

## Iraqi Refugee Gets Pass to Become Soccer Star in Brazil

Contributed by Marina Sarruf  
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A Brazilian soccer team from Brazil's capital Brasília hired its first international football player last week. The team is Brazsat Football Club. The player is the Iraqi Ali Khaled Abu Taha, aged 18.

The youth, who spent the last four years in Ruweished refugee camp, in Jordan, is now practicing to play in the "C" Series Professional Football Champion in the Federal District, where the Brazilian capital is based, in June. "My dream is to play in a large Brazilian team," says Taha.

The new member of the team arrived in Brazil at the end of last year together with 116 Palestinian refugees that the government of Brazil decided to receive. Since November, Taha had been living with his parents in the city of Mogi das Cruzes, in Greater São Paulo, where he played with his friend in an amateur team.

"I am the first Arab player in Brazil and am very happy," he said. Taha does not yet speak fluent Portuguese, but he already understands the language and can already produce many phrases.

The contract with Taha is for two years. According to the club president in Brasília, João Gilberto Vaz, it was an Al Jazeera TV correspondent in Brazil who informed him about the young Palestinian talents.

"I therefore decided to bet and bring Ali to my team," said Vaz. According to him, Taha's arrival is going to open a new phase for business between Brazil and the Arab countries. "Many Brazilians leave to play in Arab teams. Now, we are going to show that it is possible to do the opposite too," he said.

Vaz believes that Taha may grow in football and go to other larger teams. "Now our priority is to train him and show that it is possible to adapt an Arab player to a Brazilian team," he said. The president at the club also stated that Taha would be an example to show Arabs and Brazilians that it is also possible to work together in football.

For the time being, Taha is training daily from 3:30 pm to 6:00 pm, with Sundays off. According to the team supervisor, Ricardo Beserra, the youth is now working on stronger physical rehabilitation over the first few days and is being worked on in his abilities.

"I need to practice very much and need help. I want to become famous," said Taha. Practice sessions are at the Foreign Ministry Employee Association's Club (ASMRE), where the teams training center is located.

The Brazsat Football Club team was established last year and is betting on the 2008 edition of the "C" Series of the Professional Football Championship, which begins on June 15. The club, which is named after Brazsat Commercial Space Services, in the area of technology, the company belonging to it's founder, is seeking partnerships with the Middle East and Europe.

The club also plans to offer its youths schooling and English language teaching in the case of those presenting potential to play abroad. Another novelty at the club is bringing foreigners to play. Among the several projects is the establishment of an International Juvenile Football Tournament.

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