

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Park Gyu-nam's ascension, Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma pro football club president

Knut Holdhus
May 30, 2026



The Seonghwa ceremony for Park Gyu-nam in Seoul 28th May 28, 2026. Calligraphic inscriptions received from Rev. [Sun Myung Moon](#) and Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#) are displayed before an image of the deceased



The faith and ideals of Park Gyu-nam, the architect of an impressive achievement on the pitch: 7 domestic championships and 5 international titles

In a [report](#) published on 29th May 2026 in the South Korean daily [Segye Ilbo](#), religion correspondent Jeong Seong-su (정성수) covers the funeral rites held for Park Gyu-nam (박규남), the longtime president of the Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma (성남일화 천마) professional football club and a senior member of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#). The [article](#) presents Park not only as a successful sports administrator but also as a religious leader whose career reflected the [movement's](#) broader vision of promoting social harmony and international peace through public engagement, particularly in the realm of sport.

The [report](#) centers on the Seonghwa ceremony (성화식 - 聖和式) held on 28th May at Seoul Asan Medical Center following Park's death on 25th May at the age of 89. Within the theological framework of the [Family Federation](#), a Seonghwa ceremony is understood not merely as a funeral but as a sacred transition from earthly life to spiritual life. The [movement](#) regards death as a return to [God's](#) embrace and the beginning of a new existence

in the spiritual world. Consequently, the ceremony combined mourning with expressions of gratitude, remembrance, and hope.

Family members, leaders of the [religious organization](#), colleagues from the football community, and other guests gathered to pay tribute to a man whose life spanned decades of religious service and sports management. According to the report, participants reflected on Park's contributions both to Korean professional football and to the [religious community](#) in which he had long played a prominent role.

A central feature of the ceremony was the memorial address delivered by Song Yong-cheon (송용천), president of the [Family Federation](#) in Korea. Song portrayed Park's life as one marked by sustained dedication to public service and faith. He recalled that Park first served as an evangelist and pastor during

the early years of the [movement](#) before later assuming responsibility for the management of Seongnam Ilhwa. In Song's account, Park's twenty-five years with the football club represented an important chapter in what the [movement](#) describes as "sports ministry" - the use of athletic activities as a means of fostering positive values and contributing to society.



Park Gyu-nam

Song also highlighted Park's later years of religious devotion, including extensive participation in prayer vigils and spiritual disciplines. He presented the gathering not merely as a farewell but as an opportunity for attendees to renew their own commitment to faith and to continue the work that Park had devoted his life to advancing.

Religious affairs correspondent Jeong's [report](#) reviews Park's role in Korean football, emphasizing the difficulties he faced as well as the achievements he helped make possible. During his tenure, Seongnam Ilhwa experienced several relocations, playing their home matches in Seoul 1992-1995, then in Cheonan 1996-1999, and lastly in Seongnam from 2000. The club operated under circumstances that were not always favorable. Despite these challenges, Park remained closely involved in the club's daily affairs, overseeing operations and maintaining a visible presence around the team.

Under his leadership, Seongnam Ilhwa became one of the most successful clubs in Korean football history, winning seven domestic championships - in 1993, 1994, 1995, 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2006 - and establishing a reputation as one of Asia's leading football organizations. The club won five international titles: 1995 Asian Club Championship, 1996 Asian Super Cup, 1996 Afro-Asian Club Championship, 2004 A3 Champions Cup, and 2010 AFC Champions League.

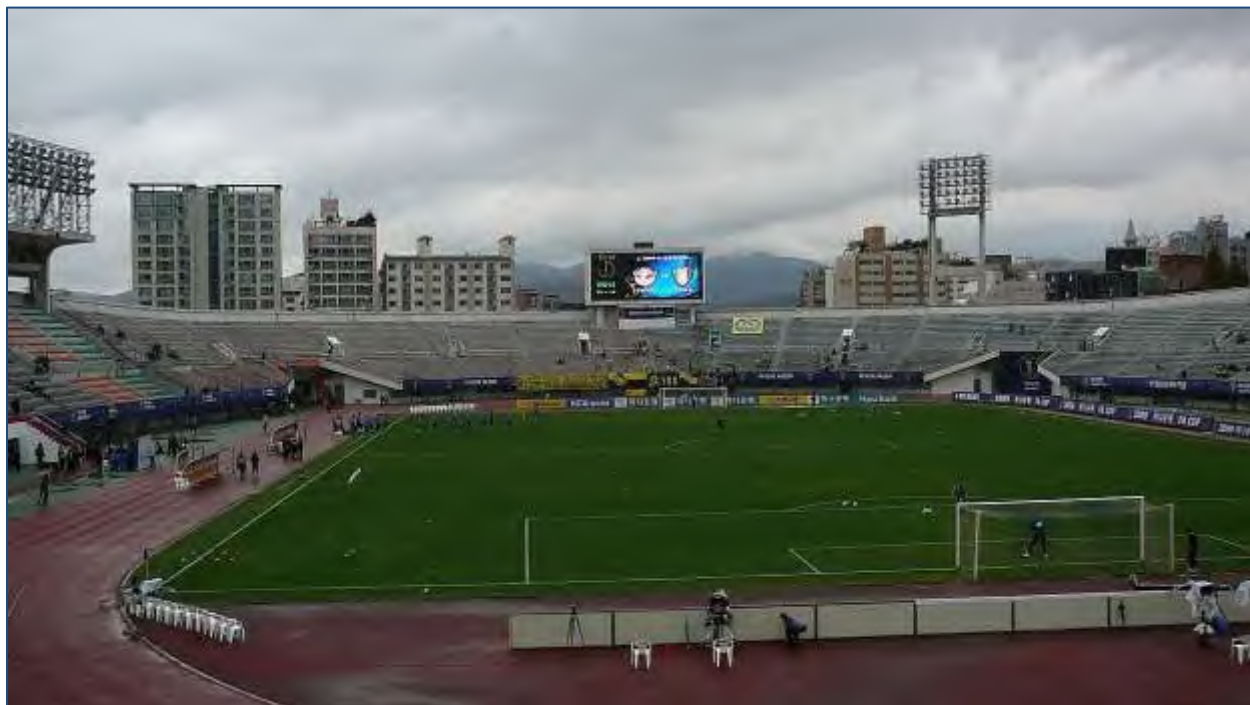


Seongnam Ilhwa Cheonma celebrating the victory in the Asian Champions League 13th November 2010 after defeating the Iranian team Zob Ahan 3-1 in the final in Tokyo, Japan

Beyond club management, Park also played a role in shaping the institutional development of professional football in South Korea. As a vice president of the Korea Professional Football League, he participated in efforts to strengthen and stabilize the country's professional football system during a period of growth and increasing international recognition.

[Jeong's report](#) places particular emphasis on the connection between Park's football career and the vision of the [Family Federation's](#) founders, [Sun Myung Moon](#) and [Hak Ja Han](#). According to the [article](#), Park's involvement in football began because he was encouraged and entrusted by the founders to take on responsibility for the club. Within the [movement's](#) interpretation of his life, his achievements in sport were therefore not viewed as separate from his religious calling but as an extension of it.

The [article](#) further explains the theological and philosophical ideas that motivated the [movement's](#) investment in football and international sporting events. The [Family Federation](#) has long promoted the view that sport can serve as a means of building friendship, overcoming barriers between peoples, and encouraging peaceful coexistence. The [report](#) notes that this philosophy inspired the creation of the Peace Cup, an international football tournament that brought together prominent clubs from Europe and elsewhere. Teams such as Real Madrid, Juventus, PSV Eindhoven, Tottenham Hotspur, and Olympique Lyonnais participated in the competition, while Seongnam Ilhwa represented South Korea on the international stage.



Seongnam Stadium 8th November 2009, when it was the venue for the Korea FA Cup Final

By highlighting these events, the [report](#) portrays football as more than a competitive activity. Instead, it is presented as a vehicle for cultural exchange and a practical expression of ideals concerning peace and human unity. Within this framework, Park is depicted as someone who worked to transform those ideals into tangible projects and institutions.



Song Yong-cheon, President of the [Family Federation](#) in South Korea, delivers the Seonghwa address 28th May 2026 in Seoul

In November 2013, the club was sold to the city of Seongnam, then with current South Korean president Lee Jae-myung (이재명) as mayor. The name was changed to Seongnam Football Club (Seongnam FC). Since 2022, it plays in K league 2, the second-highest level in the country. Seongnam has about one million inhabitants and is the country's 10th largest city. It is located fairly close to Seoul and is part of the Seoul metropolitan subway system.

The [article](#) concludes with remarks from a [Family Federation](#) representative who described Park as a figure committed to promoting reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula and peace throughout the world through sport. The representative expressed confidence that the values Park championed would continue to influence future generations.

Overall, [Jeong Seong-su's report](#) presents Park Gyu-nam as a multifaceted figure whose life linked religion, public service, and professional football. While acknowledging his achievements as a football executive, the [article](#) places equal emphasis on his identity as a man of faith and on the broader vision that guided his work. In doing so, it portrays his death not only as the passing of a respected sports manager but also as the conclusion of a life dedicated to advancing a particular understanding of service, community, and peace through athletic endeavor.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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reported that a Seoul court had extended by one month the suspension of detention granted to **Hak Ja Han** (한학자) – also called **Mother Han** – the co-founder and current leader of the **Family Federation for World Peace and Unification** – in Korea often referred to simply as **Unificationism** (통일교).



Logo of News1

Mother Han, one of the most influential religious figures in modern South Korean history, is currently standing trial on charges pressed by special prosecutors appointed by the current left-leaning Lee Jae-myung (이재명) administration. They are investigating whether organizations connected to the **Family Federation** supported leading politicians or sought influence in legally prohibited ways.



The building housing Seoul Central District Court. Image: Grok xAI, Nov. 2025.

According to the **News 1 report**, the decision was made by the **27th Criminal Division** of the **Seoul Central District Court**. **Mother Han's** temporary release from detention had originally been scheduled to end on 30th May, but the court extended it until 30th June 2026 at 2 p.m. According to the court's conditions, she may stay only at the hospital where she is receiving treatment and is forbidden from contacting witnesses or other people connected to the case, either directly or indirectly.

For readers unfamiliar with the South Korean legal system, a “suspension of detention” does not mean that charges are dropped or that a defendant is acquitted. Instead, it is a temporary release granted for humanitarian or medical reasons while the trial continues. South Korean courts may approve such requests in cases involving serious illness, medical treatment, childbirth, or urgent family matters. The decision takes effect immediately once approved by the court.

Mother Han (83) has repeatedly sought this form of release since being **taken into custody** in September 2025. Earlier requests were conditionally approved for **three days in November 2025** and **ten days in February 2026**. News reports stated that she had been receiving treatment for injuries sustained in a fall, as well as eye-related medical care. On 27th March 2026, the court **approved another suspension request** connected to shoulder treatment. Since then, her temporary release from detention has been **prolonged** twice and will now altogether last roughly three months. Observers see this as a sign of a significant worsening of **Mother Han's** medical condition.

After **Sun Myung Moon's** (문선명) death in 2012, **Mother Han** assumed the central leadership role within the **movement**.

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[News1](#) article by reporter Yu Su-yeon (유수연) points out that the special prosecutors allege that [Hak Ja Han](#) conspired with senior officials of the [Family Federation](#), including [Jeong Won-ju](#) (정원주), a vice director at Cheonmuwon – an administrative body within the [Federation](#) – and [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호), the former head of the world headquarters. According to the indictment, the group unlawfully delivered 100 million won (roughly US\$70,000 at current exchange rates) in cash to conservative lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동) of the *People Power Party* in January 2022 as political funding.

The prosecution also claims that between March and April 2022, [Family Federation](#)-related funds totaling 144 million won were divided into smaller donations and distributed to several lawmakers affiliated with the *People Power Party*. This practice, often described in Korea as “split donations”, is controversial because it can allegedly be used to conceal the true origin of political contributions or evade campaign finance restrictions.

Another major allegation involves luxury gifts reportedly given to Kim Keon-hee (김건희), the wife of former President Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열) and former First Lady of South Korea. Prosecutors claim that in July 2022 [Hak Ja Han](#) and [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호) arranged the delivery of expensive items worth around 80 million won, including a diamond necklace from the British luxury jewelry company Graff. Investigators further allege that funds from the [religious organization](#) were embezzled in the process of obtaining money and valuables used for unlawful political activities and gifts.

[Mother Han](#) and the other defendants are now continuing to face trial while the court monitors compliance with the conditions attached to her temporary medical release.

The [religious movement](#) has traditionally maintained that its engagement in public life is educational and moral in nature rather than political. However, the current progressive administration of Lee Jae-myung has appointed special prosecutors to examine allegations that senior members of the [Family Federation](#) sought to influence South Korea’s 2022 presidential election, raising questions about possible violations of political finance and lobbying regulations.

Text: *Knut Holdhus, editor*

Featured image above: *Mother Han 9th January 2022. Screenshot from live transmission by [PeacelinkTV](#)*

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