

Nationals barge through to semis

Magical Bahrain beat Kuwait to advance in Arabian Gulf Cup

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Bahrain defied the odds and squeezed into the semi-finals of the 24th Arabian Gulf Cup last night following a drama-filled 4-2 victory over Kuwait in their final Group B game of the tournament's preliminary round. Naturalised striker Thiago Augusto came on as a second-half substitute and provided the magic that the Bahrainis needed to pull off the hard-earned triumph. Augusto scored twice within the span of just 10 minutes to help lift the nationals to the winning margin they required in order to make it through to the next stage.

Augusto's brace added to earlier goals from teammates Ali Madan and Jassim Al Shaikh, who were both also in spectacular form in the contest.

Kuwait's Youssef Nasser and Ahmed Zanki were both on target for their team as they put up a valiant fight in a hugely intense encounter.

Saudi Arabia took down defending cham-



Bahrain's Al Shaikh surveys the pitch as he looks to make a pass against Kuwait

pions Oman 3-1 in the other divisional fixture played simultaneously at a different venue.

Following both results, the Saudis marched on to the final four as Group B winners with six points, while Bahrain advanced with a superior goal difference over Oman after both teams finished with four points on the table. Kuwait ended their campaign with three points in last place.

The Bahrainis now face off with unbeaten Group A winners Iraq in the semi-finals, while Saudi take on hosts Qatar. Both games in the last four will be played on Thursday.

The concluding Group A games were also played yesterday, with Iraq and Yemen battling to a goalless stalemate and the Qataris beating the UAE 4-2.

In Bahrain's win over Kuwait, all but one of yesterday's goals were scored in a pulsating second half that only confirmed the semi-finalists following Augusto's second goal three minutes into second-half stoppage time.

Madan fired in Bahrain's opener with a brilliant solo effort in the opening minute of first-half added time. He dribbled the ball nearly a quarter-way up the pitch while being chased by the Kuwaiti defence and then hit a low shot past goalkeeper Hameed Youssef to give the Bahrainis the lead.

The second half then began with a huge blunder by Al Shaikh when he took down Kuwait's Redha Abujabarah in the box for a

penalty. Nasser stepped up to take the spot kick and he drove the ball home into the bottom-left corner with Bahrain's Sayed Mohammed Jaffar, who had made a few crucial saves earlier in the match, diving the opposite way.

There was then a controversial moment after Nasser scored another goal in the 65th minute to give the Kuwaitis the lead. His effort was cancelled by the match referee, however, after VAR technology showed that Nasser had tugged on the shirt of Bahrain's Sayed Redha Isa, which caused Isa to fall over and allow Nasser to go unmarked as he charged towards the box to receive a pass and score.

With the 1-1 tie restored, Al Shaikh made up for his penalty gaffe with Bahrain's second goal of the night. He had a fine strike from just outside the box in the 69th minute off a pass from Mahdi Humaidan to give Bahrain back the lead and revive their semis hopes.

Augusto was then inserted by Bahrain head coach Helio Sousa and he made his impact instantly. His opening goal in the 83rd minute came from a perfect cross by Al Shaikh, which virtually sealed Bahrain's qualification.

But there was still some drama to be had as Kuwait's Zanki scored just two minutes later to reduce the deficit, until Augusto put any Bahrain nerves to rest with his second goal, sealing both the win and the coveted final four berth.



Bahrain's Madan in action against Kuwait last night

Bahrain players celebrate after their opening goal

Last Night's Scores

Group B

Kuwait	2	4	Bahrain
Y. Nasser 59' (pen)			A Madan 45+1'
A Zanki 85'			J Al Shaikh 69'
			T Augusto 83', 90+3'
Oman	1	3	Saudi Arabia
A Al Alawi 55'			F Al Buraikan 26'
			H Bahebri 42', 57'

Group A

Qatar	4	2	UAE
A Afif 20', 28' (pen)			A Mabkhout 33' (pen), 77'
H Al Haydos 53'			
B Khoukhi 90+4'			
Yemen	0	0	Iraq

Final Group B Standings

(*advance to semi-finals)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
*Saudi Arabia	3	2	0	1	6	4	6
*Bahrain	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Oman	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Kuwait	3	1	0	2	6	7	3

Owen, Towndrow take overnight lead in KHT golf

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Homegrown talent Daniel Owen and fellow-professional Sean Towndrow took a share of the lead yesterday after the opening round of the 12th King Hamad Trophy golf championship, being played at The Royal Golf Club (RGC) at Riffa Views.

Owen and Towndrow both carded scores of six-under-par 66 over the prestigious annual competition's first 18 holes.

They enjoyed a one-shot lead over the pair of Liam O'Neill and Matty Lamb, who were tied third.

Another pair were deadlocked a further one stroke behind. They were

Craig Ross and Monty Scowsill, who both had four-under-par totals of 68 from day one.

Each of the top six golfers are from Great Britain. Both Lamb and Scowsill are amateur players.

A total of 95 players representing 20 countries from around the world teed off yesterday at RGC's 18-hole Colin Montgomerie-designed championship course.

Owen had a brilliant front nine from yesterday's play. He had already birdied five holes by then but had also bogeyed the par-four eighth, before carding another two birdies over the back nine.

Towndrow also had a fine start with an eagle on the par-five third hole. He

birdied another five holes the rest of the day, but also had a bogey on the par-four 17th.

O'Neill had an eagle on day one on the par-five 13th. That helped him make up for back-to-back bogeys on holes four and five to keep him within a stroke of the leaders. Lamb also had a pair of bogeys but managed to card five birdies to match O'Neill.

Scowsill was another to register an eagle for the day, sinking the par-five ninth hole in three shots.

The field behind the top six golfers was tightly knit, with Peter Badawy of Lebanon ranked seventh with a three-under-par score of 69.

There were then another 11 players who were two shots under and tied

for eighth place. They included Jamal Allali and Id Omar Ayoub from Morocco; Mathiam Keyser from South Africa; Gabbe Axell from Sweden; and Phil Kelly, Jake Bolton, Louis Campbell, Callum Farr, Jamie Elson, Zane Scotland and Tom Sloman, all from Great Britain.

Bahrain's best-ranked participant on day one was Mohammed Diab Alnoaimi, who was tied-34th with a two-over-par total of 74.

The second round will be held today with the players hoping to make the cut of 45, who will then be battling it out in the third and final round tomorrow.

The first group of golfers are scheduled to tee off this morning at 7am.



Bahrain's Alnoaimi tees off from the par-five ninth hole during the first round yesterday