



THE EVOLUTION OF THE J.LEAGUE

SUMMARY

Since its inaugural season on May 15, 1993 now celebrated annually as “J.League Day” the J.League has played a central role in the development of football in Japan for over three decades. From its early beginnings, the league has grown significantly in scale, popularity, and competitive quality. Today, it continues to evolve, with ongoing reforms aimed at further elevating Japanese football on the global stage.



GROWTH

1993: 10 clubs
2026: 60 clubs

NUMBER
OF CLUBS

J.LEAGUE
CLUBS'
HOME
PREFECTURES

1993: 8 prefectures
2026: 41 prefectures

1993 season: 3,235,750
2025 season: 13,503,210

STADIUM
TOTAL
ANNUAL
ATTENDANCE

Currently recording consecutive increases
in attendance for two years in a row.

J.LEAGUE
ORDINARY
INCOME
TRENDS (GBP)

1993: £41.2 million
2025: £160.3 million

The 2025 season reached a record high.

COMPETITIVENESS

TOP 3 CLUBS BY J1 LEAGUE TITLES

(from 1993 to 2025 season)

- 1ST** Kashima Antlers: 9 titles
- 2ND** Yokohama F. Marinos: 5 titles
- 3RD** Kawasaki Frontale: 4 titles

A total of 11 teams have won the J1 League over the past 33 years, highlighting the league's competitive balance.



NUMBER OF FOREIGN PLAYERS IN J.LEAGUE

**2025: 177 players
from 30 countries**

COMPETITIVENESS OF THE J.LEAGUE COMPARED TO OTHER LEAGUES:

20th in the world

FAN BASE

DOMESTIC FAN DEMOGRAPHICS (GENDER)

MALE: 65.7% / FEMALE: 34.2%

A key strength of the league is its growing female fan base.



DOMESTIC FAN DEMOGRAPHICS (AGE)

Under 15 years old: 3%	40-49 years old: 26%
16-22 years old: 8%	50-59 years old: 20%
23-29 years old: 13%	Over 60 years old: 11%
30-39 years old: 19%	

A decline in interest among younger audiences and difficulty attracting casual fans are key challenges.

INTERNATIONAL FAN ENGAGEMENT (2025 SEASON)

- Total followers: 3.08 million
- Annual reach: 400.8 million
- Website page views: 3.6 million

The J.League operates official English-language accounts on [X](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#) to expand its marketing presence internationally. Combined, these accounts have over 1.69 million followers, with the league enjoying particularly strong recognition and popularity in Southeast Asia.



FUTURE OUTLOOK

The J.League is undergoing structural reforms to enhance its global competitiveness and long-term sustainability. The following are three notable initiatives the J.League has begun to implement.



1. CALENDER REFORM (AUTUMN-SPRING TRANSITION)

- The J.League will transition to an August-May calendar from the 2026-27 season, introducing a cross-year format, a winter break (mid-December to mid-February), and a transitional competition in early 2026.
- The reform includes key structural changes such as shifting the season start from February to August and aligning the league format more closely with major European competitions.
- The primary objectives are to mitigate extreme summer heat, align with international competitions like the AFC Champions League, and synchronize with the European transfer market to enhance global competitiveness.



2. INTRODUCTION OF U-21 LEAGUE

- The J.League will launch a U-21 league in the 2026/27 season to create more playing opportunities for young players and strengthen the development pathway.
- The competition will feature 11 clubs, with a regional format, home-and-away fixtures, and a playoff system.
- It aims to bridge the gap between academy and first-team football, supported by regulations such as squad limits, foreign player rules, and the use of over-age players.



3. PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS POSITIVE LEAGUES (SPL)

'Sport Positive Leagues (SPL)' is an initiative that ranks professional football clubs and other sports organizations based on environmental sustainability and climate action efforts, assessing 12+ categories including energy use, waste management, transport, water conservation, food options, and biodiversity.

- The J.League became the first league in Asia to join the Sport Positive Leagues (SPL) initiative from April 2025, with all 60 clubs participating.
- The decision aligns with the league's sustainability strategy, including its goal to reduce CO₂ emissions by 50% by 2030, while enabling measurable and transparent tracking of environmental progress.
- Participation is expected to enhance environmental performance, strengthen stakeholder engagement (including ESG investors and younger fans), and improve global competitiveness by aligning with leading European leagues.