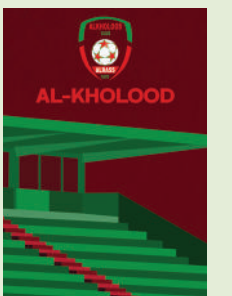
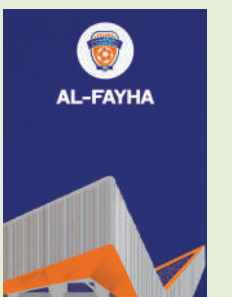
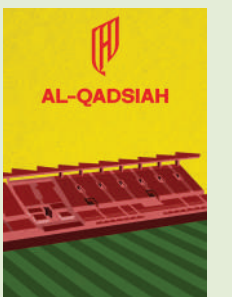
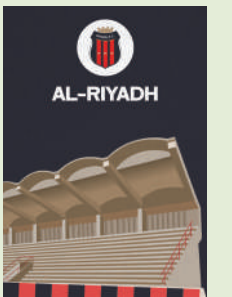
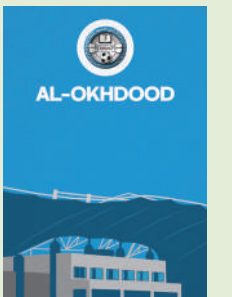
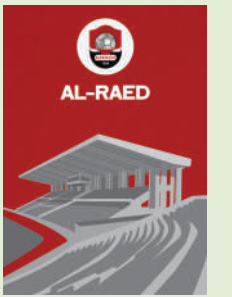
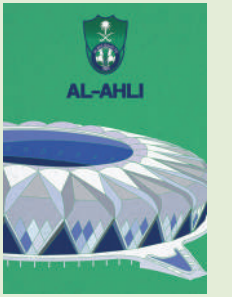
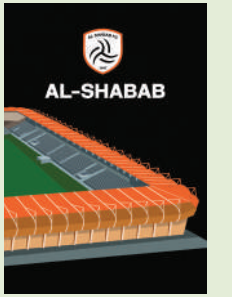
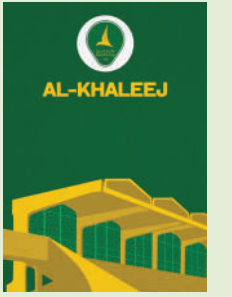
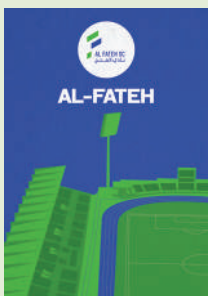
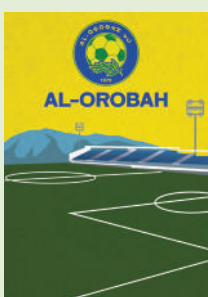
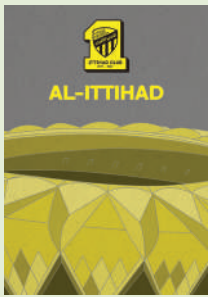


Sport News



YANNICK CARRASCO (AL-SHABAB)

SALEM AL DAWARI (AL-HILAL)

NACHO FERNANDEZ (AL-QADSIH)

KARIM BENZEMA (AL-ITTIHAD)

PLAYERS TO WATCH THIS SEASON

CRISTIANO RONALDO (AL-NASSR)

RIYAD MAHREZ (AL-AHLI)

SAUDI PRO LEAGUE 2024-2025

Favorites Hilal chase 20th title

... but trio of Al-Nassr, Al-Ahli and Al-Ittihad will once again hope to stop another procession

Arab News Riyadh

The wait is over, and the 2024-25 Saudi Pro League season begins today. The questions that have been flying around will start to be answered over the coming days, weeks and months.

Any team that finishes above Al-Hilal are surely going to be lifting the trophy. The Blues were dominant last season as they won a 19th league title and while they haven't yet made any big signings, the return of Neymar from injury, perhaps next month, will feel like one. The ingredients are already in place, and coach Jorge Jesus obviously knows how to win in Saudi Arabia.

In terms of points per game, Al-Nassr's haul last season would have been just enough to win the title the

previous year, but they were still 14 points behind their neighbors. For such a successful and ambitious club, it was disappointing.

Pressure is on coach Luis Castro to iron out defensive mistakes and ensure that the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo — who managed a league record of 35 goals — keep scoring.

Breaking into the top four is no easy task as many clubs have found out over the years. Al-Taawoun finished fourth last season and still have the wily Brazilian coach Pericles Chamusca in charge. Al-Shabab had a poor season by their own high standards and while they have lost Ivan Rakitic, the addition of Hamdallah should mean goals. Ettifaq took sixth and if Steven Gerrard can lift the team any higher this time, then that would be his greatest achievement as a coach given the competition all around.

ARAB NEWS SPL COVERAGE

For all the latest SPL news, results and team information, scan the QR code below with your smartphone, or visit arabnews.com/SaudiProLeague



Al-Fateh and Al-Fayha both had decent seasons. The former lost Firas Al-Buraikan to Al-Ahli while the latter have the impressive Fashion Sakala who enjoyed his debut campaign. After two mid-table finishes, Damac will want to return to the top half.

And what of Al-Qadsiah? The Knights of the East won promotion and have been busier than most in the transfer market with the likes of Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Nacho joining what was already a decent-looking squad.

The battle to avoid relegation is always fierce, and that was certainly the case last season. Al-Okhlood, Al-Riyadh and Al-Wehda were not far above the dropdoor. Of the newly promoted trio, Al-Qadsiah will be hoping for a top-half finish, but Al-Orobah and Al-Kholood will surely be satisfied with getting that all-important 15th place, which means survival.