

Subotic hails Bahrain's defensive progress

Coach pleased with cagers' professionalism after perfect Dubai campaign

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Bahrain head coach Slobodan Subotic praised his players for embracing his defensive philosophy after the kingdom's senior men's team completed a perfect first round of pre-qualifying for the FIBA Asia Cup 2029.

The Bahrainis rounded off their Group A campaign with a 95-67 victory over Kuwait yesterday at Sheikh Saeed bin Maktoum Sports Hall in Dubai.

It was their fourth win from four games, following victories over Oman, the UAE and Nepal.

Subotic was appointed by the Bahrain Basketball Association in July, succeeding Georgios Vovoros. The veteran Greek-Slovenian tactician believes his players are already showing signs of adapting to what he has demanded from them.

"You know, I have been here for a month and a half with the team and we have had 23 or 24 practices together," Subotic said after the game.

"I think my team showed something that I have been ask-



Slobodan Subotic talks tactics with Ahmed Alderazi in the previous match

ing from them since day one, defence.

"Today, we played a very good team. Historically, Kuwait is a very good team, and they scored

only 67 points.

"My players took this game very seriously, like all the games they have played since I joined the team, and this makes me

happy because it shows they are professionals who like to meet targets and are on the same page with me.

"I hope we will continue like

this."

Bahrain took control after a competitive start and led 19-11 at the end of the first quarter. They stretched their advantage to 45-30 by half-time and remained firmly in command after the break.

Bahrain carried a 69-48 lead into the final period before sealing the 28-point triumph.

Ahmed Salman led the scoring with 21 points, including five three-pointers, while Mustafa Hussain and JaKarr Sampson added 20 apiece. Sampson also grabbed 16 rebounds, while Hussain contributed six assists.

The result capped an impressive campaign that began with a 106-62 rout of Oman. Bahrain then edged hosts UAE 83-80 before beating Nepal 105-71.

Hussain stressed that the unbeaten run was only the beginning of what the squad hope to achieve.

"Alhamdulillah, with our mindset, we actually don't think too much about what we have achieved so far," he said.

"This is only the first step. InshAllah, we are going to be in the Asia Cup."

Bahrain will next compete in Group E of the second pre-qualifying round alongside the UAE, Kuwait, Palestine, Kazakhstan and Sri Lanka.

The stage will be played during the international window from November 23 to December 1, with the top four teams advancing to the Fiba Asia Cup 2029 qualifiers.

The UAE and Kuwait will be familiar opponents after progressing from the same opening-round group, while Bahrain will face Palestine, Kazakhstan and Sri Lanka for the first time in this campaign.

Group F comprises Hong Kong China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Mongolia and Fiji, with its top four also moving on.

Before resuming their continental qualification campaign, Bahrain will turn their attention to the 20th Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, where the basketball events will run from September 10 to 26.

The nationals have been drawn in Group C of the men's 5x5 tournament alongside defending champions the Philippines, China and Kazakhstan.

Barcelona confirm Jesus arrival from Arsenal

AFP | Barcelona

Barcelona signed Brazilian forward Gabriel Jesus from Arsenal yesterday on a deal until 2029, after they were unable to pry Julian Alvarez from Atletico Madrid.

"Barcelona and Arsenal have reached a deal for the Brazilian striker Gabriel Jesus," said the Catalan club in a statement, with Spanish media reporting that they paid the Gunners around 10 million euros (\$11.5m).

Jesus arrives to bolster an attack weakened by the departures of Robert Lewandowski and Ferran Torres earlier this



Brazilian forward Gabriel Jesus poses with his jersey during his official presentation at Barcelona

summer.

Spanish champions Barca pursued Alvarez through the summer but Atletico refused to negotiate with the Catalan giants.

Messi legacy will 'live forever', says Beckham

AFP | London

David Beckham said Lionel Messi's "legacy will live forever" after the Argentina legend announced his retirement from international football.

Messi on Monday revealed he had called time on his remarka-

ble career with Argentina after 207 caps and 125 goals.

The 39-year-old won the 2022 World Cup in Qatar and his last game for his country was Argentina's World Cup final defeat against Spain in July.

Messi's brilliance for Argen-

tina and Barcelona made him one of the world's greatest ever players. Former England captain Beckham has had a close-up view of Messi's career as an opponent and now as co-owner of the forward's current side Inter Miami.



Lionel Messi (L) and David Beckham

Alcaraz makes winning return at US Open, Sabalenka safely through

AFP | New York

Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz didn't miss a beat as he returned from a four-month injury absence with a straight-sets first-round victory in the US Open on Monday.

Out of action with a wrist injury since April, Alcaraz passed his first test with flying colors, beating Russian Roman Safiullin 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 at Arthur Ashe Stadium, where women's defending champion Aryna Sabalenka also made it safely into the second round.

"It's been a really tough five months for me," Alcaraz said.

"Being able to step on the Arthur Ashe, being able to compete again, I couldn't decide to come back in a better tournament. It's a really special place for me.

"I tried to enjoy as much as I can. I missed the crowd, I missed the energy, I missed competition. I missed everything."

Alcaraz is trying to bookend his season with major titles after his Australian Open triumph in January made him the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam.



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain returns a shot against Roman Safiullin

Monday's performance might not have been peak Alcaraz, but the seven-time Grand Slam champion unleashed his powerful forehand with increasing confidence and displayed his familiar touch at the net.

"I think the level of tennis is going to be better for sure," said Alcaraz, who said he was most proud that he was able to quell his own doubts about his fitness.

"I tried to forget everything, I tried to enjoy," he said.

Aggressive Sabalenka

Sabalenka's bid for a rare US Open three-peat comes during a worrying drop in form, but the Belarusian star rose to the occasion in a 6-2, 6-4 victory over Camila Osorio.

She was slowed by 23 unforced errors but belted 32 winners to more than compensate, her thunderous groundstrokes proving enough to see off a counter-punching opponent who stepped up her game in the second set.

"She brought the fight," Sabalenka said. "She battled really well and I just tried to stay as aggressive as possible.

"I think I played great. She's a tough opponent, makes you work really hard to get every point, so I'm happy that I was able to close the match in straight sets," she added.

Sabalenka hasn't reached a final since capturing the prestigious "Sunshine Double" of Indian Wells and Miami in March.

Japan's Naomi Osaka was forced to dig deep before overcoming Russian first-round opponent Anastasia Zakharova 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/3) in just over two hours in a late night duel.

Man City agree blockbuster deal to sign Chelsea star Fernandez: reports

AFP | London

Manchester City have agreed to sign Chelsea midfielder Enzo Fernandez in a blockbuster £125 million deal (\$167 million) that would equal the British transfer record, according to reports yesterday.

City have been chasing Fernandez for several months and the Argentina international is on the verge of moving to the Etihad Stadium on deadline day.

Fernandez's switch would equal the fee paid by Liverpool to Newcastle for Sweden striker Alexander Isak last year.

Enzo Maresca worked with Fernandez at Chelsea before



Enzo Fernandez

taking charge of City in the close-season after his January exit from Stamford Bridge.

Maresca was keen to land Fernandez after the recent sale of influential World Cup winner Rodri to Barcelona, as well as the departures of fellow midfielders Bernardo Silva, Nico Gonzalez and Tijjani Reijnders.