

New-look Bahrain target Asia Cup return

Subotic era begins as nationals prepare for continental challenges

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Bahrain's senior men's national basketball team have stepped up preparations for a crucial period ahead, with the FIBA Asia Cup 2029 Pre-Qualifiers and the 20th Asian Games set to provide early tests under a new coaching regime.

The nationals are continuing their training programme ahead of the opening round of the Asia Cup pre-qualifiers, which will be held in Dubai from August 26 to 31.

The tournament will mark the start of a new chapter for the national team under Greek-Slovenian head coach Slobodan Subotic, who was appointed last month to succeed fellow Greek tactician Georgios Vovoras.

Subotic brings extensive international experience to the role, having previously managed European giants including Panathinaikos, Olympiacos and AEK Athens. He has also led the national teams of Slovenia and Lebanon, adding valuable club



Mustafa Hussain during preparations at Zain Basketball Arena

and international experience to Bahrain's coaching setup.

The Bahrainis have been

drawn in Group A alongside teams advancing to the second round of the pre-qualifiers. They begin their campaign



Slobodan Subotic oversees a training session with the national team

against Oman on August 27 before facing the UAE the following day. After a rest day on August 29,

Bahrain return to action against Nepal on August 30 before wrapping up their group stage against Kuwait on August 31.

The second round, scheduled for November 23 to December 1, will feature 12 teams split into two groups of six. The top four from each group will then advance to the Fiba Asia Cup 2029 Qualifiers, where 24 teams will compete for 16 places at the continental finals.

The final qualifying stage will be played across three windows in November 2027, and February and November 2028.

Following their Dubai assignment, Bahrain will turn their focus towards the 20th Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, from September 19 to October 4.

The upcoming competitions will represent Subotic's first major challenges in charge as Bahrain look to return to the Fiba Asia Cup after their last appearance in 2022, when they finished 13th overall in Jakarta, Indonesia. The kingdom has previously qualified for nine editions of the continental championship.

Pegula leads Eala as storms push Washington Open finals



Jessica Pegula reacts during the match

AFP | Washington

World number three Jessica Pegula and rising star Alexandra Eala must wait until late yesterday to decide a Washington Open championship after thunderstorms postponed the completion of Sunday's WTA final.

After waiting through a three-hour thunderstorm delay to start, Pegula won the first set 6-4 and Eala led 2-1 in the second set of the championship match when rain returned.

More than five hours passed with conditions remaining unplayable before organizers called off the resumption of play until late yesterday.

Also postponed was the entire men's final at the WTA and ATP 500-level hardcourt tournament, with 10th-ranked American Taylor Fritz set to face 19-year-old Spaniard Rafael Nadal.

The women's final was set to resume at noon local time (1600 GMT) with the men's final not before 1 p.m. in Washington.

Pegula, who won her first WTA title in 2019 at Washing-

ton, seeks her 12th tour trophy and third of the year after Dubai and Charleston.

The 32-year-old American top seed defeated Eala in a 2025 Miami semi-final in their only prior meeting.

Philippines star Eala, cheered all week by a host of supporters, seeks her first WTA title in her second career final, having lost last year at Eastbourne.

The 21-year-old left-hander is set to jump to a career-best 24th in the world rankings.

Eala ousted former world number one Naomi Osaka, second seed Elina Svitolina and defending champion Leylah Fernandez to reach the final.

Pegula broke Eala in the fifth game, blasting a forehand service return winner, only for Eala to break back at love to 3-3 on a blistering backhand service return winner.

Pegula saved two break points in holding to 4-4, broke again when Eala sent a forehand long in the ninth game and held at love to capture the first set in 40 minutes when Eala hit a backhand beyond the baseline.

Gulf Cup cleared as Bahrain eye title defence

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The 27th Arabian Gulf Cup will go ahead as planned, with no discussions over postponing the tournament, according to Gulf Cup Football Federation secretary-general Jassim Sultan Al Rumaihi.

The tournament is set to kick off in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on September 23, coinciding with the Kingdom's National Day, and will run until October 6.

Al Rumaihi said preparations are progressing on schedule, with the federation working closely with the Saudi Arabian Football Federation and the local organising committee to ensure the event is delivered successfully.

"We are moving according to the planned timeline to organise this major event, which means a lot to the people of the Gulf," Al Rumaihi said.

"We hope everything goes as planned and that the upcoming



Bahrain celebrate their historic Gulf Cup triumph in Kuwait last year

edition will be an ideal tournament and better than previous editions."

The confirmation comes as Bahrain prepare to defend their Gulf Cup title after being drawn into a competitive Group B alongside the UAE, Qatar and Yemen.

Hosts Saudi Arabia headline

Group A, which also includes Iraq, Oman and Kuwait.

Bahrain lifted their second Gulf Cup trophy in the previous edition, held across December 2024 and January 2025, after defeating Oman 2-1 in the final. Their first title came in 2019.

The national team have already begun preparations for a

demanding period ahead, with head coach Dragan Talajic overseeing the squad's build-up for both the Gulf Cup and the AFC Asian Cup 2027.

Following the regional tournament, Bahrain will turn their attention to the continental stage, with the AFC Asian Cup scheduled to take place across three Saudi cities from January 7 to February 5 next year.

The Bahrainis are among the 24 teams competing in the tournament and have been drawn in Group B alongside North Korea, Jordan and Uzbekistan.

Group A features Kuwait, Oman, Palestine and hosts Saudi Arabia, while Group C consists of Iran, Syria, Kyrgyzstan and China.

Group D includes Australia, Tajikistan, Iraq and Singapore, while Group E is made up of South Korea, the UAE, Vietnam and either Lebanon or Yemen.

Defending champions Qatar headline Group F alongside Japan, Thailand and Indonesia.

Chelsea sign England midfielder Jordan Henderson

AFP | London

Chelsea announced the signing of veteran England midfielder Jordan Henderson from Premier League rivals Brentford yesterday.

The former Liverpool captain, who was part of England's World Cup squad at the recent tournament in North America, has signed a two-year deal at Stamford Bridge.

"Given the size of the club, the manager, who I have great admiration for, and the quality of the players, this was a huge opportunity I couldn't turn down," said Henderson.

"I was also so impressed with how much the ownership want Chelsea to be successful and move in the right direction.

"For me, it's about giving



England's Jordan Henderson celebrates during a match (file photo)

everything every single day, both on and off the field, to help the players around me and the team as much as possible. I'm very excited to get going."

It was confirmed last week

that Henderson had had his Brentford contract terminated after it emerged the club's west London rivals Chelsea were interested.

The 36-year-old won the Premier League and Champions

League with Liverpool. He left Anfield for Saudi club Al-Ettifaq in 2023, moving to Ajax six months later.

He returned to the Premier League with Brentford last year, signing a two-year contract.

Henderson, who has won 91 international caps, was part of England's 2026 World Cup squad but played only a handful of minutes, breaking an arm later in the tournament.

He joins Xabi Alonso's squad just two days after Chelsea signed fellow veteran Danny Welbeck from Brighton.

The Blues spent a British-record £117 million (\$157 million) to sign Morgan Rogers from Aston Villa last month and have also landed France defender Maxence Lacroix and Atlanta defender Marco Palestra.