

'Bahrain became my purpose'

Emotional Tony Davis steps down as boxing coach after 7 incredible years

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TDT | Manama

Tony Davis says his seven years in Bahrain have shaped him more deeply than any period of his coaching career. Sitting down with The Daily Tribune yesterday, the outgoing national boxing head coach spoke with emotion, clarity and a sense of closure that carried the weight of a remarkable journey. "I came here as a coach," he said. "I'm leaving as someone who genuinely feels part of this country."

A Life-Changing Call

His Bahrain story began in 2017 in the aftermath of the Westminster terror attack in London. A veteran of 22 years in the military, Tony Davis was working in what he described as his "dream job" with Great Britain Boxing when chaos erupted outside Parliament. He heroically jumped over a fence to try and save a police officer, PC Keith Palmer, and rushed to help injured victims. The incident made international headlines and eventually reached His Highness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa, who invited him to join Bahrain's sporting project. "That moment changed my life," Tony said. "HH Shaikh Khalid and HRH Shaikh Salman made sure I got care and support. Bahrain stepped in like family. When someone saves your life, that loyalty stays forever."

Building a Legacy

His early months in Bahrain were an eye-opener. He arrived from one of the world's most resourced boxing environments to a programme still in its infancy. "There was talent here but it needed structure and belief," he said. Over the years that followed, Bahrain earned historic results, none greater than qualifying a boxer for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. "For a small nation to walk into an Olympic boxing ring is extraordinary," Tony said. "It's something I'll always carry with pride."



HH Shaikh Khalid receives a token of appreciation from Davis in a previous ceremony

His journey was nearly cut short in 2021 when he contracted a severe strain of COVID-19 during a tournament in Istanbul. "I thought that was the end. I genuinely thought I was going to die," he said. "HH Shaikh Khalid and HRH Shaikh Salman didn't just support me as a coach, but also as a human being. That's something you never forget."

Defining Moments

This autumn brought two defining milestones for Bahraini boxing and for Tony personally. In early October, just before the national team settled for the 3rd Asian Youth Games in Bahrain, Tony quietly revealed to TDT that he would be stepping down after the season. Around the same time, he was fully immersed in his role as competition manager for the boxing tournament at the AYG, which brought together

athletes from 31 nations. The event required weeks of meticulous preparation and a level of operational precision he had never been responsible for before. "I wanted Bahrain to feel proud of what we delivered," he said. "When the feedback came in, I knew we had achieved something special." Despite only two young Bahrainis competing, Tony saw them as symbols of the Kingdom's future. He grew emotional recalling Abdulrahman Al Mudhaki's opening-bout victory. "I cried when he won. To see a young Bahraini stand there with that courage reminded me why I love this sport," he said. He also praised Mohammed Atiyah's resilience, calling him "a fighter with real potential."

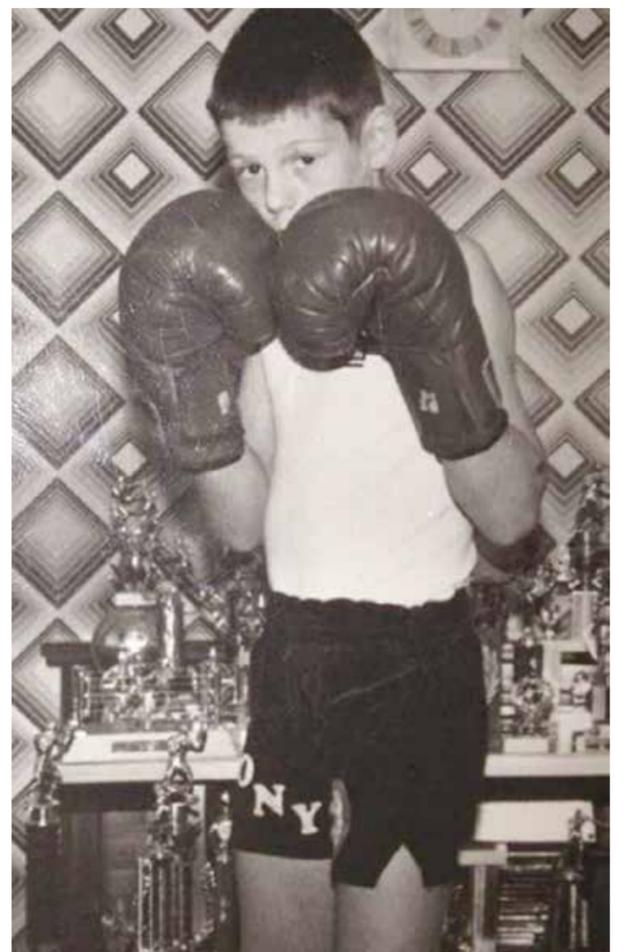
Capping off his tenure, last Thursday Tony Davis oversaw the 4th edition of the Royal Rumble in Bahrain, a fast-grow-

ing event on the regional combat sports calendar. Tony believes its success reflects how far the country has come. "The Royal Rumble wasn't just a tournament. It showed the ambition of this nation. The crowds, the atmosphere, the organisation. It proved Bahrain can deliver major events at a level people once didn't think possible."

Tony will now remain in Bahrain and continue working in the sporting sector, while Olympian John Conlon assumes the role of national coach. "John is the right man. He'll push Bahrain to another level," Tony said. As he transitions to the next chapter, Tony carries a sense of gratitude that goes beyond sport. "Bahrain gave me a home, a purpose and a second chance at life," he said. "This country will always be part of me."



Tony Davis, during his fighting days, with his British Four Nations boxing medal



A young Tony Davis dreaming of a boxing career

Red Bull promote rookie Hadjar to partner Verstappen

AFP | London

French rookie Isack Hadjar will step up to the main Red Bull car next season to partner four-time world champion Max Verstappen, the Austrian Formula One team announced yesterday.

Isack, who only turned 21 in September, has enjoyed an impressive first season with Red Bull's junior team Racing Bulls, scoring 10 top-10 finishes, including his first podium when he finished third in the Netherlands.

He replaces Japanese driver Yuki Tsunoda who becomes Red Bull's test and reserve driver.

"After all the hard work I have put in since joining the junior team, it's such a great reward,"

a grateful Hadjar said in a Red Bull statement.

"I've had many ups and downs throughout my career and they kept believing and pushing me."

"It's an awesome move, to work with the best and learn from Max is something I can't wait for."

Red Bull will be hoping Hadjar can solve the perennial problem of Verstappen's partner.

After releasing Sergio Perez at the end of last season, Red Bull began 2025 with Liam Lawson at the wheel but the New Zealander lasted only two races before being supplanted by Tsunoda.

Since then, however, Tsunoda has scored just 33 points in the world championship compared with Verstappen's 396.

The Japanese driver, who has

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Hadjar, who only turned 21 in September, earned his promotion after securing a podium finish in the Netherlands during his impressive debut F1 season

been with the team since joining the junior programme in 2019, has competed in more than 100 Grand Prix and has yet to make

a podium.

He currently sits one place and three points below Lawson in the standings.

"Everyone in the sport would agree it is impossible not to like Yuki, his personality is infectious, and he has become a very special part of the Red Bull family," said team principal Laurent Mekies.

"On behalf of everyone at Red Bull, I thank him for what he has contributed so far and we know he will provide invaluable support to the 2026 projects moving forwards."

Lawson will continue with Racing Bulls in 2026 when he will be partnered by Arvid Lindblad, who turned 18 in August and who is currently with the team's junior programme in Formula 2.



RB's French-Algerian driver Isack Hadjar walks down the pitlane