

The making of champions

Coach John Conlon's Bahrain Boxing Mission

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

John Conlon has swapped the streets of Belfast for the gyms of Bahrain, driven by a single mission: to make the Kingdom a boxing force to be reckoned with. Speaking exclusively to The Daily Tribune, the Irishman, appointed head coach in December 2025, brings decades of experience training Olympic champions. He is now focused on shaping Bahrain's young fighters and instilling in them what he calls "warrior DNA."

Coach's Roots

Conlon grew up in West Belfast, a neighborhood renowned for producing Olympians. "I worked as a club coach for a long, long time. We have a great history of producing Olympians, my sons included," he said. His sons, Jamie and Michael Conlan, are accomplished boxers. Jamie held the Commonwealth super-flyweight title, while Michael won Olympic bronze, World Championship gold, and also challenged for the featherweight world title. From grassroots coaching to leading Ireland's high-performance programs, he also trained stars like Katie Taylor and Kellie Harrington. "Ireland has a strong boxing culture. It was a pleasure to be involved."

After a two-year break, Bahrain's Boxing President, His Excellency Rashid Felyefel, approached him. "I just connected straight away. I felt, you know what, this fits perfectly." Conlon spent his first days meeting athletes and visiting gyms, impressed by their commitment and warmth. He replaced Englishman Tony Davis as coach, bringing fresh energy and a clear vision to



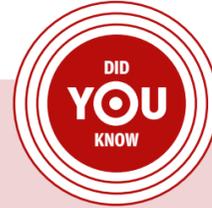
John Conlon, Bahrain's new head coach and performance director, at The Daily Tribune's headquarters

the federation.

Warrior DNA

At the heart of the coach's philosophy is courage. "I'm very similar to Irish people. You cut me, I have this warrior

DNA. I can't teach that. It's something you're born with," he said. He sees the same drive in Bahraini athletes, even those with limited natural talent. His role is to refine technique, conditioning, and strategy. "You want to throw



Coach Conlan's sons, Jamie and Michael, are former professional boxers

Jamie held the Commonwealth super-flyweight title, while Michael won Olympic bronze and challenged for the featherweight world title

one punch and take ten? No, not in my game." Exposure to diverse styles — American, Russian, European, Asian, and African — ensures Bahrain's boxers will surprise their opponents on the global stage.

Youth Development

Developing young talent is central to Conlon's approach. "The juniors are like sponges. They're diamonds that need to be polished," he said. He highlighted 15-year-old Mohammed Atiya, who impressed during a recent sparring trip to Saudi Arabia. Initially underestimated because of his age, Atiya quickly dominated. "Within two seconds, his opponent realized the game had changed. This kid fights for pride, not pay. That drive, focus, and heart is exactly what we look for."

Other Bahraini boxers like Sami AlAdsani, Ali AlAradi, and Rasheed Mehfrifar are learning to rotate strat-

egies, inspired by fighters such as Vasyl Lomachenko. Conlon emphasizes discipline, mental resilience, recovery, and attention to detail, all of which are crucial traits for producing well-rounded athletes.

10-Year Vision

Conlon's long-term plan connects local clubs to elite competition. Athletes will receive full support — medical, psychological, technical, and social — while remaining connected to grassroots coaches. "The club coaches do a huge amount of work. My role is to polish that work, not replace it," he said. The ultimate goal: medals at the Asian Games, World Championships, and Olympics, alongside national pride.

While touring local gyms, Conlon praised their role in shaping character. "They're teaching courage and self-respect. Boxing creates strong, disciplined, respectful young men and women. They're not thugs. Nobody messes with them because they know they can get clipped, but they behave in a way people admire."

Building Champions

Recent sparring camps, particularly Atiya's performance, hint at a bright future for Bahrain's youth fighters. Conlon's mission is ambitious but clear: instill discipline, and provide a structured pathway for the country to become a global boxing force. "Everything in life passes. When times are better, we will host more camps, bring in more countries, and develop athletes and coaches alike," he said.

With Conlon at the helm, Bahrain's boxing future is no longer a dream — it's a rising force, shaping champions round by round.

Tottenham appoint De Zerbi in battle for Premier League survival

Italian replaces Igor Tudor with Spurs one point above relegation zone

- Third manager of the season
- Seven Premier League games remaining
- De Zerbi signs reported five-year deal

AFP | London

Tottenham appointed Roberto De Zerbi as the club's third manager of the season yesterday as they battle to avoid relegation from English football's top-flight for the first time in nearly 50 years.

Former Brighton and Marseille boss De Zerbi has reportedly been handed a lucrative five-year deal to convince him to take the job immediately rather than waiting to see which division Spurs are in next season.



Marseille's Italian head coach Roberto De Zerbi gives instructions to his players (file photo)

Tottenham sit just one point outside the relegation zone with seven games of the Premier League season remaining.

De Zerbi replaces Igor Tudor, whose interim reign lasted just

seven games after Spurs crashed out of the Champions League and fell ever closer to the Premier League drop zone.

"I am delighted to be joining this fantastic football club,

which is one of the biggest and most prestigious in the world," said De Zerbi in a club statement.

"I am here because I believe in that ambition and have signed a long-term contract to give everything to deliver it.

"Our short-term priority is to climb the Premier League table, which will be the complete focus until the final whistle of the last game of the season."

De Zerbi established a positive reputation for himself in England during a two-year spell as Brighton boss between 2022 and 2024.

His time at Marseille started positively, finishing second to Paris Saint-Germain in Ligue 1 last season to qualify for the Champions League.

But he left the French club in February after failing to make it out of the Champions League group phase and a humiliating 5-0 defeat by PSG.

Tottenham have not tasted life outside the top flight of English football since the 1977/78 season.

Despite boasting a new 63,000-capacity stadium, state-of-the-art training ground and revenues that make them among the top 10 richest clubs in world football, they are at severe risk of a humiliating relegation to the Championship.

Just a few years ago they were Champions League regulars under former manager Mauricio Pochettino, reaching the final in 2019.

Last season they ended a 17-year trophy drought by winning the Europa League.

But the warning signs of a battle for survival were there as Ange Postecoglou was dismissed despite victory over Manchester United in the Europa League final after finishing 17th in the Premier League.

Thomas Frank was appointed



De Zerbi left Marseille in February after a 5-0 humiliation by PSG and failing to progress from the Champions League group stage, but now takes on an even greater challenge at Tottenham

as the Australian's successor, but the Dane was sacked in February after a run of two wins in 17 league games and replaced by Tudor.

De Zerbi's first match in charge will be away to Sunderland on April 12.

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