kin, his tracksuit and mat of rain-soaked hair giving the effect of a black flash. →

As he screamed God-knows-what at the fans, arms aloft like a conquering emperor, and threw around some advertising hoardings, he embodied the sense of personality he has instilled at Tai Po, and which had just won him and his club their first-ever league title.

A few seconds later, as emotion caught up with him and his face crumpled into tears, he was comforted by his tight-knit band of players, many of whom, astonishingly, have played under him since they were together at Sham Shui Po in 2011, and followed him to YFCMD and Pegasus before Tai Po. The so-called Kin Army are club captain Wong Wai, Fung Hing-wa, Lee Ka-yiu, Lee Ka-ho and Leung Kwun-chung, while Philip Chan, who was also in that Sham Shui Po team, took a slightly different route over the past eight years before reenlisting in the summer.

Offensive line-ups, impressive energy and a never-say-die attitude, sprinkled with Brazilian pizzazz, won them the title. The acquisition of left winger Igor Sartori two seasons ago meant they had the best player in Hong Kong, while the much improved Eduardo Praes marshalled the back line and Sandro, signed halfway

through the season, scored vital goals, including both in that decisive R&F match.

A younger member of the Kin Army, Tan Chun-lok, also stood in the Guangzhou down-pour. But as the men in green celebrated, he wore white and gold, having left for the much wealthier R&F in the summer, along with Sean Tse.

Those departures, and that of Andy Russell six months earlier, had lowered expectations for Tai Po at the start of the season. The apparent weakening of the side that finished second in 2018 had made another Kitchee title win seem inevitable in August.

But, after seven years of domination by 2018's unbeaten champions, it became clear early in the season that another team stood a chance of winning the league.

But which team? R&F, Southern, and Tai Po were all in the mix. Even as late as April, Hong Kong had a four-horse race, and anyone could win.

It all started with a stumbling start for Kitchee, who drew three of their first four matches. Soon after came a shocking and deserved 3-1 home loss to R&F, ending Kitchee's 22-month unbeaten league run and proving what the Guangzhou side – supercharged by two former Kitchee full backs in Lam Zhi-gin and Lo Kwan-ye – were capable of. →

五月四日，星期六，在廣州的完場哨子聲一響，大埔以2:1反勝富力。球員們立刻衝向場邊的作客球迷，唯一比球員衝得更快的是教練李志堅，他一身運動服加上濕透的頭髮，令他看似一道黑色的閃電閃到球迷前。

當他對著球迷高聲咆哮、舉高兩臂猶如剛打勝仗的王者般，並推走阻路的廣告牌時，展示了他向大埔灌輸的個人風格，就是這個風格為他和大埔贏得歷來首個聯賽錦標。

不出幾秒，他的情緒突然爆發淚流滿臉，一眾和他關係密切的球員上前安慰。驚人地，當中不少球員都是從2011年在深水埗便已經開始跟著李志堅出戰，並追隨到澳滌和飛馬。這班「堅家軍」成員包括黃威、馮慶輝、李嘉耀、李家豪、和梁冠聰。而陳肇鈞亦曾一同為深水埗效力，在這八年間雖轉會到不同球隊，但最後在上個暑假重回「堅家軍」陣線。

進攻型的排陣、無窮的能量和永不言敗的精神，配上一點巴西活力均助他們贏得聯賽冠軍。大埔在兩季前簽入香港現時最佳的球員伊高沙托尼，同時有進步不少的艾華度在後防引領，還有季中簽入的辛祖為球隊取得重要入球，其中兩球便是在對富力的關鍵一戰射入。

另外一位較年輕的「堅家軍」成員陳俊樂當時同樣站在廣州的豪雨下。不過，當身穿綠衣的球員在慶祝時，他卻穿著白金色球衣。他和謝家強在季前的暑假一同離開大埔加盟財力較雄厚的富力。

連同羅素半年前離隊的消息，令大家在季初都對大埔的期望大減。他們在2018年成為聯賽亞軍後便隨即被削弱軍力，令傑志在八月時看來更加有冠軍相。

不過，傑志在2018年以不敗姿態稱霸，經過這七年的壟斷局面後，今季很早便看得出有其他球隊能夠問鼎冠軍之座。但是哪一隊呢？富力、南區和大埔都在爭鬪頭。即使到了四月的倒數階段，仍然有四支球隊在爭標，當中任何一隊都能成為冠軍。

爭標亂局由傑志在季初失分開始，他們首四場賽事中有三場和局。接著在主場意外地以3:1不敵富力，終結長達22個月聯賽不敗紀錄。而林志堅和盧均宜兩位倒戈球員都為富力帶來新動力，同時證明了自己的能力。

東方和南區在季初一度是爭標熱門。陳婉婷帶著東方在首六仗中贏四場和兩場領先榜首，緊追著的是首四戰全勝的南區。

大埔在季初的弱點看似是對著下游球隊失分，聯賽首戰元朗被迫和4:4，還有以2:2賽和夢想。再加上被南區在最後一刻絕殺強搶三分，這都令人回想起他們在季初儘管在場上佔有優勢卻有偏向失分的趨勢，未能輕鬆取得勝利。

但這些算是他們全季唯一的錯失。其後五仗之中的三仗對著主要競爭對手，獲得四勝一和的佳績。大埔在失分後的十三場賽事中只失六分，當中包括對傑志一仗在只剩二十分鐘仍落後2:0時，最後追和2:2。→

## Local heroes



Southern's Nikola Komazec celebrates with the team's fans. Photo: KC Southern

**Tai Po's title triumph was the first win ever for a district team in Hong Kong. Established in 2002 with 13 teams in Division 3, the district team system was intended to support local football and its integration in the community by helping clubs build local links. Its most successful clubs – Tai Po, Southern and Yuen Long – finished first, third, and seventh in the league respectively.**

大埔是香港有史以來第一隊贏得聯賽冠軍的地區球隊。球隊在2002年成立，與另外十三支球隊角逐丙組。當時成立區隊制度是為了支持本地足球和幫助球隊與地區社會建立更緊密的連繫。在這十三支球隊當中能脫穎而出的有大埔、南區和元朗，他們分別以冠軍、季軍和第七名完成今季聯賽。

這重要的一分對大埔來說可能是一個轉捩點，減少他們對自 2010 年未曾在傑志身上全取三分的恐懼、還有上季在兩個盃賽決賽都慘敗而回的不安。直到二月，大埔以 3: 0 重挫傑志，這勝仗令大埔完全抹去餘下的陰影，成為其中一隊爭標熱門。

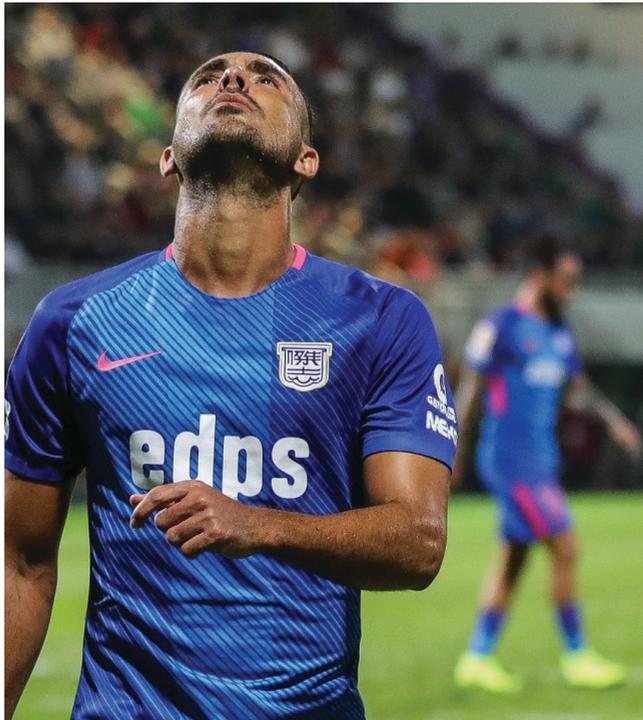
他們的轉捩點或許只出現在一個月後，「綠衣軍」在對飛馬開賽後六十分鐘中表現得一塌糊塗落後 1: 0，最終以 2: 1 反勝。這勝利難看得來又像沙托尼和李家豪的入球精彩，亦是在冠軍球隊身上應有的爭勝決心。

轉捩點又或許是富力對南區的 3: 3 驚險和局。南區在補時尾段扳平，令大埔的其中兩個爭標對手同時失分。

大埔此後變得銳不可擋，贏盡餘下八場比賽。在四月十九日，沙托尼在最後一分鐘絕殺南區，令大埔只差一步便能成王；他在一個月後在廣州幫助球隊贏得比賽。

李志堅在賽後慶祝完結之後，回答記者提問時感謝家人一直支持他在無常又不穩的香港足球世界中當教練的職業生涯。訪問期間，球員闖進記者室內用水樽向他射水，並歡唱「Campeones」。他們互相擁抱和親吻後才讓李志堅繼續回答問題。

在興高采烈的剎那過後，接下來最大的疑問是到底他們能否再贏冠軍。傑志和富力來季肯定會捲土重來變得更强，他們和其他球隊亦會虎視「堅sir」的球員，例如黃威和沙托尼。而在足球這項變化萬千的運動之中，一個這麼不可能又這麼難忘的奪冠之路，通常都很難再次重演。■



Below: Fernando, of Kitchee. The team could not recover from a poor start to the season.  
Above right: Tai Po players celebrate their title win in Guangzhou.  
Photos: Kitchee, Wofoo Tai Po

The early talk was about Eastern and Southern. Chan Yuen-ting's side won four and drew two of their opening six to go top, taking the lead from Southern, who won all of their first four.

Tai Po's early weakness was, it seemed, dropping points against bottom-half teams, with a 4-4 draw at Yuen Long on the opening day and a 2-2 tie with Dreams. And a 1-0, smash-and-grab, last-second defeat to Southern was a reminder of their former tendency to let slip matches in which they hogged possession but failed to make it count.

But that would be their only loss of the season. In the five other matches against their three main rivals, they won four and drew one. In the 13 matches after that loss, they dropped just six points, including in a massive 2-2



draw with Kitchee, after trailing 2-0 with 20 minutes left.

Maybe that draw was the turning point for Tai Po, eroding their fear of a club they had not beaten in the league since 2010; a club which beat them in two cup finals the previous season. Any fear that remained was clearly obliterated in February's 3-0 demolition of Kitchee, a game that put Tai Po in the box seat.

Or maybe the turning point came a month later, in the Greens' 2-1 win over Pegasus, during which they trailed 1-0 after an hour, playing terribly. The victory was as ugly as Sartori and Lee Ka-ho's goals were beautiful, and was the kind of ground-out win generally associated with champions.

Maybe it was the fascinating 3-3 draw between R&F and Southern, which the Aberdeeners salvaged in the dying seconds, clipping mainland wings and ensuring two of Tai Po's rivals dropped points together.

Tai Po were unstoppable

### Crucial clashes

Records against fellow top-four teams

	W	D	L	P
Tai Po	4	1	1	13
Southern	2	3	1	9
Kitchee	1	2	3	5
R&F	1	1	4	4

from then on, winning their final eight matches. A last-minute goal from Sartori dispatched Southern on April 19, to place one hand on the trophy, setting up the Guangzhou win a month later.

Speaking to reporters after the Guangzhou celebrations, Lee thanked his family for their support during his long career in the fickle and shaky world of Hong Kong football coaching. As he spoke, a gang of his players barged into the conference room to soak their coach with water bottles and chant "Campeones". The mob exchanged hugs and kisses, before Lee got back to answering questions.

But the biggest question, once the euphoria dies down, is whether they can possibly do this again. Kitchee and R&F will probably come back stronger next season. They and other teams will covet Lee's stars, such as Wong and Sartori. And in a sport with as many variables as football, a title win so unlikely – and so memorable – will always be tough to repeat. ■

# Match by match

How the Premier League season played out



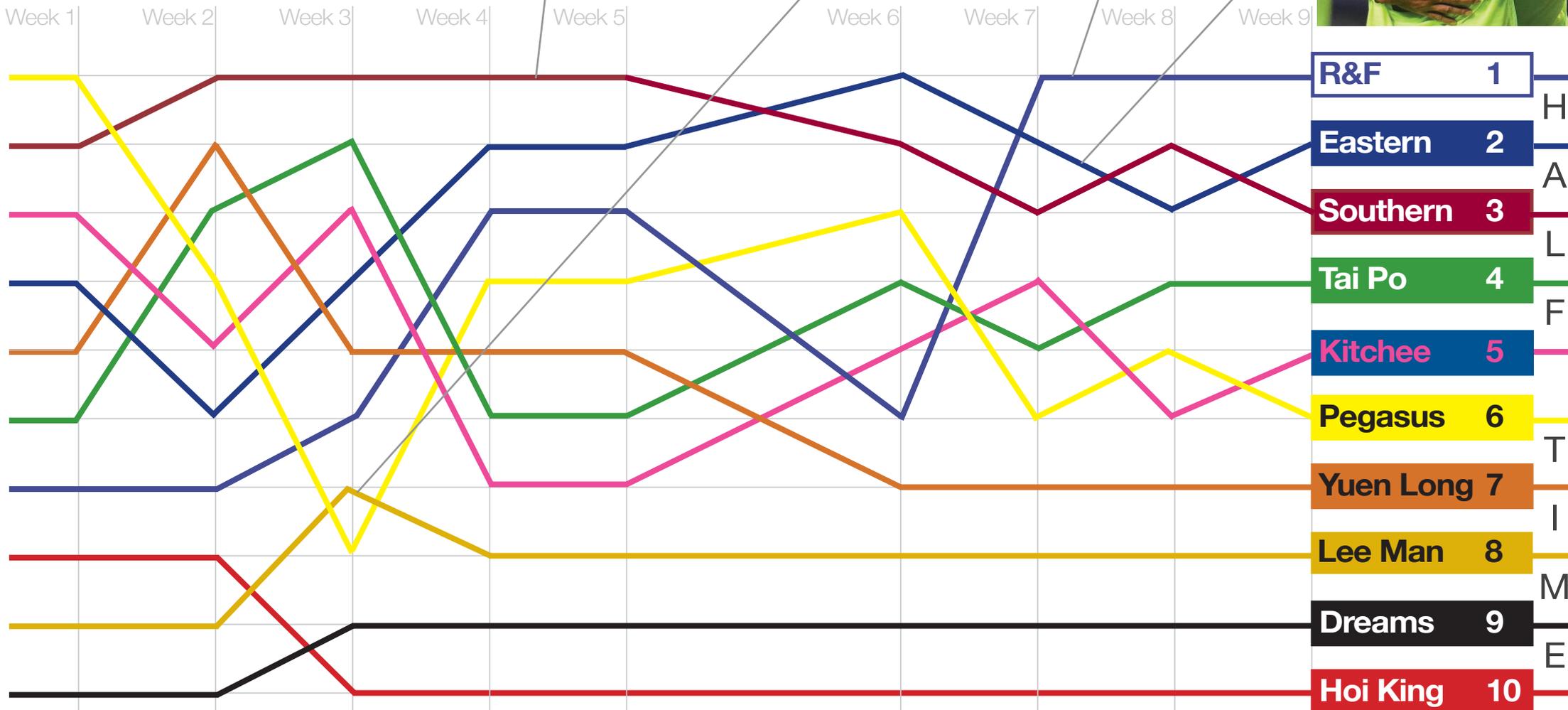
Southern won their first four, including this 1-0 win over Tai Po after a last-minute James Ha goal.  
Photo: KC Southern

Stefan Pereira's goal helped Lee Man to their first win of the season, beating Hoi Kong 1-0.  
Photo: Lee Man



R&F beat Kitchee 3-1 to end their 31-match unbeaten league run and go top of the table.  
Photo: HKFA

Pegasus beat Eastern 2-1 to give them their first league defeat of the season.  
Photo: HK Pegasus



Season Review 2018/19



Kitchee won the Senior Shield, beating Tai Po 3-2 in the final ...  
Photo: Kitchee



... but Tai Po got revenge with a 3-0 battering, their first league win over Kitchee since 2010.  
Photo: Wofoo Tai Po

Eight points from eight games between January and April left Eastern languishing in mid-table.  
Photo: Eastern Long Lions



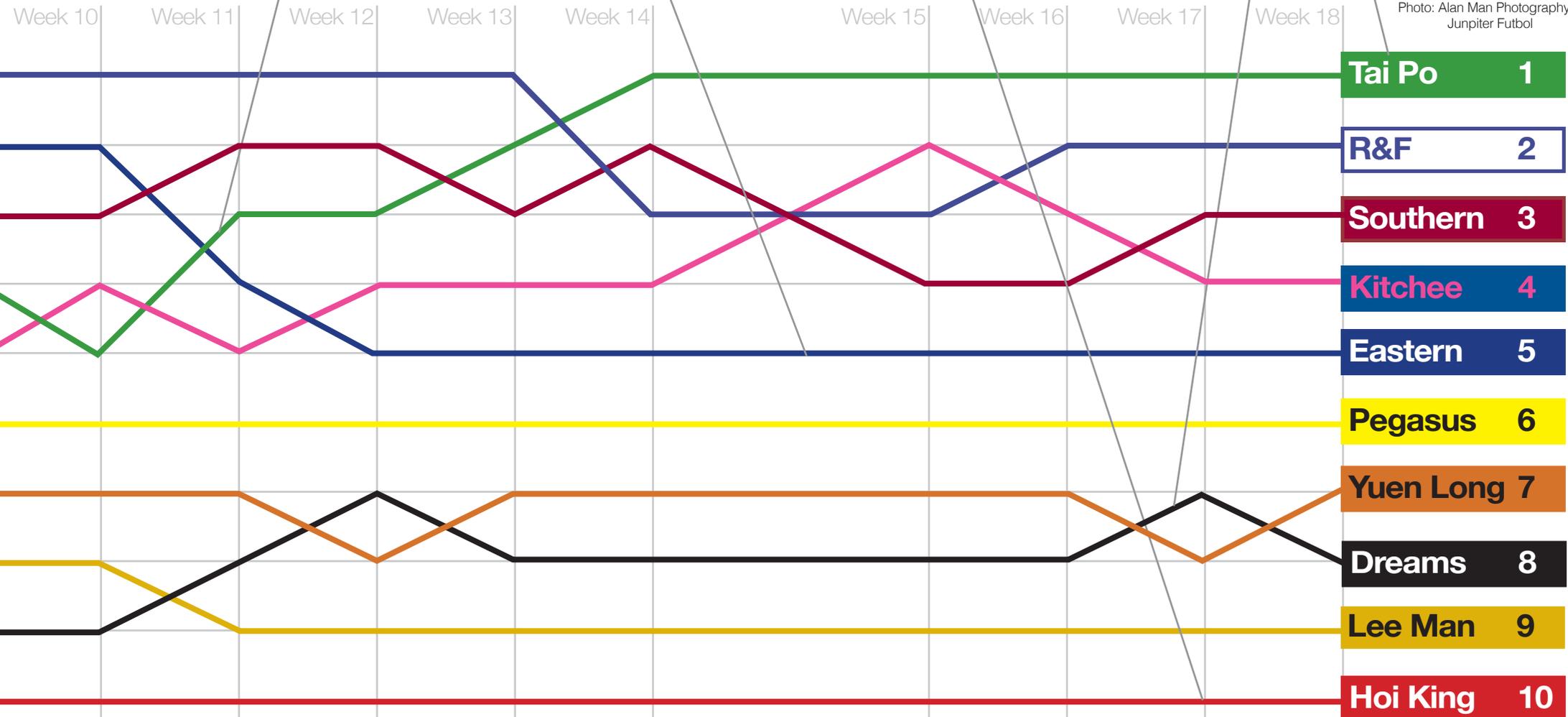
Dreams beat Lee Man 6-0, with goals from Nacho Martinez and Marcos Gondra, to go seventh.  
Photo: HKFA



A 1-1 draw with Kitchee was one of the best results of last-placed Hoi King's season.  
Photo: Kitchee



Tai Po won the league, five points ahead of second-placed R&F.  
Photo: Alan Man Photography & Junpiter Futbol



# Season awards

## Goal of the season

最佳入球

**James Ha** 夏志明  
v Eastern, 17/02/2019

In what must have been one of the best individual performances of the season, James Ha tore through Eastern, scoring a hat-trick in Southern's 4-1 win. His first goal was the best of the bunch, and the whole season. He deftly knocked Lau Hok-ming's pass up onto his own chest, before volleying the ball past a helpless Yapp Hung-fai. Other great goals included Chris Annan's early stunner for Hoi King against Southern and Marcos Gondra's 30-yard rocket for Dreams against Pegasus.

要選出今季最精彩的個人表演一刻，非東方的夏志明在以四比一擊敗南區一仗中的帽子戲法莫屬。他射入的第一球是這三球和全季當中最佳的入球。他先以心口接應劉學銘的傳球，然後以窩利抽射射破葉鴻輝的十指關。其他不錯的入球有安基斯為凱景對南區射入的一球，還有馬高斯在夢想對飛馬一仗中射入的三十碼重炮。



Photo: KC Southern

## Coach of the season

最佳教練

**Lee Chi-kin** 李志堅  
Tai Po

It would be hard to overstate the size of Lee Chi-kin's achievements this season. With the losses of key players, Tai Po did not look like title challengers in August. But with their all-out attacking style, an improved defence, surprising staying power and a talent for coming from behind in key matches, they stormed to a first-ever league title, losing only one game. Lots of credit is due to the players, but even more goes to the coach. R&F boss Yeung Ching-kiung and Southern's Ricky Cheng also had great seasons, but there was only one king of the dugout.

要誇大李志堅在今季取的得成就，可以說是一件難事。大埔今季失去幾位重心球員，在八月末有被視為爭標份子。但他們的全方位進攻模式配上大有改變的後防，還有令人意外的持久力和在重要賽事中能夠落後反勝的能力，令他們以只輸一場的姿態成功贏得歷來首個聯賽冠軍。很多功勞都來自一眾球員，但更多的是歸於李志堅。富力的楊正光和南區的鄭兆聰都有一個不錯的賽季，但能稱霸的只有一位。



Photo: Wofoo Tai Po

## Young player of the season

最佳青年球員

**Chan Kwong-ho** 陳廣豪  
Yuen Long

It was not a stellar year for young Hong Kong players, with young-ish players like Leung Nok-hang, Lau Hok-ming and Tan Chun-lok all doing well, but a little old for youth awards. But one guy making a breakthrough was Yuen Long's 22-year-old forward Chan Kwong-ho, who chipped in eight goals and many impressive displays during a middling season for his team. Tai Po's Harry Sawyer, still only 22, also made an impact both domestically and in the AFC Cup. Fun fact: Chan and Sawyer were born on the same day, December 31, 1996.

今年沒有星級年輕球員，縱使梁諾恆、劉學銘、陳俊樂這班年輕球員表現都不錯，但對這項目來說便有一點超齡。不過元朗的二十二歲前鋒陳廣豪在場上能令人眼前一亮，為今季成績一般的元朗射入八球和有很多出色的表現。而同樣年僅二十二歲的大埔球員哈利亦都在本地賽和亞洲足協盃當中發揮不少作用。趣聞：陳廣豪和哈利都是在1996年12月31日同年同月同日出生。



Photo: HKFA

## Player of the season

最佳球員

**Igor Sartori** 伊高沙托尼  
Tai Po

This season was, perhaps even more than usual, dominated by Hong Kong's Brazilian stars. Key performers included top scorer Lucas Silva, of Kitchee, and any of R&F's attacking trident of Itaparica, Tiago de Leonco and Giovane. Eduardo Praes was also instrumental at the back for Tai Po. But his teammate Igor Sartori was best of all, providing constant threat, speed, mazy runs and assists from the wing as his side swept to a stunning league title win. The 26-year-old's total of eight goals – some of them long-range screamers – also made him the side's top scorer.

今季一如以往的由巴西球員佔盡風頭。候選球員包括傑志的盧卡斯和富力的進攻三寶——伊達、利安高和基奧雲尼。艾華度亦是大埔後防的重要一員，但他的隊友伊高沙托尼是眾位球員之中表現最佳的。他在場上以速度、不能捉摸的跑動和在邊線的助攻都不斷威脅著對手，成功幫助大埔贏得聯賽冠軍。這名二十六歲的球員今季射入八球一當中有遠距離世界波，因而成為大埔今季的神射手。



Photo: Wofoo Tai Po



*The player of the season sits down with James Legge and Tobias Zuser*

**Igor Sartori, you have won the league, and you are Hong Kong Football Podcast Player of the Season. Congratulations!**

Thank you very much, I am very happy!

**Can you tell us about the season?**

I think this season was amazing for us. At the beginning it was a little bit difficult to win. We drew many games, but when we put in our minds that we could become champions, everyone started to play very well.

**When did you start to believe you could become champions?**

In January, when we lost against Kitchee in the Senior Shield final, we knew that we actually played a great game, so everyone was disappointed about the result. But then we played against Kitchee at our home stadium,

**伊高沙托尼，恭喜你剛贏得聯賽冠軍，並獲選為 Hong Kong Football Podcast 的今季最佳球員！**

多謝，我真的感到非常高興！

**你可以跟我們簡單分析今季戰況嗎？**

我認為今季十分精彩。在季初要勝出的確有一點難度，我們有很多場和局，但當我們發現有機會能爭奪冠軍後，大家便開始進入狀態。

**你是從什麼時候開始相信你有機會成為冠軍？**

在一月，我們在銀牌決賽負傑志，當時我們認為自己的表現絕佳，所以大家對賽果都感到失望。但後來我們在主場迎戰傑志以 3:0 大勝，賽後我們便開始覺得我們可以成為冠軍。

**你在這場全季其中一場最重要的賽事中射入一球。你可以告訴我們大埔如何在這比賽中發揮得這麼好嗎？**

我認為這場是我們在全季中表現最好的一場。每位球員都踢出水準，而在比賽初段就取得入球對我們的幫助很大。傑

and we won 3-0, so after this we thought we could be champions.

**You scored in that game, and it was one of the biggest games of the season. Could you tell us a bit more about this performance, as it was such a good performance for Tai Po?**

I think that was the best game for us. Everyone played great football, and we scored right at the beginning of the game. That helped us. In the other games, Kitchee always scored first, so that game was different, and we had many chances.

**You had a great season last season. You had another good one this season. Do you think you have changed while you have been in Hong Kong?**

In my opinion, I played better this season, as I was more prepared and more focused. Last season was my first season in Hong Kong. I didn't know the players and the other teams. This season was completely different. I already knew everything about Hong Kong, I know my teammates, and they also trust me.

**Who else around the Premier League has impressed you this season?**

For my teammates I think Michel [Lugo] and [Eduardo] Praes. These two did a great job this season. I also really like [Chak] Ting-fung, our goalkeeper Duk-gu [Tsang Man-fai] and Wa Jai [Fung Hing-wa]. For the other teams, I think Tiago [de Leonco, of R&F] had a great season.

**What changed for Tai Po this season? Last year was second place, which was a great finish. But this season you won the league with one game to go. Did anything change, or did things just click into place?**

Of course we wanted to win last season, but Kitchee were much better than the other clubs. They won the title three rounds before the end or so. So we mainly focused on [qualifying for] the AFC Cup. But this season was different. We really wanted to be champions, because last season we lost three times: two cup finals and the league in second position. I was really disappointed and I put in my mind: If I stay at Tai Po, we need to win. And we did.

志在其他賽事都是先取得入球的一隊，所以這場賽事就是不一樣的，同時我們也有很多埋門機會。

**你在上季的表現很好，而今季再有一次極好的賽季。你覺得來到香港後的自己有什麼轉變嗎？**

我覺得我個人今季的表現比上季更好，因為我更有準備和更集中。上季是我在香港的第一個賽季，當時我不認識其他球員和球隊。今季則完全不一樣，我已經認識香港的一切，並熟悉我的隊友，同時他們亦十分信任我。



Sartori takes a shot against Southern. Photo: Wofo Tai Po

**今季港超還有其他球員的表現令你印象深刻嗎？**

在我的隊友當中，我覺得勞高和艾華度兩個在今季都表現出色。同時我也很喜歡（翟）廷峯、門將德古（曾文輝），還有燁仔（馮慶燁）。其他球隊的話，我覺得富力的利安高也有不錯的表現。

**大埔在今季有什麼改變？上季奪得亞軍也是一個不錯的結果。但今季你們提出一輪便封王。隊中有什麼變化嗎？還是只是突然開竅？**

我們當然想在去年贏得聯賽，但傑志當時的實力比其他球隊更強。他們好像提早三輪便封王，所以我們便專心爭取亞協盃（附加賽資格）。但今季是不一樣的。我們真的很想成為冠軍，因為上季我們飲恨三次，包括兩個盃賽決賽和聯賽亞軍。當時我真的十分失望，同時我亦下定決心：若我留在大埔的話，我們便要贏。而我們成功了。

# THE 離合無間 DEPARTED



Left: Gary White at Mong Kok Stadium. Bottom left: New team captain Huang Yang against North Korea. Bottom right: White celebrates with Chung Wai-keung against Taiwan. Photos: Zinc Yeung, HKFA, Andy Chiu.



**I**t was a strange year for the Hong Kong national team. Having missed out on qualification for the 2019 Asian Cup, there was not much to play for over the past 12 months. But it would not be Hong Kong football if this gap year had meant less drama, less chaos, or less excitement.

With Kim Pan-gon's resignation in December 2017, the HKFA kicked off its worldwide search for a successor. But it took nearly nine months before Gary White was appointed in September 2018. All of a sudden there was sports-related momentum to talk about, a change of mood music after the tiresome "anthem affair"

## 香

港代表隊經歷了奇怪的一年。在2019年的亞洲盃外圍賽出局後，港隊在過去十二個月都沒有很多比賽。

不過，若在這空虛的一年中沒有鬧劇、混亂或令人振奮的事的話，這就不會是香港足球。

隨著金判坤在2017年十二月離任後，香港足總便展開了全球招聘程序尋找繼任人選，最後卻花了近九個月才確認加利韋特上任成新教練。經過早前一直被煩厭的「國歌事件」騎劫球壇新聞後，大家突然之間可以談論跟體育有關的話題，轉變一下氣氛。韋特當一度被認為是最佳接任人選，但當足總正式宣布韋特為新教練時，球迷和傳媒仍然感到意外。

韋特的上任在某程度上帶來了希望。這名英籍教練近年帶領過關島和中華台北在國際足協排名突飛猛進，以能夠帶領亞洲小國進步而成名。

他在2018年十月首次領軍，雖然港隊在旺角場以0:1不敵泰國，但球員們的表現仍令人印象深刻。韋特的陣容名單沒有太大變化，當中有兩名值得關注的新兵，包括重召了在客麥隆出生的基奧，令人意外的還有他相中了東方的二十歲中場茄子楠。一個月後，港隊再有機會作客印尼試陣，靠三十八歲中堅法圖斯的入球逼和1:1。

直到十一月，韋利重回台北挑戰2019年東亞盃，當時他在上任後仍未嚐一勝。雖然港隊的表現看似有進步，但大家都不敢有太大期望。北韓在這賽事中向來都是香港的絆腳石，而當時沒有特別原因令人期望今次會有不一樣的結果。

在韋特上任後幾個月來到這循環賽首場便要迎戰東道主中華台北。某程度上，韋特在與自己的隊伍對戰。若香港想力保晉級機會，他們必先獲得首場勝利。

而這仗港隊贏得不易。麥基先拔頭籌後一度被台灣的陳庭揚追和，

that had previously dominated the football news cycle. For some time White was seen as a favourite for the job, but both fans and the media were still taken by surprise when the FA announced the appointment coup.

White's appointment, to some extent, brought hope. The Englishman had, over the years, built a reputation for boosting small Asian national teams, earning his credentials by catapulting both Guam and Chinese Taipei up the Fifa rankings.

He made his debut in October 2018, and despite a 0-1 loss to Thailand at the Mong Kok Stadium, the team still made a positive impression. While the roster remained largely unchanged, the new coach made two significant additions: he re-invited Cameroon-born forward Paul Olivier Ngue and – more surprisingly – called up Eastern's then 20-year-old midfielder Yue Tze-nam. One month later, the national team had another test outing, this time away to Indonesia, where they got a 1-1 draw courtesy of an equaliser by 38-year-old centre back Festus Baise.

So White was still waiting for his first win when facing his first major challenge in November, when he returned to Taipei for the 2019 EAFF qualifiers. Even though the team seemed improved, expectations remained humble. Too often had Hong Kong been barred by North Korea from the competition's final round, and there was little reason to hope for anything different.

The first match of this round-robin tournament was against hosts Chinese Taipei, whose bench White had sat on only a few months earlier. In a way, he was playing against his own team, and if his Hong Kong team wanted to maintain their chances of qualifying, they had to deliver a first win.

And it was a tough game. Jaimes McKee's opener was levelled by Taiwan's Chen Ting-yang, and with just 10 minutes left to play both teams were tied at 1-1. In came Tai Po's 23-year-old Chung Wai-keung for his international debut, and a few moments later he scored the winner.

With the points in the bag, the following encounter with North Korea was already a final. A few months earlier, Hong Kong had seen their Asian Cup dreams shattered by the very same team in Pyongyang. But this time the Koreans simply could not get past Andy Russell, Festus and goalkeeper Yapp Hung-fai. Yapp in particular seemed to have his mojo back, after White decided to give the responsibility of →

賽事在餘下十分鐘時戰局仍然是1:1。直至大埔的二十三歲球員鍾偉強後備上陣不久後，在他的處子戰為港隊建功挫中華台北。

取得這三分後，接下來對北韓便已經是定生死的一戰。香港在數月前才剛在平壤被他們粉碎亞洲盃之夢。但這次北韓未能擊破安迪羅素、→

captaincy to Huang Yang instead. The game ended in a goalless draw.

That meant Hong Kong needed a big win against Mongolia, and they did just that with an unlikely 5-1 thrashing. However, the side's hero of the evening was none other than Taiwanese goalkeeper Pan Wen-chieh, who frustrated the North Korean attack time and time again. Chinese Taipei lost 2-0, but Hong Kong topped the group with a better goal difference than North Korea. They qualified for the final round of the EAFF championship for only the second time since 2010. In December of this year they will lock horns with China, Japan and hosts South Korea in Busan.

For a moment, everything seemed perfect; maybe too perfect. And in early December 2018, the HKFA dropped a bomb: Gary White had resigned on the last day of his probation period to take a job with Tokyo Verdy in Japan. Even the FA seemed taken by surprise, with newly designed "Whitevolution" merchandise already on the way to stores.

Back was the chaos, and back was the doubt.

Hong Kong was again without a coach, and the FA conducted another lengthy search. A small glimmer of excitement could be felt when Kenneth Kwok won his second consecutive Guangdong-Hong Kong Cup with a younger version of the national team. However, the FIFA break in March passed without any friendly games scheduled, marking another uncomfortable moment of

stasis. Finally, in early April 2019 former Finland international Mixu Paatelainen was presented as the new man for Hong Kong. Together with newly appointed technical director Thor Arnason, who earned his spurs with the Icelandic FA, Paatelainen will be in charge of the upcoming 2022 World Cup qualifiers, which start as soon as September 2019. Before that, he will make his debut in June with a home friendly against Chinese Taipei.

Drama can be good at times. But Hong Kong fans will hope this will mark the start of a new (and stable) era. ■

法圖斯和門將葉鴻輝的把關。在韋特將隊長重任改放到黃洋身上後，葉鴻輝就像重掌魔力一樣發揮水準，最後成功以零失球守和。

這代表港隊需大勝蒙古，後來亦成功大炒 5: 1。但當晚的英雄是守著北韓進攻稅氣的台灣門將潘文傑。雖然中華台北最後負 2: 0，但香港因而得利，以得失球差壓過北韓成為小組首名，取得自 2010 年以來第二次晉級到東亞盃決賽週的資格。今年十二月，他們將會到釜山與中國、日本和主辦國南韓一較高下。

霎時間，一切看來都十分完美，也可說是太完美。在 2018 年十二月，香港足總爆出驚人消息：韋特在試用期的最後一天辭職，並接任成日職球隊東京綠茵的主教練。就連足總都好像感到十分意外，因為當時他們正在宣傳新設計的「Whitevolution」商品。

混亂和疑慮再一次回來。

港隊再一次群龍無首，同時足總又要再一次展開漫長的招聘程序。郭嘉諾帶領著年青版的港隊成功連續兩年拿下省港盃令人感到一點激動。不過，港隊在三月的國際賽期中沒有安排任何賽事，標誌了另一個令人不安的停滯期。最終在 2019 年四月，前芬蘭國腳麥柏倫成香港新帥，同時有來自冰島的艾拿臣上任為技術總監。他們將會合作主領香港備戰在最早今年九月便會開始的 2022 年世界盃外圍賽。期間，麥柏倫會先在六月首次帶領香港在主場友賽中華台北。

一件事有戲劇性的發展有時可以是一件好事，但香港球迷會希望這是一個新（和穩定）的一代。■

Tobias Zuser



Gary White addresses the Hong Kong fans in Taiwan. Photo: Andy Chiu.

## GARY WHITE: Q&A

**How would you sum up your time in Hong Kong?**

Well, it was way too short obviously, but I loved every minute of it. The HKFA has some great people, the clubs are working really hard to develop the professional side of the game, the fans are as passionate as anywhere I have been before, and the coaches and players were absolutely a pleasure to work with.

**What effect do you hope to have had on the team?**

The biggest effect I wanted to leave was their belief in themselves as well as the self-confidence that Hong Kong can compete with any country in Asia. That I think was the biggest pleasure for me, to see the confidence I left the programme with when I departed for Tokyo. Of course I wanted to qualify for a major tournament, which we did with the East Asian Cup.

**What do you think the Hong Kong team needs from your successor?**

The successor is in a very good position. He has a major competition to prepare for, including the World Cup qualifiers in the next couple of years. The team is in a very good place and now hopefully they can go further and really fulfil their

potential by winning things. He's going to need to be very confident. He needs to make sure that he pushes the players to the boundary of their comfort zone, and not settle for anything. What is very important for the success of any coach in Hong Kong is to work closely with the clubs and with the fans. Particularly the clubs are doing a good job in terms of trying to professionalise the game.

**Kenneth Kwok was your assistant coach at that time. How do you see his potential?**

Kenneth was a pleasure to work with. He was always listening, always learning, always asking questions, and he always did everything I ever needed him to do. The one thing that I told him before I left is that he has to be a little bit more aggressive and a little bit more ruthless when it comes to big decisions. Of course it is a bit difficult for him, because he was born and bred in the programme and everyone knows him. But he has a massive future in Hong Kong and maybe even past Hong Kong.

## GARY WHITE: Q&A

**加利韋特，你可以總結一下你在香港隊的執教經驗嗎？**

雖然在港時間明顯太短，但是我都非常享受每一個時刻。香港足球總人才濟濟，各個球會上下都盡心盡力去把香港足球專業化；香港球迷的熱情和投入度都不比其他地方遜色；我也很樂於和所有教練和球員合作。

**你希望你已為香港隊帶來什麼影響？**

我最希望看到的就是香港隊在自信心方面有所提升，去相信自己有足夠能力與亞洲各地競爭。在出發到東京前，我最高興的是見到我為港隊原有計劃儲下的信心。當然我曾希望能帶領球隊晉身大型賽事，而我們亦成功出線挑戰東亞盃決賽週。

**你認為香港隊最需要下任教練帶來什麼改變？**

下任教練現在處於非常有利的位。他需備戰一些重要的比賽，包括下一屆的世界盃外圍賽。港隊現在士氣高昂；我希望他們能夠更進一步，借一些勝仗來真正發揮球隊的潛能。新教練亦要對自己充滿信心，確保自己能推動球員走出舒適區，不要安於現狀。香港任何一位教練要成功的話，最重要的是要和球會和球迷一同緊密合作，尤其是球會在令球賽專業化方面做得很好。

**在你任職期間，郭嘉諾正擔任港隊助教，你覺得他有潛能做得更好嗎？**

我很高興可以和郭嘉諾合作。他總是在細心聆聽、學習和提問，而且他都能做到我要求的一切。

在離港前我曾告訴他在作出關鍵決定時需變得更積極和更無情一些。當然，這對他來說絕不容易，因為他正是被現有制度培育出來的，同時他亦和球壇內所有人關係密切。但我認為他在香港，甚至香港以外的足球界將會有非凡成就。



Kenneth Kwok's Hong Kong youth team scored another memorable win over Guangdong this season. Photo: Zinc Yeung

# OUT OF THE VALLEY

*A fallen giant returns to the big time*

There was a time when clashes between Happy Valley, South China and Rangers could attract crowds of tens of thousands, and produce season-defining games where titles were decided, and legends made.

Which made the sight of the three former giants slugging it out in Division 1 this season, in front of sparse crowds on all-weather public pitches, a little strange. All had fallen from grace over the past decade, not always for footballing reasons.

But now, at least one of them might make a top-flight return. Happy Valley, who topped the second-tier by seven points, winning 22 of 26 matches and scoring 98

goals, look sure to enter the Premier League.

Their title-winning charge was led in part by a Balkan backbone of Serbian centre back Igor Miovic, Bosnian midfielder Mahir Karic, and Albanian striker Ndue Mujeci.

Mujeci, whose 30 goals made him league top scorer, said the success was down to a level of organisation and professionalisation which would do the club well in the top flight.

"We did everything as a professional team, even training twice a day, and we have more players so even on the bench we had similar quality players to those who played, and they were ready any time to help the team to reach our goal," he said. →

想當年，愉園、南華和流浪互撼的賽事能夠吸引過萬球迷入場，他們能造出聯賽冠軍

鹿死誰手的關鍵一戰，和培育出傳奇球員。

這三隊前香港勁旅現時在公眾球場上出戰甲組聯賽，在空曠看台前一爭天下的情景令人覺得陌生。他們在過去多年都從頂級聯賽墮落，而成績並不是必然因素。

現在，起碼當中有有一隊很大機會回歸頂級聯賽。愉園今季在甲組以七分之距領先封王，在二十六場比賽中贏二十二場，並射入九十八個入球，穩奪升上超級聯賽的資格。

他們的封王之路由巴爾幹骨幹成員帶領，包括塞爾維亞中堅摩域治、波斯尼亞中場馬希卡歷和阿爾巴尼亞中鋒安度美斯。 →



Among the local contingent were Hong Kong's all-time most capped player, Lee Chi-ho, and Guangzhou-born forward Chen Liming, who hit 11 league goals during the campaign.

Lee, who has retired and will not be joining Happy Valley in the Premier League, was quick to credit the overseas players with a key influence.

"I think it is very important that the team has three outstanding foreign players this season," he said. "The team has a good balance in defence, midfield and attack. Also, the youngsters keep improving and

working really hard in every match, and the coaches did a good job to help the young guns growing up."

South China, relegated for lack of funds in 2016 but still by far Hong Kong's most successful club with 32 league titles, finished a less impressive ninth, while Rangers, title winners in 1971 and a strong cup team throughout that decade, came third.

Lording it over South China is a role reversal for the Valley, who have racked up 16 second-placed finishes since their formation in 1950, so often frustrated by

the Caroliners or, for a time, Seiko. Though the club was also a major force throughout the 1960s and 70s, during which Cheung Chi-doy was a star man, they boast only six league titles – most of them coming in the late 90s and early 00s, during a bad time for local football.

After that flurry of success around the turn of the millennium, they were suspended from the top tier in 2014 amid match-fixing allegations. A former player was convicted and jailed for fixing, while a club official pleaded guilty and was fined. The club were relegated, eventually sinking to Division 3.

Promotion for 2019/20 would mark an impressively quick return to the big time, and Lee toasted the club's turnaround in fortunes since the dark days. "I am glad to see Happy Valley start from the third division, keep climbing up and now have the chance to join the HKPL," he said.

But the jump to the top tier will probably be the →



Main image: Ndue Mujeci celebrates one of many goals this season. Bottom left: Happy Valley secure the league title in 2001. Photos: Happy Valley AA

安度美斯今季取得三十個入球成為港甲神射手，他指球隊的合作和專業助他獲得這個成就，同時亦會助球隊在頂級賽事贏得佳績。

他說：「我們的運作就如職業球隊，就連操練都每日兩次，加上我們有足夠球員，所以後備球員的水平亦與場上的球員相近。而他們都時刻準備好去幫助球隊達成目標。」

愉園陣中的本地球員則有為香港隊上陣次數最多的李志豪，還有為球隊射入十一個聯賽入球的廣州球員陳立明。

李志豪已決定在季後退休並不會隨愉園升班。他將功勞歸於對球隊有重要影響力的外援球員。他說：「我認為今季這三位表現突出的外援球員對球隊來說十分重要。球隊在防守、中場和進攻方面分佈平均。而年輕球員們在每場比賽都在進步和出盡全力，加上教練們在培訓新一代年青球員方面十分稱職。」

在 2016 年因缺乏資金而降班的南華，雖然他們仍是以贏得 32 次聯賽冠軍被列香港最成功的球隊，卻只能以第九名完成今季賽事。而 1971 年聯賽冠軍和盃賽常客的流浪則排名第三。→

biggest that the club has made on its way up, with Mujeci admitting the squad would need some additions. "Most of our players are young, so we all know that the Premier League is a level up so we need to find more experienced players and mix them with the young guys so we can have a strong team to compete for next year," he said.

Promotion will also mean a return for what was once the city's most controversially political club. When leftist riots shook Hong Kong in 1967, the avowedly pro-communist Valley pulled out of the First Division after a dispute with the FA. League officials had come out in support of the colonial police force's efforts to quell the unrest, something the club could not abide.

Those days are gone; there is no colonial establishment to fight with any more. If they do return to the top tier, the real fight will be restoring this proud club's former glory. ■

愉園在 1950 年成立以來有十六次成為聯賽亞軍，常被「少林軍」和精工強勢壓過飲恨。時移世易，南華風光不再，更被愉園爬頭。不過愉園在六十和七十年代亦曾風光一時，當時還有名將張子岱，但他們只曾六次封王，當中大部份都在九十年代尾至千禧年頭的本地足球低潮時奪得。

愉園在千禧年間正值黃金年代，在 2014 年因假波醜聞而被禁出戰頂級聯賽。有前球員被裁定詐騙罪成判囚，而一名球隊職員認罪及被罰款。球隊因此降班，最後沉淪至丙組。

愉園在來季升班將標誌極速回到頂級聯賽的重要時刻，李志豪亦祝賀球隊走出黑暗時期從谷底翻身。他說：「我很高興見到愉園能從丙組不斷向上

爬至現在有能參戰港超的機會。」

但躋身到港超參戰可能是愉園升班過程中能夠取得的最大成就，安度美斯認為球隊需積極增兵。他說：「我們大部分球員都很年輕，而我們都知道超級聯賽的一大升級，所以我們要簽入經驗豐富的球員，並將他們與年輕球員們磨合。這樣我們才能有一隊強大的隊伍去參戰來季賽事。」

愉園升班亦令人回想起他們曾是香港最具政治話題的球隊。在 1967 年，左派暴動震驚香港，香港足總當時支持出動殖民警察去平息社會動盪，而公開親共的愉園不認同該意見而與足總鬧不和，最後退出甲組聯賽。

一切都已成過去，現時已經再沒有殖民建制派去跟愉園鬥爭。若他們真的重回頂級聯賽，真正的鬥爭將會是回復這輝煌球隊當年光榮。■

James Legge

Left: Lee Chi-ho, one of Happy Valley's senior players. Right: Chen Liming in a game against South China, a fixture rich in history. Photos: Happy Valley AA



# DEAD END

Hong Kong and the AFC Cup trap



This season's AFC Cup campaign provided one of the most boring fixtures imaginable, but also one of the most exciting.

The former was Tai Po's two-leg qualifying round against Ryomyong of North Korea. The Hong Kong side's penalties to win the shoot-out were superb, but it's debatable whether they made up for the goalless 210 minutes which led to them.

The latter was the Blues' match against regular opponents Kitchee, drawn in the same group – after crashing out of Champions League qualifying against Malaysia's Perak on penalties – along with North Korea's 4.25 and Taiwan's Hang Yuen. In a topsy-turvy match, the Blues heroically levelled a 2-0 deficit in the 86th minute, only to concede in the 88th and 94th and lose 4-2.

But, even with two matches left to play, we already know neither side will make it out of Group I.

Local teams' involvement in Asia's second-tier

competition was always destined to be short. One reason for this is the shake-up of the format two years ago, which meant, among other things, that Hong Kong's entrants would be in the same group, and only one team would qualify from it.

The other is the anomaly of North Korea's involvement, due to their ineligibility for the AFC Champions League, where their level would be better suited. Their top team, 4.25, will most likely dominate any group when faced with East Asia's smaller clubs.

Both Hong Kong sides beat Hang Yuen at home, as expected. But Tai Po's match with 4.25 illustrated the gulf in class. The Koreans kept the ball, moved it quickly, and held their shape. Tai Po, then the city's champions-elect, gave up possession cheaply, made unforced errors, and defended poorly. They lost 3-1. Their away match on May 19 did nothing to close the apparent gulf in class, and neither did Kitchee's 2-0 loss in Pyongyang.

It was a far cry from 2017 and 2018, when →

Eastern and then Kitchee got to try their hand against Asia's giants in the group stage of the Champions League, and the glamour of the ties – and the occasional superstar opponent – made up for the fact they were group whipping boys. Dropping down a tier was at least expected to let Hongkongers experience the latter stages of a continental competition, as they did during Kitchee's run to the AFC Cup semi-finals in 2014. It did not turn out that way.

But there are other issues with the previously popular AFC Cup. Since 2009, when nearly 38,000 people filled Hong Kong Stadium to support South China in a semi-final, the tournament has turned into a predictable and monotonous affair.

And Hong Kong clubs appear the biggest losers from the recent reforms, which removed the performance of national teams from the ranking system. And pitting two Hong Kong teams against each other in the groups limits the number of points they can rack up between them, further damaging the city's ranking.

As football in Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia improves, the Champions League may not return to this city for some time. At least there is something that European and Asian football have in common: both systems are rigged in favour of the regional giants.

In June, 4.25 will return to play Kitchee. Before that, both Hong Kong teams will face off again, in a battle for (a rewardless) second place and local bragging rights.

Without major improvement on the pitch, or another format revamp, that may be all that's ever on offer. ■



季的亞協盃之旅上演了最悶的一幕，同時也上演了最刺激的一刻。

最悶的是大埔主客兩仗對北韓的黎明。大埔在互射十二階段勝出是一件好事，但他們在 210 分鐘之內都未能取得入球，令人懷疑他們到底是否值得晉級。

最刺激的是大埔對同組的老對手傑志 – 他們剛在亞冠互射十二碼階段負馬來西亞球隊霹靂出局，小組內還有北韓的 4.25 和台灣的航源。在這場混亂的賽事中，傑志在第 86 分鐘從落後兩球追和，然後在第 88 分鐘和第 94 分鐘連失兩球不敵大埔。

雖然還有餘下兩場賽事，但我們已經可以知道兩隊都將未能從 I 組晉級。

本地球隊在這項亞洲的二等比賽往往都注定只有一個短暫的旅程。其中



一個原因來自兩年前的賽制改革，這個改變代表香港的球隊能在同一小組內相遇，而當中只有一隊能夠出線。

另一個破格改變是北韓的加入，即使他們的水平達亞冠級，但卻不符合參戰亞冠的資格。北韓勁旅 4.25 在任何小組內對著東亞的小球隊都應能輕易佔優。

一如所料，兩隊香港球隊都在主場輕取航源。但大埔對 4.25 一仗示範了技術水平的差別。來自北韓的對手整場保持控球權、移動快速和陣型完好；而大埔作為香港的準聯賽冠軍卻輕易失去控球權、在無壓力下出錯和後防作出多次失誤，最後負 3: 1。他們在 5 月 19 日作客一仗同樣未能拉近技術距離，而傑志同樣以 2: 0 負走平壤。

2017 年和 2018 年的旅程分別甚遠，當時東方和傑志分別先後在亞冠小組賽硬撼亞洲列強，但當時有球隊能夠代表香港出戰亞冠的魅力和對手隊中的超級球星，都蓋過了他們都只是魚腩部隊的事實。跌到次一級的賽事超碼令香港人能體驗在亞洲賽事晉級的成功感，

Title image: Tai Po goalkeeper Tsang Man-fai after conceding against April 25. Top left: Eduardo Praes in a similar situation. Bottom left: Fernando scores as Kitchee beat Hang Yuen. Above: Lucas on the offensive during a Champions League play-off with Perak. Photos: Ken Wu, Kitchee SC, Alan Man Photography & Junpiter Futbol

例如傑志在 2014 年成功打入亞協四強。可惜事實未如所想。

早年頗受歡迎的亞協盃現在出現不少問題。2009 年，當時有近三萬八千人到香港大球場支持南華在準決賽出戰之後，亞協盃變成一個可預料又單一的例行賽事。

還有國家隊成績不再被計算在積分排名內，令香港成為了近年賽制改革的大輸家。再加上兩隊香港球隊被分到同一小組內出賽互撼，限制了他們能夠爭取的分數，更深的損害香港的排名。

同時，越南、菲律賓、泰國和馬來西亞的水準逐漸提升，亞冠可能在未來一段時間都不會重回香港。歐洲和亞洲足球超碼有一個共通點：兩個體制都偏向被地區列強操控。

在六月，4.25 會再臨香港對傑志。在這之前，兩隊香港球隊會先互碰，挑戰（一個無意義的）小組次名和在本地球壇能炫耀的權利。

若在場上未能有更大進步，又或者沒有再一次賽制改革，香港球隊在亞洲賽路上都只會徒勞無功。■

James Legge and Tobias Zuser



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