S-League 2016: What to look out for

With a host of high-profile signings, as well as the return of LionsXII players, this could be one of the most competitive S-League seasons in recent years. The Straits Times looks at the nine competing teams and their prospects.



BRUNEI DPMM

Key signings: None

Key player: Rafael Ramazotti (striker, right)



Last season: Champions Last season's top scorer Ramazotti (21 goals) and Portuguese forward Paulo Sergio (13 goals) are back as DPMM bid to become the first foreign side to retain the S-League title. However, their challenge has been made more difficult following the release of key imports Boris Raspudic and Joe Gamble, owing to a new rule that allows only three foreigners to play.

BALESTIER KHALSA

Key signings: Syafiq Zainal (winger), Jamil Ali (winger)

Key player: Miroslav Kristic



(striker, right) Last season: Fourth Emerged as surprise contenders last season with 16-goal Kristic. While he remains, the loss of stalwarts Igor Cerina, Poh Yifeng and Ignatius Ang means the Tigers will be hard-pressed to repeat last year's title challenge.

ALBIREX NIIGATA

Key signings: Kazuki Mine (striker), Tatsuro Inui (midfielder)

• Key player: Atsushi Kawata (striker, right)

Last season: Third The loss of last season's Player of the Year Fumiya Kogure will hurt the White Swans' bid for an elusive first S-League title, after winning a Singapore Cup and League Cup double last season.

WARRIORS FC

Key signings: Jonathan Behe (striker), Ismail Yunos, Madhu Mohana, Shaiful Esah (defender)



- Key player: Behe (above)
- Last season: Fifth



The 2014 champions are looking like strong contenders again after last season's disappointment. Frenchman Behe will lead the front line while internationals Madhu and Shaiful will quard the back.

HOME UNITED

Key signings: Irfan Fandi (striker), Faris Ramli (winger), Zulfahmi Arifin (midfielder), Khairul Nizam (striker)



Key player: Ken Ilso (striker, right)

Last season: Sixth

The Protectors will be hoping that Singapore Under-23 player Irfan, national team winger Faris, and former Fortuna Dusseldorf striker llso can fire them into the top half of the table.

GEYLANG **INTERNATIONAL**

Key signings: Sahil Suhaimi (striker), Gabriel Quak (winger), Daniel Bennett (defender), Faritz Hameed (defender)



Key player: Bennett (above)

Last season: Eighth

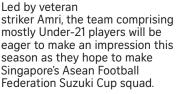
With five former LionsXII players, rookie coach Hasrin Jailani has it all to do to improve on last season's disappointing league position. Youth seems to be a key element, with several former Young Lions as well as former Youth Olympic Games players in the squad.

GARENA YOUNG LIONS

Key signing and player: Khairul Amri (striker, right)



Last season: Ninth



HOUGANG UNITED

Key signings: Fumiya Kogure (midfielder), . Jozef Kaplan (striker), M. Anumanthan (midfielder)



- Key player: Kaplan (above)
- Last season: 10th

The Cheetahs signalled their intent to improve on last season's bottom-placed finish with top signings Kaplan and Kogure, as well as a host of promising young players.