



AI Shorta's Greatest Moments - Number 20:

AI Shorta one goal away from AFC Champions League semis (2000)



AI Shorta qualified for the 1999-00 Asian Club Championship as Iraqi Premier League champions and they managed to get to the quarter-finals of the tournament. AI Shorta started in the second round. They faced Al Wahda of Lebanon in a round of two legs. AI Shorta crushed Al Wahda 5-0 in the first-leg with one goal from Haidar Mahmoud, an own-goal, two goals from Alaa Kadhim and one goal from Arkan Mahmoud. They managed to earn a 0-0 draw in the second leg to win the tie 5-0 on aggregate.

This meant AI Shorta had qualified to the quarter-finals, which was made up of an East Asian group and a West Asian group. AI Shorta were in the West Asian group with Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia, Persepolis of Iran and Irtysh Pavlodar of Kazakhstan.

AI Shorta drew 0-0 against Persepolis in their first game, and then lost 1-0 to Al Hilal with Abdullah Aljamman's 67th-minute goal, a calm left-footed finish across the 'keeper, winning the game for the Saudi outfit. This meant that in order for AI Shorta to qualify for the semi-finals, they needed to defeat Irtysh Pavlodar in their final group game and hope that Al Hilal beat Persepolis in the other match on that day.



AI Shorta didn't get off to a good start against Irtysh and went a goal behind on 27 minutes when Andrei Miroshichenko put the Kazakh side in front. AI Shorta managed to find an equaliser five minutes into the second-half though when Haidar Mahmoud played a clever one-two and fired a powerful shot into the top corner of the Irtysh net. And the Iraqi side took the lead on 64 minutes when Sabah Jayer received the ball close to the goal from a cut-back and slammed it into the net with his left foot at the 'keeper's near post.

AI Shorta thought that would be enough to win the game, but five minutes from the end, Nilton Mendes equalised for Irtysh Pavlodar from the penalty spot and AI Shorta had to score again in the last five minutes in order to stand any chance of reaching the semis. But AI Shorta did just that,

when Sabah Jayer won them the game in the 89th minute by sneaking his close-range effort underneath the onrushing 'keeper and into the net. AI Shorta won the game 3-2, but still needed Al Hilal to defeat Persepolis in order to reach the semis. Unfortunately, Al Hilal were only able to muster a goalless draw with their opponents, and AI Shorta were knocked out at the quarter-final stage, one point behind Persepolis who advanced to the semis.

Had Al Hilal scored just one goal in their game and won it 1-0, AI Shorta would have been in the AFC Champions League semi finals for the second time in their history, but nonetheless, getting so close to Asia's top four is still one of the proudest achievements in the illustrious history of AI Shorta.

To see Al Hilal's goal against AI Shorta in the second quarter final group game, [click here](#). To see AI Shorta's three goals against Irtysh Pavlodar in the last quarter final group game, [click here](#).