



# Roshn Saudi League Season Highlights 2024–25

*RSL's strong growth in the past two seasons  
has laid the foundation for long-term success.*

October 2025

A collaboration between

**BAIN**  
& COMPANY



**TWENTY  
FIRST**  
GROUP\_



# Foreword



**Jürg Kronenberg**

Head of Sports Practice in EMEA,  
Partner, Bain & Company



**Blake Wooster**

Founder and CEO,  
Twenty First Group



We are thrilled to unveil the inaugural edition of the Roshn Saudi League Season Highlights, created in collaboration with the Twenty First Group. Saudi football is experiencing an iconic transformation, with the league redefining itself through innovation and beginning to make its mark on the global football stage.

Bain & Company is a top international management consulting firm with offices across 65 cities in 40 countries. Our mission is to help our clients create such high levels of value that together we set new standards of excellence in our respective industries.

The Roshn Saudi League Season Highlights aims to provide data-driven insights into the league's evolution, showcasing the clubs that are leading the way in areas such as sporting performance, squad value development, youth development, and fan engagement. The study highlights those that have excelled in advancing Saudi Arabia's football ambitions, serving as role models for the growth and development of other teams within the league.

We hope these insights ignite meaningful discussions, inspire bold and innovative ideas, and motivate the league and its clubs to continue striving toward their goal of becoming a globally competitive league while redefining football in Saudi Arabia.

It is with great excitement that we present this study, developed in partnership with Bain & Company, on the Roshn Saudi League—a league undergoing a transformational journey unlike any other in football history.

At Twenty First Group, we specialize in partnering with football teams, their owners and investors, leveraging our unique, evidence-based insights to help the world's leading football clubs achieve sustained sporting success. Now, as we expand our presence in the Middle East with the opening of our regional office in Summer 2024, we are thrilled to bring this expertise to a region where football is not just growing but thriving. By combining the data-driven power of our Intelligence Engine with Bain's macroeconomic perspectives and deep understanding of the regional football ecosystem, we have delivered a comprehensive analysis of the league and its clubs across four key areas.

We hope these insights will serve as a valuable resource for league stakeholders as they navigate this exciting phase of growth and development. The ambition and investment driving the Roshn Saudi League represent an unparalleled opportunity to shape not only the future of football in the region but also its broader society.

As we embark on this journey together, we look forward to engaging with key members of the Saudi sports ecosystem to discuss the findings of this study and to help unlock the league's full potential.

# CONTEXT

## The purpose of the RSL Season Highlights



### 1 | To inspire innovation and change in KSA's football landscape

This ranking shows what clubs are doing well and where they can improve, with the goal to inspire innovation and change, boost competition, and raise the quality of the league



### 2 | To showcase the profound transformation of football in KSA

This ranking showcases KSA's progress in football across a variety of dimensions of the transformation, including a year-on-year comparison



### 3 | To share interesting insights that can spark a dialogue

This ranking indicates notable data points and insights about the RSL and its clubs, intended to spark a fruitful dialogue among KSA's football stakeholders

# Executive summary | Laying the foundation for long-term success

## The transformation continues










## The awards go to



## Unlocking more potential



- **Overall, the RSL experienced impressive growth over the last two years:**
  - RSL is a leading league in Asia and is catching up with European leagues based on average team quality
  - The title race has become less predictable, with fewer overall points for the winner, creating more excitement for fans
  - On average, RSL clubs underspent by 1% on new player acquisitions, though likely overspent on signings from Tier 1 European leagues
  - The average market value of RSL players continued to grow significantly, from \$1.1 million at the start of 2024–25 season to \$1.6 million by its end
  - KSA nationals continued to have significant on-pitch presence, with 42% of total playing time last season
  - Digital fan engagement continued to grow, especially among newly promoted clubs
- **2024–25 season awards:**
  - **Sporting performance and quality:**  Al Ittihad dominated on the pitch, while  Al Hilal had the best squad quality
  - **Squad value creation and spending:**  Al Qadsiah realized highest squad value growth, while  Al Fateh stood out in organic value creation
  - **Youth and national development:**  Al Qadsiah and  Al Fateh prioritized youth playing time;  Wehda,  Khaleej, and  Raed focused on nationals
  - **Fan engagement:**  Nassr led in social media followers, while  Al Ittihad drew the biggest crowds
- **Opportunity to further drive value by addressing league-level gaps:**
  - **Growth is not uniform:** Some clubs have improved faster than others and the league is polarized
  - **Wages are high:** Most clubs have a significant quality-to-wage gap
  - **Youth is not a top priority yet:** Youth development lagged, with only 12% minutes played for U23 vs. 16%–26% for top leagues
  - **Fan attendance is low:** Stadium utilization averaged 34%, less than half the rate of Tier 1 European leagues

# What this study is and what it is not

## Disclaimer



This study is an outside-in assessment, based on objective market data, and analytical models from TFG, combined with qualitative commentary from public sources and market participant interviews.

The authors of this report did not have access to internal RSL club or SPL data; as such, some data points in this report might not be fully accurate and the insights in this report should be treated as directional.

We are confident in the quality of the analysis and believe that the insights reflect RSL's reality and each award winner is well deserved.

## What this study and the awards are



The awards highlight strong performance within individual success levers; they provide recognition for what a club has done well within a specific area.

The study highlights where the league has evolved well in the last two years, and where we see opportunities to further strengthen the league.

## What this study and the awards are *not*



The awards are not an assessment of the individual quality or success of individual clubs, nor are they a predictor for future success.



# Our RSL Season Highlights comprises four key success levers

## Overview



## What good looks like



### Sporting performance and quality

Evaluates a club's success on the field and the overall strength of its squad

**Translating squad strength into consistent on-field success while exceeding expectations relative to available quality**

### Squad value creation and spending

Measures a club's ability to create value, either by developing its existing squad or by trading players efficiently

**Maximizing squad value, while ensuring efficient spending**

### Youth and national development

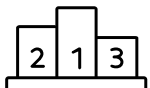
Assesses the club's commitment to developing youth and local talent

**Developing high-quality talent via structured academies and by providing meaningful playing minutes to youth and nationals**

### Fan engagement

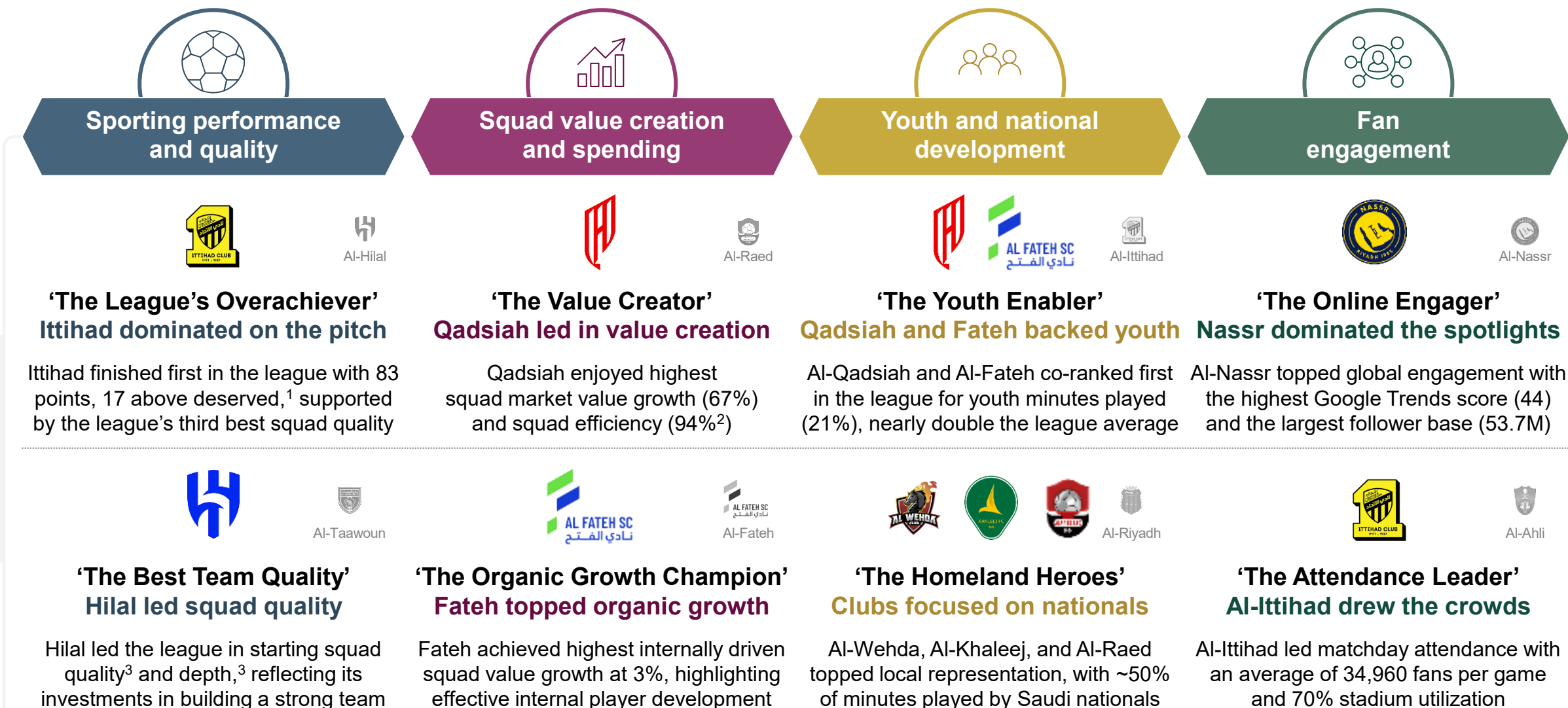
Reflects a club's ability to grow a loyal fan base both digitally and through in-stadium attendance



**Building a loyal fan base by driving strong stadium attendance and digital reach to sustain long-term growth**



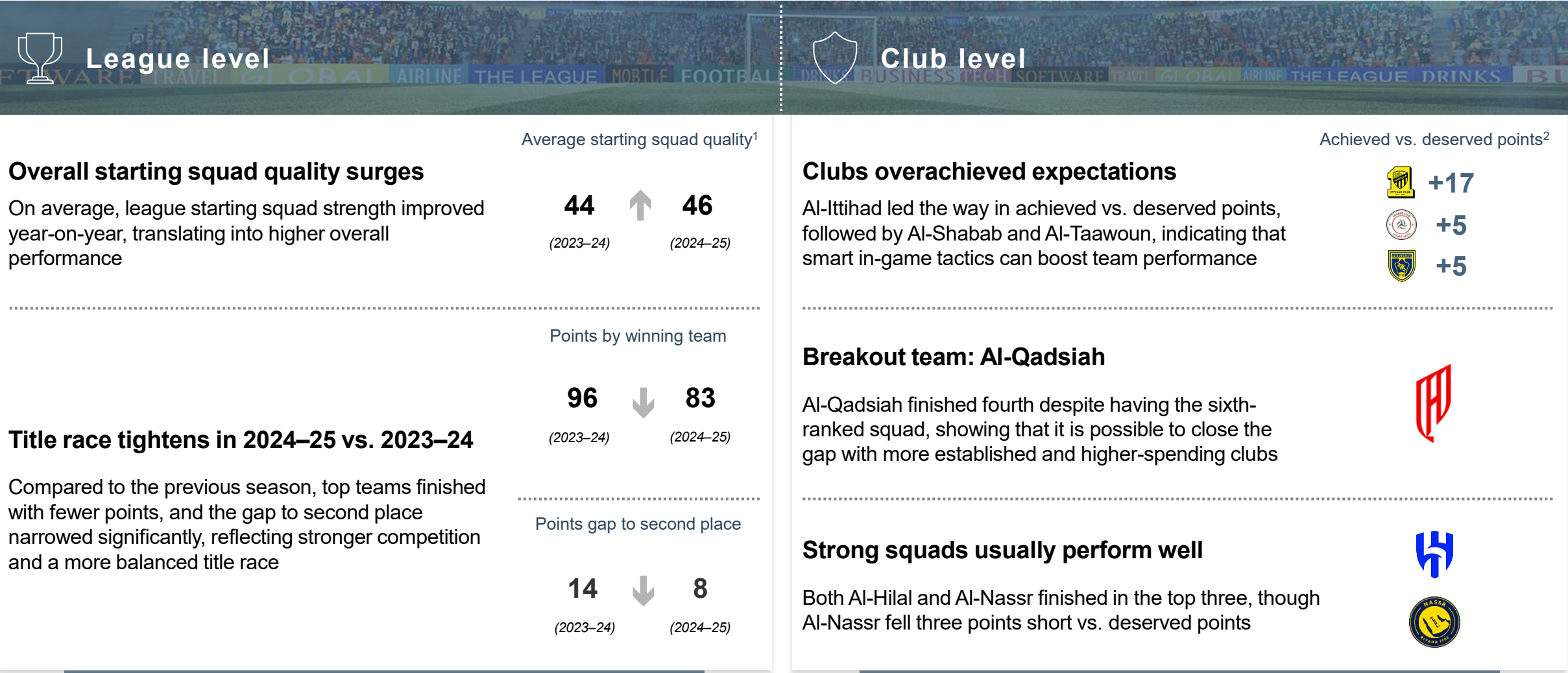
**Top-performing clubs across each of the four verticals are highlighted**

# The Awards | And the awards for the 2024–25 season go to ...



Notes: 1) Calculated difference between actual league points achieved vs. deserved points from Fotmob; 2) Squad performance relative to wage spend (percentiles); 3) As per TFG’s player rating models;   Indicates winners for 2023–24 season  
 Sources: TFG; RSL; Fotmob; Transfermarkt; Google Trends; Fanpage Karma; Lit. search

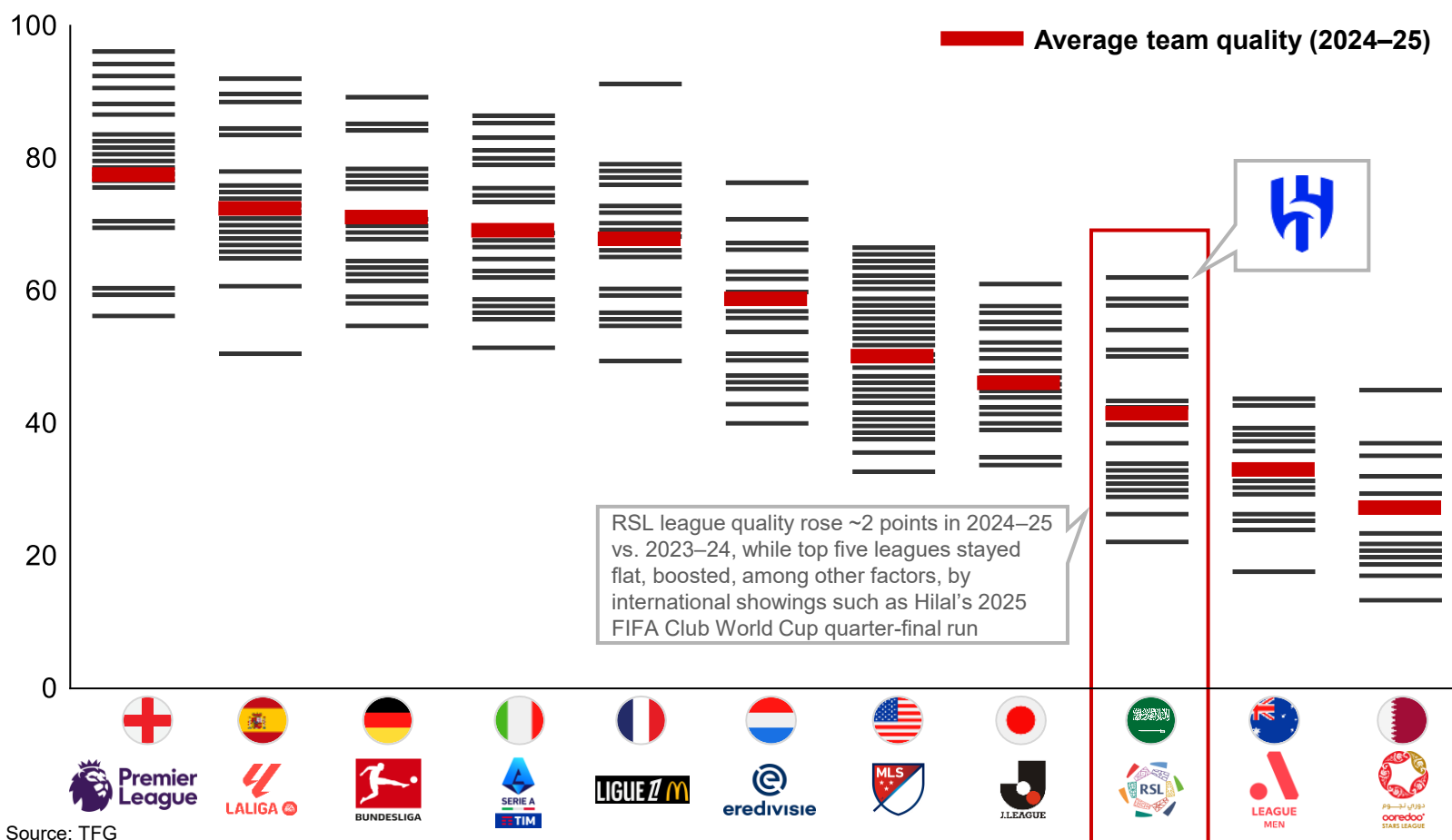
# Gaining strength | League quality increased, competition became more competitive





# Pulled up by a few | RSL is catching up with benchmark leagues, though growth is mainly driven by a few top clubs

## Team quality performance comparison per league (2024–25 season)



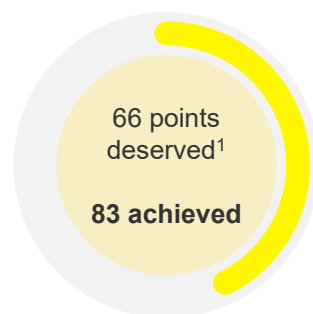
## Commentary

- RSL outperforms key regional competitors in team quality and is now the **second-best football league in Asia** (behind Japan)
- **RSL still trails Europe's top five leagues**, highlighting gaps in depth and consistency
- However, **RSL is catching up with European leagues on team quality**
  - Al-Hilal is setting the benchmark—partly driven by good international performance—now nearing average performance levels in France's Ligue 1
  - RSL remains more dispersed vs. other leagues, with a clear quality gap between the top six clubs and the rest

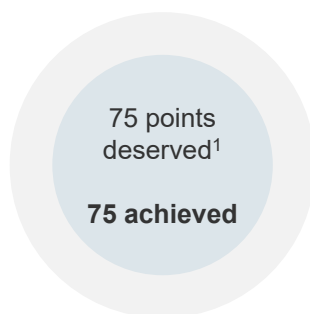
# Beating the odds | Al-Ittihad triumphed despite Al-Hilal's on-paper advantage

## Squad discipline vs. squad depth: A season defined by contrasts

## Commentary



17 points  
above deserved



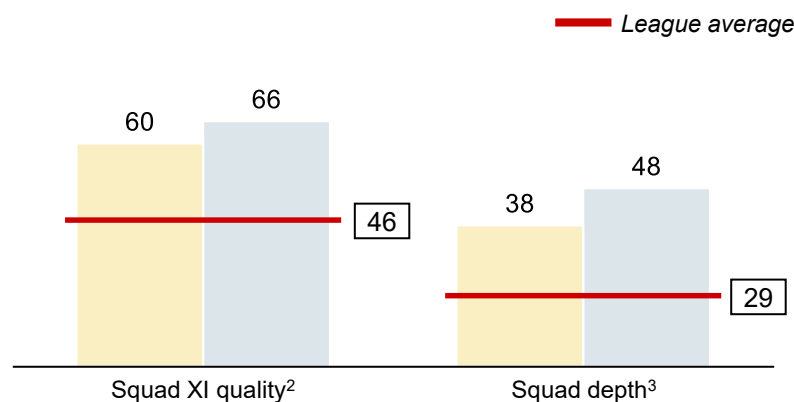
In line with  
deserved



Where quality and depth expect to dictate the league, **Ittihad flipped the script**

Despite boasting only the third-best squad on paper, they surged to the top of the table with **83 points, 17 above deserved**

They were **efficient on the pitch**, and perhaps fortunate at times



Meanwhile, **Hilal set the benchmark in squad strength**, with the top starting XI quality (66 vs. 46 average) and depth (48 vs. 29 average), shaped by **years of strategic investment** and talent acquisition

Hilal was, by all metrics, **built to win, yet Ittihad held the trophy** in the end

- The **performance gap between Ittihad and Hilal** can be partially explained by:
  - **Efficiency against big clubs:** Ittihad gained 19 out of 24 points against other big clubs, while Hilal gained only 11
  - **Narrow margins, big impact:** Ittihad won more games with 79 goals and a 44-goal difference, while Hilal's 95 goals and 54-goal difference reflected more comfortable but fewer wins
  - **Focus on national league:** Ittihad was able to focus solely on RSL, given they didn't play in any continental tournaments, unlike Hilal
- A key question is whether **Ittihad can sustain its performance next season**, or if Hilal's quality advantage will translate into future wins, **given that exceeding deserved points is typically not sustainable**

# Acquiring growth | Squad value growth continues to be driven by player acquisitions



## League level

### Player valuations surged, mostly through external levers

Average player value increased by ~35%; primarily driven by player acquisitions vs. club-level player development

Average player value (USD)<sup>1</sup>

**\$1.1M** ↑ **\$1.6M**  
(start of 2024–25) (end of 2024–25)

### Organic value creation remained negative

League-wide organic market value creation remained negative across last two seasons, driven by the reliance on international player transfers vs. player development

Organic value creation (percentage)

**-28%** ↓ **-25%**  
(2023–24) (2024–25)

### Transfer efficiency<sup>2</sup> fluctuated across clubs

Majority of clubs reported negative transfer efficiency, with top performers like Al-Ittihad (-38%) optimizing spend for value uplift, while others such as Al-Ahli overspent across its acquisitions (+70%)



**-38%** Underspend  
(2024–25 season)



**+70%** Premium paid  
(2024–25 season)



## Club level

### Al-Qadsiah built the most efficient squad

Al-Qadsiah led in efficiency and value creation, topping squad market value growth and squad efficiency rankings



Market value growth

**67%**

Squad efficiency<sup>3</sup>

**94%**

### Al-Fateh showed early signs of organic growth

Al-Fateh achieved positive organic squad value growth, driven by an emphasis on player development, and stood out as the only team whose average intrinsic value increased over the season



Organic value creation

**+3%**

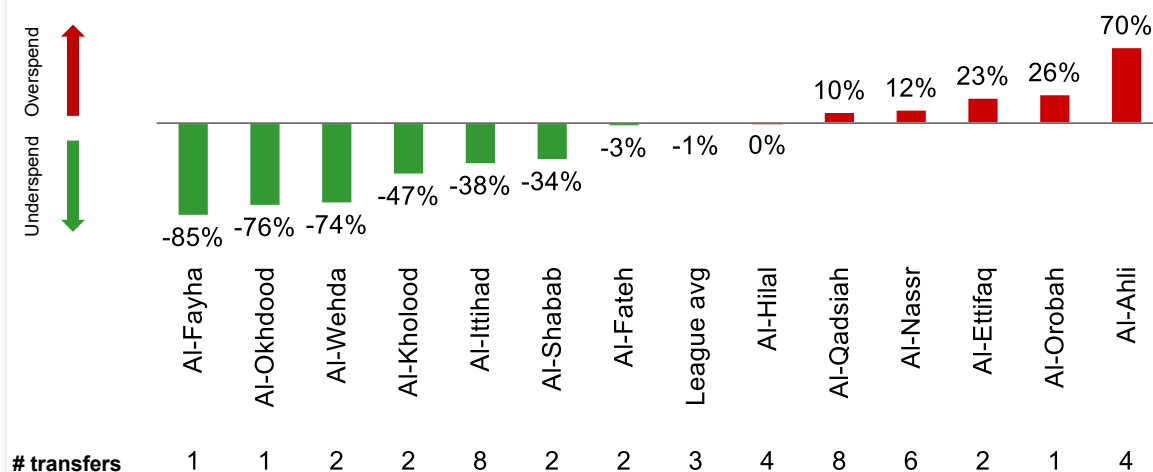
Notes: 1) Exchange rate 1 EUR = 1.17 USD (as of September 2025); 2) Average realized player acquisition price vs. TFG's predicted price; 3) Squad performance relative to wage spend (percentiles) | Source: TFG



# Spending wisely | Overall transfer efficiency was positive, despite premiums on imports from many European leagues

## Wide range for transfer efficiency across clubs

Transfer efficiency<sup>1</sup> (percentage, 2024–25)



- **RSL league averaged -1% transfer efficiency** (avg. discount paid vs. predicted price), though with a wide range in spread (-85% to +70%) and variance—clubs with 4+ transfers showed both high overspend and strong value capture
  - Al-Ahli overspent significantly with 70%, driven mainly by Toney and Galeno
  - Al-Ittihad achieved -38% transfer efficiency, driven by Aouar, Rajković, and Mitaj, who were acquired below expected prices relative to historical premiums

## RSL clubs mainly overspent when acquiring players from Tier 1 European leagues

League		Overall percentage of spend	RSL player acquisitions <sup>2</sup>
Primeira Liga		35%	10
Liga I		35%	5
Ligue 1		19%	9
Premier League		16%	17
Saudi League		11%	12
La Liga		8%	7
Serie A		-10%	8
Super League 1		-23%	4
Süper Lig		-44%	6

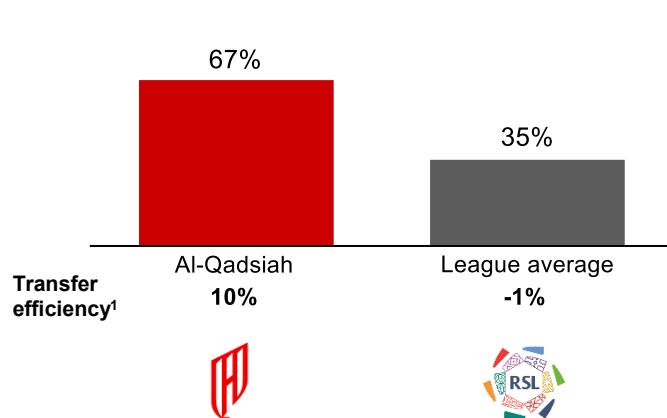
- While RSL clubs generally underspent on transfers, they **paid a premium when transferring in players from top European leagues** (e.g., overspend of +35% for Primeira Liga, +19% Ligue 1, and +16% for Premier League transfers)
- **Significant value could be found in Turkey and Greece**, e.g., Turkish Süper Lig -44% and Greek Super League 1 at -23%

Notes: 1) Average realized player acquisition price vs. TFG's predicted price; 2) As per data availability over last 3 seasons | Source: TFG

# Breakout team | Qadsiah topped the league in squad value growth and efficiency

## Qadsiah achieved high market value growth, while maintaining wage efficiency

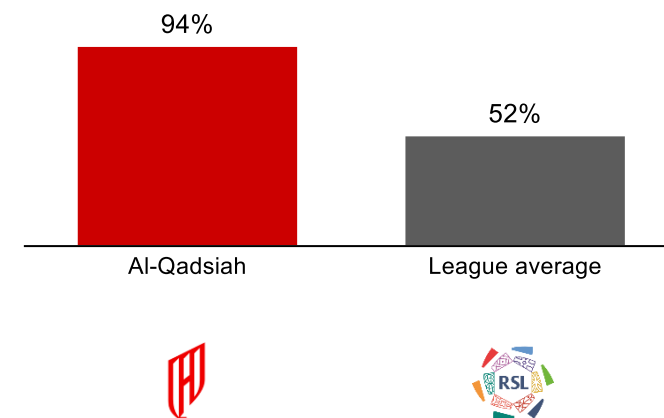
Squad market value growth (2024–25 season)



**Qadsiah topped the league in squad value growth**, with an increase of 67% (vs. 35% league average), primarily **driven by strategic transfer activity**

Qadsiah **had a transfer efficiency of +10% across its player acquisitions**—paying an average premium for newly acquired players—performing below the league average of -1%

Squad efficiency<sup>2</sup> (percentage)

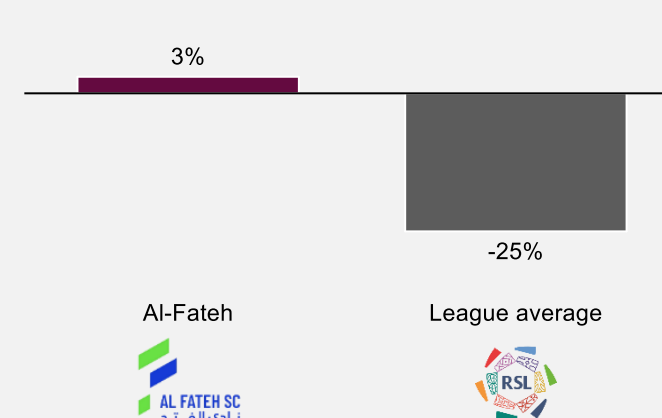


Despite paying premiums for player acquisitions, **Qadsiah maintained an efficient salary spend**, achieving the league's **best squad efficiency of 94%**, delivering strong on-field performance per wage dollar

While Qadsiah achieved high squad efficiency, it has **achieved less in organic growth** (-40% vs. -25% league average) during the last season

## Fateh grew organically

Organic squad growth (percentage)



Al-Fateh enjoyed **highest organic growth of ~3%** (vs. -25% league average), mainly driven by:

**Zaydou Youssouf**: signed for a fair fee and played regularly throughout the season

**Matias Vargas**: signed for free in January from China, scored 7 goals in the season's second half

**Saad Al Sharfa**: 20-year-old Saudi national, appearing regularly over 13 matches

# The need for Saudi youth | Some encouraging signs in player development, though greater focus on youth and locals required



## League level

### Limited U23 focus

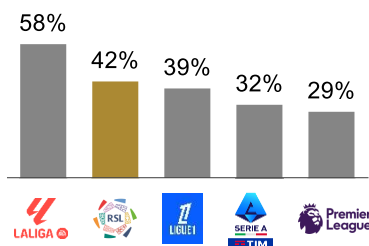
U23 accounted for just 12% of total minutes, well below the 18%–23% seen in Europe's top five leagues, though up from last year

Proportion of playing time given to U23 players

7% ↑ 12%  
(2023–24) (2024–25)

### Nationals playing time

Local players accounted for 42% of total minutes played in the RSL, comparable to top leagues



### Academies underutilized

The league averaged just two homegrown (own academy) players per club (vs. three in 2023–24), highlighting limited focus on developing and fielding talent from within

Number of first-team players produced by the club's own academy

3 ↓ 2  
(2023–24) (2024–25)



## Club level

### Some prioritized youth playing time

Al-Qadsiah and Al-Fateh led in youth involvement with ~21% of minutes for U23 players, the highest in the league (vs. 12% average)



### Few clubs focused on KSA players

Al-Wehda, Al-Khaleej, and Al-Raed topped local representation, with ~50% of minutes played by Saudi nationals



### Others invested in their academy

Al-Hilal and Al-Ahli prioritized academy players in their teams (seven and four players from their own academies)



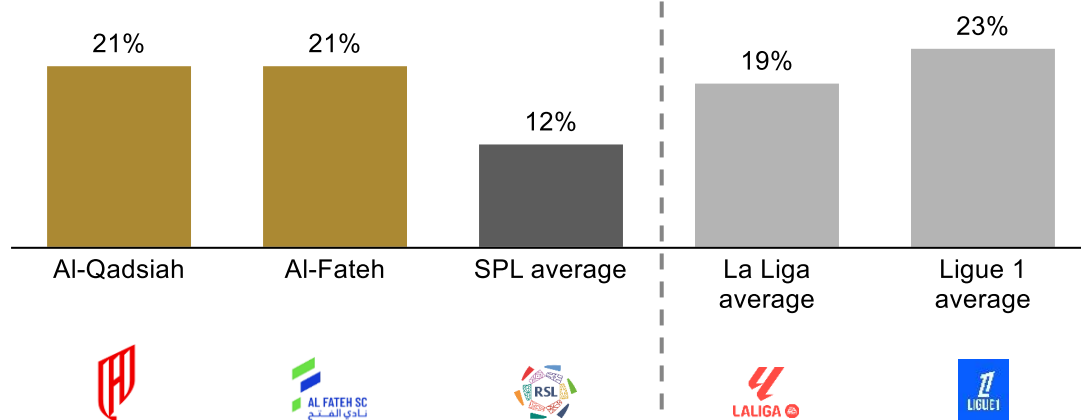
Al-Hilal and Al-Nassr ranked top two in youth/local player quality, despite limited minutes (10%–12%)



# Differing approaches | Clubs have deployed different strategies to develop players

## Qadsiah and Fateh focused on youth ...

Percentage of minutes played by youth (U23)

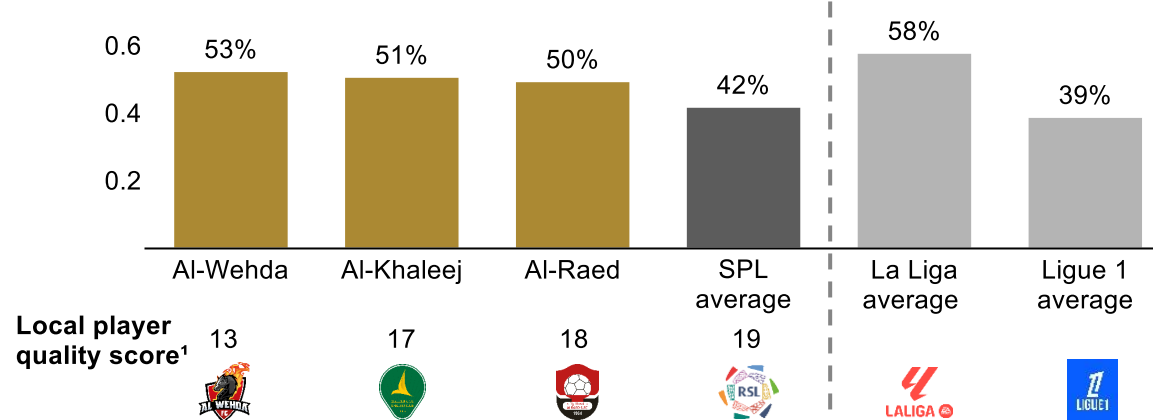


Al-Qadsiah and Al-Fateh made conscious efforts to integrate young talent, recording **21% of total league minutes played by youth** (in line with Tier 1 European leagues)

With league average at 12%, both clubs have a strong focus on **developing younger players through consistent game time**

## ... Wehda, Khaleej, and Raed prioritized Saudi nationals

Percentage of minutes played by local players



Local player quality score<sup>1</sup>

13

17

18

19

Al-Wehda, Al-Khaleej, and Al-Raed **led the league in prioritizing Saudi nationals**, with over half of total playing time fulfilled by local players, well above the 42% league average

However, with **local player quality scores lagging league average** (i.e., 13–18 vs. 19), these clubs ended up in the lower half of the league

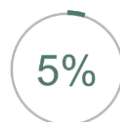
# Online vs. offline | Digital engagement was up, though stadium attendance lagged



## League level

### Online fanbase grew league-wide

The league experienced digital growth as fans increasingly engaged online



Growth in social media followers

6.3M

Average social media following per club

### Rise in stadium attendance

~8,200 average stadium attendance in 2023–24 increased to ~8,400 last season (though utilization declined driven by different stadium mix)



~2%

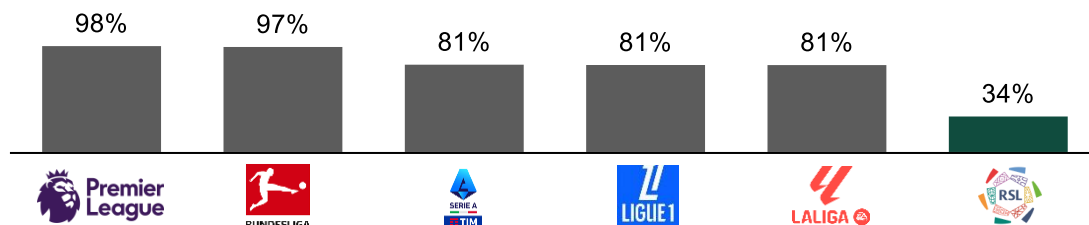
Increase in overall stadium attendance



~0.5%

Attendance drop for clubs present in 2023–24 and 2024–25

### Stadium utilization still low



## Club level

### Al-Nassr has the largest global following

Leading the charts of social media following, Google Trends scores, and second-best stadium utilization, Al-Nassr translated global reach into the league's highest fan engagement score



Social media following

~54M

~8x league avg

Google Trends score

44

~7x league avg

### Al-Ittihad had best in-stadium performance

Topping in-person engagement and stadium utilization charts, Al-Ittihad translated unrivalled home support into title-winning momentum



Stadium attendance

~35K

~4x league avg.

Stadium utilization

70%

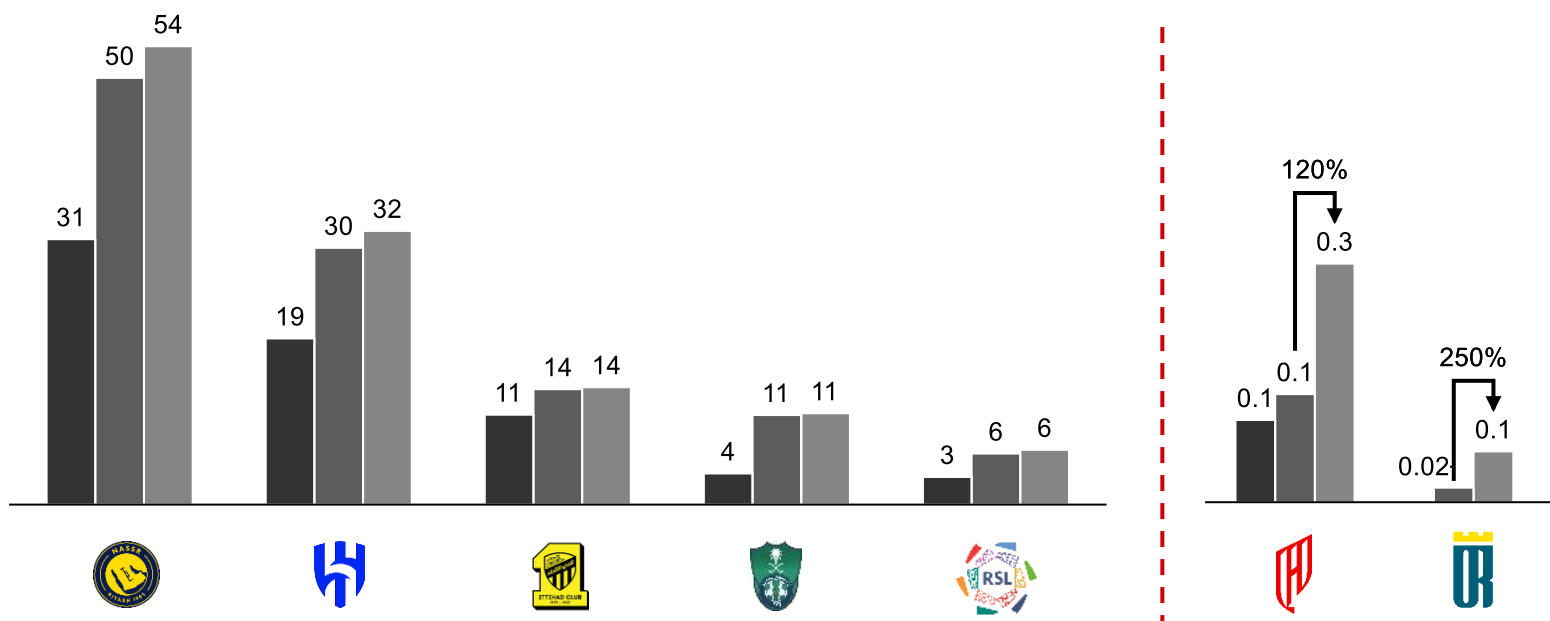
# Bumps in the road | While newcomers gained traction online, top clubs slowed

Top club online followership plateaued, while new clubs accelerated, though starting from a lower base

## Commentary

Number of online followers (millions)

■ 2022-23 season ■ 2023-24 season ■ 2024-25 season



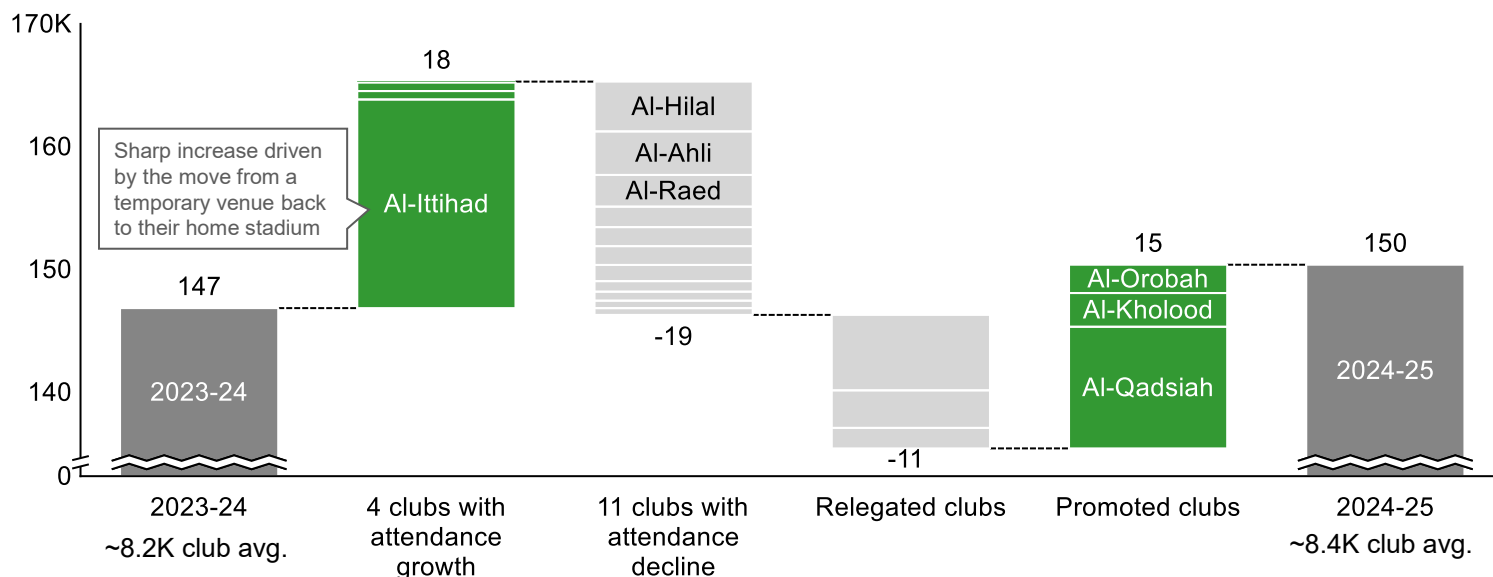
- **Top RSL clubs command large fan bases** (Al-Nassr leads with ~54 million followers vs. ~6 million league average), yet **engagement has plateaued**, indicating fading momentum among traditional top clubs
- Meanwhile, **challenger clubs like Al-Qadsiah (+120%) and Al-Orobah (+250%) surged**, showing that underdog narratives increasingly resonate with fans



# More crowds | Attendance gains were driven by few clubs; broader uplift is needed

## Overall attendance grew, driven mostly by Ittihad and league newcomers

Average match attendance evolution over last two seasons (sum of club match-averages, in thousands)

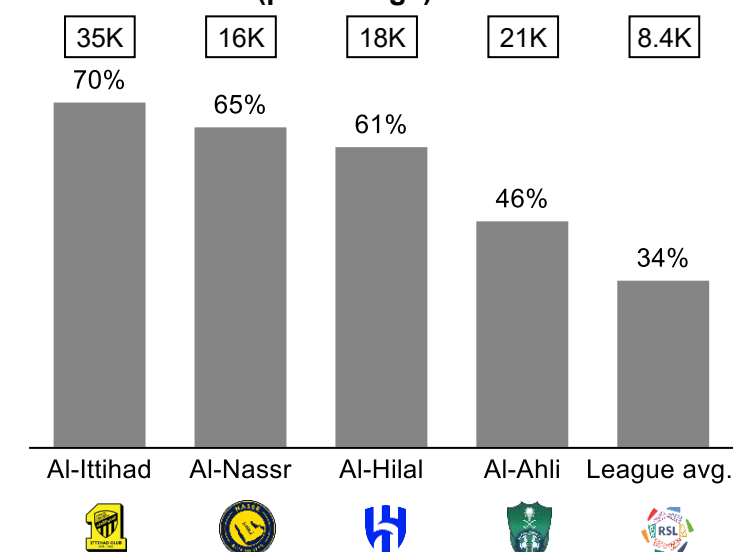


- **Overall, RSL spectators grew 2%, from ~147,000 (~8,200 club match average) to ~150,000 (~8,400 club match average), driven mainly by Ittihad and promoted clubs**
  - **4 clubs with attendance growth (+18K):** Mainly driven by Ittihad (+17K), due to the move back to their larger home stadium
  - **11 clubs with attendance decline (-19K):** Most clubs present in last two seasons reduced in average match attendance
  - **Promoted vs. relegated clubs (+4K):** Qadsiah, Orobah, and Kholood drew ~15K visitors combined vs. relegated clubs (~11K)

Sources: Transfermarkt; Lit. search

## Current stadium utilization signals improvement potential

Average stadium utilization, 2024–25 season (percentage)



- **RSL stadium utilization (34%) lags leading European leagues (81%–98%)**
- **Coupled with declining attendance at most clubs, this highlights the need to improve availability, accessibility, and enhance in-stadium fan experiences to reverse the trend**

The RSL has grown rapidly in recent years and is becoming more valuable ...

... yet opportunities remain to accelerate its trajectory



**Continue professionalization:**

Focus efforts on (smaller) RSL clubs to uplift managerial and technical capabilities through government programs, enabling them to professionalize faster and close the quality gap among clubs



**Increase league sustainability:**

Continue efforts to improve transfer and salary spend efficiency, control wage inflation, and create value by selling top players to global leagues



**Double-down on organic growth:**

Foster a culture that prioritizes young, local talent, supported by investments in academies, infrastructure, player acquisition strategy, and player development



**Boost fan bases and experience:**

Smoothen fan journeys to drive attendance and spend, while growing local and global fan bases to build commercial momentum and raise club/league value

# A large set of data points has been leveraged to develop our perspectives on the performance of the RSL clubs

## Sporting performance and quality

Evaluates a club's success on the field and the overall strength of its squad

### Sporting success

**League points**  
(League points achieved)



**Achieved vs. deserved points**  
(Difference between actual and deserved league points)



### Squad quality

**Starting squad quality**  
(Average starting XI quality score per TFG rating)



**Squad depth quality**  
(Average squad quality score per TFG rating)



## Squad value creation and spending

Measures a club's ability to create value through player trading or development

### Squad value creation

**Player value**  
(Average player market value)



**Squad value growth**  
(Squad market value growth; season start vs. end)



**Transfer efficiency**  
(Average paid player acquisition price vs. predicted price)



**Organic value creation**  
(Squad market value growth driven by internal factors; season start vs. end)



### Squad efficiency

**Squad efficiency**  
(Squad quality relative to player wages)



## Youth and national development

Assesses the club's commitment to develop youth and local talent

### Youth player development

**Academy players**  
(Number of own academy players in squad)



**Youth playing time**  
(Percentage of minutes played by U23 players)



**Youth quality score**  
(Average youth player quality score per TFG rating)



### Saudi nationals' development

**Saudi nationals playing time**  
(Percentage of minutes played by Saudi nationals)



**Saudi nationals' player quality**  
(Average Saudi nationals' player quality score per TFG rating)



## Fan engagement

Reflects a club's ability to grow a loyal fan base both digitally and in attendance

### Offline engagement

**Stadium attendance**  
(Percentage of seats utilized, number of attendees, and growth vs. previous season)



### Online engagement

**Google Trends score**  
(Global popularity score)



**Social media followers<sup>1</sup>**  
(Number of followers, and one-year growth)



**Instagram engagement**  
(Average number of interactions per follower per day, including likes, comments, and shares)



Note: 1) Primary social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, X, TikTok, YouTube)





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At the heart of our approach is the Intelligence Engine—a suite of advanced machine learning tools that ingests, models, and learns from vast quantities of data across multiple sources. Built and continually refined by our best-in-class data scientists and engineers, it powers insights that transform decision-making.

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