

Arab Cup Opens With Shockwaves



Sensational opening ceremony lights up Qatar's Al Bayt Stadium

Hosts stunned as Bahrain eye strong opening

● **Syria stun favourites Tunisia**

● **Palestine edge hosts Qatar**

● **Bahrain brace for tough opener**

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

The FIFA Arab Cup returned to Doha with all the tension and unpredictability the region has come to expect, and on opening night, Group A delivered two seismic jolts. Syria's disciplined 1-0 win over Tunisia at Ahmad bin Ali Stadium set the tone, before Palestine stunned hosts Qatar with a late own goal at Al Bayt Stadium, capping an extraordi-

nary first chapter to a tournament once again staged in World Cup-calibre surrounds.

Tunisia, with the lively PSG academy product Ismael Gharbi and veteran full-back Ali Maaloul, seized early control. They camped in the Syrian half, stitching neat sequences through Moutaz Neffati and repeatedly attacking down both channels. Gharbi forced Syrian goalkeeper Shaher Alshaker into an early save, while Maaloul went close with a curling free-kick. Yet Syria, guided by Spanish coach José Lana's compact and disciplined approach, slowed the rhythm, blocked lanes and disrupted every Tunisian surge.

Then came the moment of the night. Three minutes into the second half, the match changed direction. Omar Kharbin, Syria's talismanic forward, stepped over a free-kick 25 yards out and bent a stunning strike into the top



Palestinian heroes celebrate last-gasp victory over hosts

corner. The goal silenced the Tunisian bench and reminded the crowd of the quality once showcased across Qatar's venues during the 2022 World Cup. Tunisia responded with urgency. Gharbi weaved into tight areas, striker

Seifeddine Jaziri tried catching the keeper off his line and waves of red shirts pushed forward. Syria held their ground with remarkable resolve and closed out a famous opening win.

If that upset raised eyebrows,

the late drama in Al Khor lifted them higher still. Qatar controlled long stretches, attacking through Akram Afif's set pieces and the introduction of Edmilson Junior after the interval. Palestine, however, grew in belief,

carving chances for Oday Dabagh and Zeid Qunbar before finally forcing the breakthrough. Deep into added time, Sultan Al Brake inadvertently turned the ball into his own net, sealing a 1-0 Palestinian win that left Al Bayt stunned.

Today's action continues with Morocco facing Comoros, Egypt meeting Kuwait at the iconic Lusail Stadium, and Saudi Arabia clashing with Oman in Education City.

For Bahrain, attention now shifts to tomorrow's Group D opener against Iraq at Stadium 974. The national team has spent the past week preparing in Doha, with head coach Dragan Talajic insisting his side "have much more quality" while acknowledging the challenge ahead. "It's important to start positively and insha'Allah the Bahraini people will be behind us. We will do it all together for our kingdom," he said.

Boycott urges England to 'use their brains' in quest to level Ashes

AFP | London

Geoffrey Boycott has urged England to "use their brains" as Ben Stokes's men go in search of an Ashes series-levelling win in this week's second Test in Brisbane.

England fell 1-0 down in the five-match series following a humiliating eight-wicket loss to Australia inside two days in last month's first Test in Perth.

Batting collapses cost England dear as the tourists lost five wickets for 12 runs in their first innings and four for 11 in their second.

Former England opener Boycott insisted Stokes's men could win at Brisbane's Gabba ground with a more measured approach.

"But it doesn't help our chances



Ben Stokes, Joe Root and Harry Brook leave the field after play (file photo)

es of success if Ben Stokes keeps encouraging our batsmen to attack, attack with one finger hovering over the self-destruct button," Boycott wrote in his Daily Telegraph column.

"Nobody is asking the players to stop being positive because they have given us some marvellous, thrilling and entertaining cricket. All we ask is for them to use their brains and

"Nobody is asking the players to stop being positive because they have given us some marvellous, thrilling and entertaining cricket. All we ask is for them to use their brains and realise there are times when they should throttle back and be aware of situations and bat accordingly."

GEOFFREY BOYCOTT

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Slovenia looking for new coach after World Cup bid failure

AFP | London

Slovenia are looking for a new coach after deciding to part ways with Matjaz Kek following their failure to qualify for the 2026 World Cup, the national federation announced yesterday.

The 64-year-old's contract expired at the end of November and the Slovenian Football Association (NZS) said that it was time to give someone else a chance.

"We agreed that, after seven years of very good partnership, marked by a very successful qualification to the (2024) European Championship, it was time to end our work together," NZS said in a statement.

"We will choose a new coach... without any time pres-



Matjaz Kek

sure," the statement added, stipulating that a new handler would be named before the squad's next match in March.

Kek guided Slovenia to the Euros last 16 in Germany in 2024 -- the first time in 24 years that they had reached the Euros -- but



Mahmoud Alafyah and Mohamed Abdulla challenge Egypt's attack

Bahrain's Arab Cup Run Stalled

TDT | Manama

Bahrain's senior men's volleyball team suffered their first defeat in the Arab Challenge Cup in Amman, Jordan, going down 3-1 to Egypt last night. After a resounding 3-0 win over Palestine in their opener, the Bahrainis faced a far much tougher opponent in the North African side.

The first set saw Egypt seize the early initiative, claiming it 30-28. Bahrain responded in the second set, edging Egypt 25-23 thanks to sharp attacking from Naser Anan and Ali Ebrahim. Their precise spikes

and coordinated play hinted that Bahrain could maintain their momentum.

Egypt, however, quickly regained control. The third and fourth sets both ended 25-17 in favour of the Egyptians, who combined powerful serving with strong net play to wear down Bahrain's defence. The gulf in depth and experience became apparent as Bahrain struggled to sustain their early intensity.

Despite the setback, Bahrain showed flashes of quality. Coach Arnaud Josserand praised the team's fight in the second set and emphasised the need for sharp-

er execution in upcoming matches. The squad, including Mohammed Anan, Mahmood Alafyah, Abbas Al Khabbaz, and Sayed Hashim Issa, will aim to bounce back when they face Kuwait tonight at 7pm. Bahrain then take on Tunisia on Thursday at 3pm and conclude their campaign against host Jordan on Friday evening. The Arab Challenge Cup, organised by the Arab Volleyball Association in cooperation with the Jordan Volleyball Federation, remains a key platform for regional teams to test themselves ahead of the international season.

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