

# How Brexit and the English FA's new rules are having a knock-on effect on Gulf football



- Only individuals recently working in certified leagues, or bands, can coach in England — and no Gulf nation is on the list

DUBAI: Fans keeping an eye on Saudi and Gulf football will recently have noticed the challenges faced by Al-Nassr FC in hiring a new first team coach.

Eventually, at the start of October, the Riyadh club landed 46-year-old Portuguese coach Pedro Emanuel on a contract that will see him in the role until the end of the current season.

Logistics, not many apparent to football fans, are increasingly placing obstacles in the face of hiring new coaches.

Having spoken with several European agents, it seems that Al-Nassr was one of the first victim of the new rules implemented by the English Football Federation last January.

At the start of the year, the FA implemented a set of restrictive measures to hiring football coaches and other technical staff to English football leagues as a result of Brexit and the subsequent leaving of the European market.

The knock-on effects are now being felt in the Middle East

Indirectly, these new rules will very likely limit the number of coaches who can, or are willing to, come to the Gulf, as witnessed in the recent case at Al-Nassr.

Simply put, to be able to work in England as a football coach or part of a team's technical staff, an individual must satisfy new rules placed by the FA based on five "bands;" these will determine whether a prospective coach qualifies for a Governing Body Endorsement (GBE) that will allow him or her to train an English team.

The new rules demand that only technicians who have worked in the leagues of the pre-defined "bands" by the FA can train in England. When referring to coaches, the FA also includes regular assistants to coaches.

The five categories are as follows: Band 1 represents the elite of the English Premier League, Germany's Bundesliga, Spain's LaLiga, the Italian Serie A and France's Ligue 1.

Band 2 includes, among others, the Portuguese league and Belgian First Division; Band 3 the Russian Premier League and Brazilian league; Band 4 the Czech Croatian leagues; and Band 5 includes the Serbian SuperLiga and Chinese Super League.

To receive a GBE that allows employment in England, coaches and assistants must have worked in one of these bands in the past two consecutive years or in three of the past five.

With no leagues from any Gulf countries included in the bands, coaches who work in the region for more than two years know they are closing the door on any potential job in England.

Not surprisingly, this will limit the range of choices for some Gulf clubs as many coaches will now think twice before committing to them, as they might later wish to work in England.

Gulf media reported that Al-Nassr had unsuccessfully contacted eight European coaches at the end of September, with three of them — Antonio Conte, Rudi Garcia and Quique Flores — turning down the offer because they had hopes of coaching in the UK in the near future.

To get an idea of the impact of the FA's new measures, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer would not have been able to join Manchester United from Norway's Molde in 2018 under today's rules.

The FA's shunning of any Gulf league — particularly the successful Saudi Pro League — will clearly have an impact on the availability of reputable coaches for clubs in region.

In the circumstances, any reluctance from coaches to move to the Middle East is understandable. Coaching in England remains a dream that many will not risk.

To what extent that will impact regional clubs remain to be seen, with the development of football in the Gulf also at stake.

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