



HD Soccer-**Chinese company** Ledman buys Australia's Newcastle Jets

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LP SYDNEY, June 14 (Reuters) - **China's** Ledman Group has purchased Australian A-League club Newcastle Jets, Football Federation Australia (FFA) said on Tuesday.

The Shenzhen-based optoelectronics **company**, which is already a sponsor of the **Chinese** Super League and owns the naming rights to the Portuguese second division, Ledman LigaPro, will take ownership of the club at the end of the month.

TD Media reports in Australia said the **purchase** of the club cost Ledman and its major shareholder, Martin Lee, around A\$5 **million** (\$3.70 **million**).

"We see a bright future for football across Asia and the Hyundai A-League is at the forefront as one of the top professional leagues in the region," Lee said in an FFA news release.

"The investment aligns with Ledman's activities in several sectors of the sports industry and I'm excited by the potential of the club."

Ledman were also part of a consortium of **Chinese** interests which purchased sports marketing giant Infront Sports and Media group last year, investing 25 **million** euros (\$28.24 **million**) in the Swiss-based **company**.

The investment in the A-League is part of a **Chinese** strategy driven by President Xi Jinping to develop a multi-**billion** dollar domestic sports industry.

**Chinese** electronics retailer Suning announced earlier this month that it was buying nearly 70 percent of Italian club Inter Milan for 270 **million** euros.

Complaints from the Portuguese players' union earlier this year forced Ledman to backtrack on a clause in the deal for their sponsorship of Ledman LigaPro that required 10 **Chinese** players be included in the starting line-ups of top teams.

FFA Chairman Stephen Lowy welcomed Ledman's investment as a sign of Australian soccer's increasing integration with the game in Asia.

"In the decade since joining the Asian Football Confederation, Australia has diligently developed important connections across the spectrum, including the sporting, political, cultural, administrative and development spheres," he said.

"The investment by Ledman shows those links have delivered a dynamic relationship built on trust and mutually beneficial activities. Ledman's move is a signpost towards our future in the fastest growing football region in the world."

Newcastle Jets were taken over by the FFA last year after **mining** magnate Nathan Tinkler had his licence revoked when he put the club into voluntary administration.

The club, which is based in one of the world's largest **coal** ports just north of Sydney, finished eighth in the 10-team league last season with eight wins in 27 matches. (\$1 = 1.3526 Australian dollars) (\$1 = 0.8853 euros) (Reporting by Nick Mulvenney, editing by Peter Rutherford)

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