



Hasan Al Samahji celebrates during Al Najma's win over Sharjah

Najma find their spark in the Asian Championship

TDT | Manama

Bahrain's Al Najma produced a much-needed response at the 28th Asian Men's Club League Championship, defeating the UAE's Sharjah Sports Club 32-27 in Kuwait last night to record their first win of the tournament.

After back-to-back defeats, Najma entered the clash under pressure but responded with an energetic performance that lifted them off the bottom of the standings and back

into contention for a semi-final place.

They started brightly, with Mohamed Ahmed opening the scoring, while Sayed Ali Al Shubbar and Jasim Khamis helped the Bahrainis settle into an early attacking rhythm. The Emiratis, though, never let them get away, with Gamal Mahmud repeatedly finding space and punishing gaps in the defence.

Najma edged a high-tempo first half 15-12, pulling clear late in the period thanks to important strikes from Mahdi Habib and Mohamed Ahmed to take a three-goal lead into the break.

The second half followed a similar pattern, with Sharjah briefly

threatening to overturn the deficit after capitalising on turnovers and defensive lapses. The UAE side cut the margin to a single goal midway through the half, with Mahmud continuing to lead the charge en route to a match-high 10 goals.

But unlike previous outings, Najma found answers at key moments. Uros Mitrovic and Jassim Khamis helped steady the response, with Mitrovic efficient on five from six attempts, while Khamis added six goals.

When Sharjah threatened again, Najma showed greater composure in the closing stages. Mohamed Ahmed and Al Shubbar stepped up with crucial late goals, and coach

Abdulrahman Mohamed saw his side close out the game effectively to secure their first win under his leadership.

It was also a more rounded attacking performance, with contributions coming from multiple players rather than relying on isolated scoring bursts — a key factor in maintaining their tempo across the full 60 minutes.

The win moves Najma onto two points from three matches, placing them fifth in the standings, just behind Qatar's Al Duhail, who sit fourth on three points and currently hold the final qualification spot.

At the top of the table, Saudi Arabia's Al Khaleej lead the way with

seven points, followed by Kuwait's Burgan Club and Kuwait Sporting Club, who are level on five points apiece. Qatar's Al Arabi sit sixth with two points, while the UAE's Sharjah Sports Club remain bottom without a win after three matches.

Najma now face a packed schedule as the preliminary stage moves into its final stretch. They take on Qatar's Al Arabi at 4pm today, meet Kuwait's Burgan Club tomorrow at the same time, before closing against Saudi Arabia's Al Khaleej on Sunday night at 8pm.

The semi-finals are on Monday, and the Bahrainis will look to finish in the top four as they continue their bid for a third Asian title.

Exclusive

Al Shaikh backs Bahrain to handle pressure of title defence

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Bahrain midfielder Jassim Al Shaikh believes the national team's experience will be key as the reigning Gulf Cup champions prepare for a demanding period that includes their title defence and the AFC Asian Cup 2027.

Speaking to *The Daily Tribune*, Al Shaikh said Bahrain's squad has the maturity to handle expectations following their recent success in regional football.

The 27th Arabian Gulf Cup (Khaleeji 27) will be hosted in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, from September 23 to October 6. Bahrain enter the tournament as defending champions, having lifted the trophy in January 2025. That triumph marked their second Gulf Cup title, following their maiden victory in 2019.

The national team will then turn its attention to the AFC Asian Cup, scheduled for January 7 to February 5, 2027. The 19th edition will feature 24 teams across three host cities: Riyadh, Jeddah, and Al Khobar.

Despite being drawn in a challenging Gulf Cup group alongside Qatar, the UAE and Yemen, Al Shaikh insisted that the nature of regional football makes predictions difficult.

"In the Gulf Cup, it doesn't really matter which group you're in," he said. "The matches are always tight because they are derbies. There is very little difference between the teams."

Bahrain enter the competition with raised expectations after defeating Oman 2-1 in the previous final, but Al Shaikh believes their experience will help them manage pressure.

"We are under pressure as defending champions, but we



Jassim Al Shaikh celebrates Bahrain's Gulf Cup victory at the start of the year

have an experienced group," he said. "Many players have featured in four, five, or more Gulf Cups, and that experience will be important."

He also pointed to the timing and conditions of the tournament as additional challenges.

"The competition comes early in the season, and the weather will still be humid. We need to arrive fully prepared physically and mentally," he added.

Looking ahead to the Asian Cup, Bahrain have been drawn in Group B alongside North Korea, Jordan and Uzbekistan. Al Shaikh believes the team can target a strong run if they start well.

"The group is challenging but manageable," he said. "If we be-



Jassim Al Shaikh recently lifted the Khalid bin Hamad Cup with club side Riffa

gin strongly, we believe we can progress."

He noted Bahrain's familiarity with some opponents but acknowledged Uzbekistan as a tougher tactical challenge.

"We've played North Korea

and Jordan several times and understand them well. Uzbekistan is less familiar, but we will have time to prepare."

Bahrain's best Asian Cup finish came in 2004, when they reached the semi-finals. Al Shaikh said the current squad should aim to match or improve on that achievement.

"Our goal is to equal or surpass that performance," he said. "First we must get out of the group stage, then take it step by step."

For Al Shaikh, the message remains simple as Bahrain prepare for two major tournaments.

"It's tournament football, and anything can happen. We need to stay focused, work hard and believe in ourselves."

Bahrain Set For Handball World Championship



Captain Hussain Al-Sayyad lifts Bahrain's maiden Asian title

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

The draw for the 30th IHF Men's World Championship preliminary round was conducted yesterday in Munich, confirming Bahrain's group-stage opponents for Germany 2027 as all 32 nations discovered their tournament pathways.

The championship will be staged from 13 to 31 January 2027 across six cities — Cologne, Munich, Kiel, Hanover, Magdeburg and Stuttgart — under the slogan "Where handball is alive."

Asian champions Bahrain have been placed in Group H alongside Iceland, North Macedonia and Japan, setting up a challenging but significant test on their World Championship return.

Bahrain's qualification marks a historic breakthrough following their first-ever Asian Men's Handball Championship title earlier this year, where they defeated Qatar 29-26 in an overtime final in Kuwait. Since then, the team has continued its upward trajectory regionally, also securing gold in the men's handball tournament at the 2026 GCC Games in May.

This will be Bahrain's eighth appearance at the World

Championship, with their best finish coming in 2023 when they placed 16th in the tournament co-hosted by Poland and Sweden.

Elsewhere in the draw, Group A features hosts Germany in Munich, confirming Bahrain's group-stage opponents in Munich against Tunisia, Serbia and Uruguay.

Group B sees African champions Egypt drawn with Italy, Cape Verde and Saudi Arabia.

Group C brings together last year's runner-up Croatia with Spain, Chile and debutants Türkiye.

Group D delivers a marquee South American clash between Argentina and Brazil, alongside France and Kuwait.

Group E features a Scandinavian derby with Sweden, Norway, Greece and Qatar.

Group F includes Portugal, Poland, Algeria and the Faroe Islands.

Group G sees defending champions Denmark alongside Slovenia, the United States and Angola, completing a balanced preliminary-round field.

The championship will culminate with the final at Cologne's Lanxess Arena on 31 January. Quarter-finals will be played on 26-27 January, followed by the semi-finals on 29 January and the medal matches on the closing day.