

Seven under-23 players who deserve a chance in the senior team

Iraq's U23 team left Asia stunned with some sublime performances in the AFC U23 Championship qualifiers, sweeping aside Saudi Arabia and Bahrain whilst thrashing Afghanistan 8-0 to secure qualification. Here we take a look at the players who shined, and why we think they deserve to feature more prominently in the senior team.



Ayman Hussein

Without doubt the Al-Naft hitman was the star player for the U23s, scoring 6 goals over the 3 games. His pace, strength and physical presence were all too much for opposition defences to handle. He has also enjoyed an excellent Iraqi Premier League campaign, scoring 14 goals, the 3rd-highest in the league. However, his temperament is the one glaring weakness in his game, and this was made evident in the recent match against Saudi Arabia where he received a straight red card for pushing a player in the face. That type of behaviour could make the difference when Basim Qasim decides on his final squad for the WCQs, however we think he has just been too good to leave out.



Ahmed Abdul-Ridha

Having recently made his debut for Iraq against South Korea, his performances for the U23s will have done his chances of reselection no harm. His versatility makes him a valuable player, as he is comfortable playing across the defence and in midfield. Basim Qasim, also manager of Abdul-Ridha's club Al-Quwa Al-Jawiya, will have seen first-hand just how well he has been playing and therefore he can expect to be in the next Iraq squad.



Mazen Fayad

He looked a constant threat for Iraq in the wing forward position; his pace and trickery got him into great positions where he managed to score 1 and assist 2 goals. He has been one of Al-Naft's best players, chipping in with 5 league goals this season and his recent performances definitely make him a deserved contender for selection.



Hussein Ali

Probably Iraq's most exciting U23 player, his perfectly-weighted through balls and crosses provided 4 assists in 2 games. He won the Young Player of the Season award last year with Al-Zawraa and is having another fantastic season this year, scoring 7 goals from midfield. He provides qualities that the senior team are lacking and we'd definitely like to see more of him in the senior team.



Mohammed Jaffal

His first touch and weight of pass were exquisite, potentially the most technically gifted of the U23 midfield players. He played a part in many of the attacking moves and his vision and quality passing are things Iraq have lacked in recent times. Basim Qasim clearly rates the player as he signed him for Al-Quwa Al-Jawiya this season. With more playing time at club level, we think Jaffal would be a good addition to the senior side.



Burhan Jumaah

The Al-Talaba defender was perhaps Iraq's most solid defender in the 3 games, putting in an incredible performance against Saudi Arabia. However, Al-Talaba's poor defensive record in the Premier League may count against him when it comes to senior squad selection. But given his performances for the U23 team, we hope Burhan Jumaah will get his chance sooner rather than later.



Ahmed Basil

The Al-Shorta goalkeeper made numerous outstanding saves, especially against Bahrain where he made the difference between winning and losing. Ahmed Basil has been ever-improving for his club and had a fantastic season, keeping Mohammed Hameed out of their team and contributing greatly to Al-Shorta's title challenge. There is a lot of competition for the GK position, but we think Ahmed Basil has done enough to be in contention for future squads.



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