

Five Highlights in Iraqi Football from 2016

As the new year begins, we take a look at five of the best moments from the past twelve months in Iraqi football.

1. Iraq qualify for Olympics



2016 kicked off with the AFC U23 Championship and defending champions Iraq needed to finish in the top three to qualify for the Rio Olympics in the summer. They lost the semi-final to Japan and went a goal down to hosts Qatar in the third place match but Mohanad Abdul-Raheem and Ayman Hussein scored two late goals to book Iraq a ticket to Rio.

2. Ali Adnan makes Iraqi football history



Ali Adnan made history in February 2016 when he scored a free-kick for Udinese against Genoa in the Serie A. This was the first ever goal scored by an Iraqi player in one of Europe's top five leagues (Premier League, La Liga, Serie A, Ligue 1 and Bundesliga).

3. Iraq legends open the Karbala Stadium



12 May 2016 saw the opening of a beautiful new stadium in Karbala. It was opened with a mini-game which saw Karbala FC play against a number of players who famously won the 2007 Asian Cup for Iraq. The game was goalless but the stadium was packed for the memorable occasion.

4. Iraq draw away to Neymar's Brazil



Iraq didn't qualify for the knockout stages of the Rio Olympics with three straight draws but they did play out one of the most memorable games in their recent history. They battled valiantly to earn a famous point in Brazil against the hosts, with the Iraqi defence silencing Neymar all game in the goalless encounter. Brazil ended up winning the gold medal.

5. Hammadi Ahmed wins AFC Cup and is nominated for Player of the Year



Hammadi Ahmed stole the show in the 2016 AFC Cup as he scored in every single game he played in in the tournament; a total of 16 goals. One of them was in the final that saw Al-Quwa Al-Jawiya defeat Bengaluru 1-0 and become the third Iraqi team to win a major continental competition and the first to win the AFC Cup. Hammadi's heroics saw him finish runner-up in the Asian Player of the Year award.