

# Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia a win-win for football officials of both nations



- Television revenue and prize money from competition provide major financial boost for ailing Spanish clubs, while the Kingdom offers another global event that allows fans to see some of the world's finest athletes up close

It is hardly surprising that Saudi Arabian football fans have embraced the Spanish Super Cup taking place in Riyadh. This is far more than just another sporting event.

Tickets for the first semifinal between Real Madrid and Barcelona — arguably the two most popular foreign clubs among football followers in the Kingdom — sold out within an hour of going on sale, which confirms that this tournament

could well become part of the fabric of the Saudi Vision 2030 launched by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

As part of several local and international sporting events held in the country, it was agreed in 2019 to hold the Spanish Super Cup over a period of three years in Saudi Arabia.

The decision backed by Prince Mansour bin Khalid Al-Farhan, the Kingdom's ambassador to Spain; Yasser Al-Mishal, president of the Saudi Arabian Football Federation; Luis Rubiales, president of the Royal Spanish Football Federation; and parties from Real Madrid and Barcelona, as well representatives of other elite clubs in Spain.

The move was not without controversy, however, with Spanish fans and media expressing resentment that the mini-tournament had been taken abroad.

Nevertheless the decision will benefit Spanish football financially — helping stave off bankruptcy for some clubs — and in terms of global exposure.

The Spanish Football Federation earns more than \$8 million per year from television broadcasting rights, which means that in a four-day tournament, it will receive about \$24 million from the agreed three editions.

The 2020–21 edition of the competition did not take place in Saudi Arabia due to the pandemic, but was held in Andalusia, with the final played at Seville's La Cartuja stadium behind closed doors.

For 2021–22 Saudi Arabia was again able hold the tournament, prompting the president of the Spanish federation to announce the renewal of the current contract until 2029, which means that the Royal Andalusian Football Federation will receive between \$274 million and \$365 million.

This year, Real Madrid and Barcelona received \$7.8 million each, while the other semifinalists, Athletic Bilbao and Atletico Madrid, took only \$913,000, with the difference explained by the popularity and history of the former two clubs.

Tournament prize money will reach \$16 million, with the winner getting \$4.3 million and the runner-up \$3.2 million. The losing semifinalists will receive \$913,000.

Should Real Madrid win the title, total earnings could reach \$13.7 million, given the commercial and advertising revenues.

Rubiales has said more than once that the arrangement with Saudi Arabia will help save Spanish football, in economic terms, especially following the outbreak of the global pandemic.

The Kingdom's leadership and sporting officials are keen that the Spanish Super Cup is integrated into the Vision 2030 plan and the "Quality of Life" program for Saudi fans, especially as it comes during the Riyadh season, which is organized and managed by Turki Al-Sheikh, chairman of the Entertainment Authority.

Since the announcement of Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has hosted a growing number of international sporting events and competitions.

The Italian Super Cup preceded its Spanish counterpart, while motorsports also have thrived, with the Dakar Rally, Formula E and, most recently, the Saudi Arabian Formula 1 Grand Prix all here to stay.

Many other sports, from golf to WWE and horse racing's Saudi Cup, have become annual events, too.

The high profile of the Spanish Super Cup fits in that calendar.

For the Spanish authorities the competition offers a financial boost for the game and its clubs, while for Saudi Arabia's sporting leadership it is about bringing entertainment to the people of the Kingdom.

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