

HH Shaikh Khalid urges **strong** Asiad showing

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

His Highness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa has called on Bahrain's athletes to deliver a performance worthy of the country's sporting reputation at the 20th Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan.

HH Shaikh Khalid, First Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, General Sports Authority chairman and Bahrain Olympic Committee (BOC) president, stressed the importance of honourable representation from every national squad competing under the Team Bahrain banner.

He made the remarks while chairing the BOC board's eighth meeting at Al Wadi Palace in



HH Shaikh Khalid chairs the BOC board meeting at Al Wadi Palace in Riffa

Riffa, where members reviewed final preparations for the Games, which officially run from September 19 to October 4.

The delegation announced so far spans 11 sports, with reigning Olympic champion Winfred Yavi leading a powerful 34-member athletics squad featuring Salwa Eid Naser, Ruth Jebet, Birhanu Balew and Abbas Yusuf.

Olympic bronze-medallist and defending Asian Games champion Gor Minasyan headlines the four-strong weightlifting team alongside Jokser Albornozi Quinto, Ingrid Vanesa Segura Grueso and Alina Marushchak.

The kingdom will also be represented in basketball, judo, cycling, shooting, wrestling, taekwondo, jiu-jitsu, badminton and

esports.

The men's basketball team begin their Pool C campaign against the Philippines on Friday before facing China and Kazakhstan. Seven judokas, seven shooters and five wrestlers have also been selected.

More than 11,000 athletes from the Olympic Council of Asia's 45 member nations are expected to contest 469 medal events across 43 sports. Bahrain, who made their debut in 1974, will be making their 14th appearance at the continental showpiece.

Looking beyond Japan, the board discussed the Dakar 2026 Youth Olympic Games, this year's Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in Riyadh and the road towards the Los Angeles

2028 Olympics.

Members also received an update on plans for Bahrain to host the 2027 Arab Games before reviewing its leading sporting achievements from the first quarter of 2026.

These included the men's handball team's Asian title and the national delegation's performances at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya and the GCC Games in Doha.

It was also confirmed that the country will host the 38th meeting of GCC national Olympic committee presidents and the 102nd executive office meeting.

Closer to home, the fifth Bahrain Junior Olympics and the 2026 Olympic Day event will be staged during the final quarter of this year.

BRAVE CF 108 enters history books as first global MMA event inside Roman Colosseum

Manama

BRAVE Combat Federation made history at BRAVE CF 108 by bringing modern mixed martial arts into one of the world's most enduring monuments to combat.

On Saturday, September 5, the Bahrain-based promotion staged its event at Pula Arena in Croatia, becoming the first major global MMA organization to hold a fight card inside a Roman amphitheater.

Nearly 2,000 years after the historic structure was built, its ancient walls once again surrounded a spectacle of combat. The weapons and customs of the Roman era were long gone, replaced by gloves, unified rules, and the technical sophis-



tication of modern MMA.

Yet the spirit of the arena remained.

Pula Arena is one of the six largest and best-preserved Roman amphitheaters in the

world. Built for massive crowds and grand spectacles, the imposing structure provided a remarkable setting for BRAVE CF's "Modern Gladiators" theme.



"Our ethos is about elevating the experience of watching live sport while honoring the past," BRAVE CF President Mohammed Shahid said.

"Pula Arena allowed us to

connect the heritage of combat with modern MMA and give fans an experience that could not be replicated in a conventional venue."

That connection came to

life through an international cast of fighters, including former BRAVE CF Bantamweight World Champion Stephen "The Sniper" Loman, who made his highly anticipated return after three years away from competition.

From the opening contest through the main event, the athletes supplied the intensity while the historic venue provided an atmosphere unlike any conventional arena could offer.

More than a backdrop, Pula Arena became part of the story.

BRAVE CF 108 demonstrated how far MMA has traveled, placing a contemporary global sport inside a structure that has witnessed nearly two millennia of history.

Kooheji eyes PFL MENA final

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TDT | Manama

Bahrain's Hamza Kooheji will look to move one step closer to the PFL MENA title when he faces Algeria's Elias Boudegzdame in the featherweight semi-finals in Riyadh next month.

The KHK MMA star returns to action at PFL MENA 11 on October 2 at the Global Theatre in Boulevard City in the Saudi capital, with a place in the tournament final at stake.

Kooheji secured his place with a unanimous decision victory over Morocco's Taha Bendaoud at PFL MENA 9 in Dubai. The 33-year-old controlled large periods of the three-round contest through his grappling and well-timed takedowns, with all three judges scoring the bout 29-28 in his favour.

The victory marked a successful PFL MENA debut and an important response to his previous outing, when he suffered a fourth-round stoppage defeat to Serbia's Borislav Nikolic in Bahrain last November.

Speaking exclusively to TDT after overcoming Bendaoud,



Hamza Kooheji lands a strike during his tournament debut

Kooheji made clear that his focus remained on going all the way in the tournament.

"I'm still fully focused. I'm not celebrating too much because the job isn't finished yet," he said.

"My aim is clear, I want to win the belt by the end of the year."

He also stressed what his run means for Bahraini MMA.

"In every corner of the Arab region, we are showing that Bahrain has elite fighters who can compete and win at the highest level," Kooheji said. "My goal is to prove that we

belong among the best in MMA across the region."

Standing in his way is the experienced Boudegzdame, who carries a 21-9 professional record compared with Kooheji's 15-4.

The Algerian advanced after defeating Iraq's Hussain Salem, setting up a meeting between two seasoned featherweights.

The other semi-final in the division will see Lebanon's unbeaten Shadi Kabbani face France's Mehdi Saadi.

PFL MENA 11 will also feature semi-finals in the lightweight and welterweight divisions.

Zheng stuns Swiatek to reach US Open quarter-finals, Zverev and Rybakina advance

AFP | New York

Zheng Qinwen pulled off another US Open stunner Monday, beating Iga Swiatek to book a quarter final with Elena Rybakina as men's top seed Alexander Zverev advanced safely to the last eight.

It was one more gritty comeback for Zheng, the Paris Olympics gold medallist and a former world number four now ranked 121st after struggling in the wake of elbow surgery last year.

Zheng had won the last seven games, saving a match point, as she shocked Madison Keys in her previous match.

After falling behind 5-0 in the first set against six-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek she again reeled off seven straight games.

She then broke Swiatek twice in the second set to clinch the win.

"I guess to come back from 0-5 (Saturday) is not lucky, that's all I can say," said Zheng, who had to come through qualifying to gain a main draw berth.

Zheng, the first qualifier to beat Swiatek at a major, said it took her some time to settle in on the cavernous Ashe court,



China's Qinwen Zheng celebrates defeating Poland's Iga Swiatek

noting it's been "a long, long time" since she'd been scheduled on a main show court.

"I just focus on point by point," Zheng said, adding that she was so focused on the rallies that she lost track of the score.

Swiatek, who fell to Zheng in the gold medal match in Paris two years ago, left the Arthur Ashe Stadium in tears, although she later downplayed the upset.

"You can lose a set from any score, so nothing special about that," she said.

Zheng is the first qualifier

to reach the US Open women's quarter-finals since Emma Raducanu -- who went on to win the title -- in 2021. She'll next face world number two Rybakina, the reigning Australian Open champion who cruised past a hurting Naomi Osaka 6-1, 6-4 in just 66 minutes.

Rybakina is not only chasing a third Grand Slam title. If she beats Zheng to reach the semi-finals she will seize the number one ranking from Aryna Sabalenka -- even if the Belarusian wins a third straight crown.