

Bahrain’s warriors ready for Asian battle

Strong Yellow Cup showing builds confidence for Kuwait

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Bahrain’s senior men’s handball team have concluded their preparatory stint at the Yellow Cup in Switzerland and now shift their focus to the 22nd Asian Men’s Handball Championship, which begins on Thursday in Kuwait City. The continental tournament will also serve as the Asian qualifier for the 2027 IHF Men’s World Championship in Germany, placing extra emphasis on a strong start for Robert Hedin’s squad.

The Bahrainis wrapped up the Yellow Cup with a close 31-33 defeat to Ukraine, finishing fourth overall. Trailing 17-18 at halftime, Bahrain showed greater tenacity in the second half, clawing back from a four-goal deficit to within one goal late in the match, but Ukraine ultimately held on for the victory. While the result may have disappointed, the performance offered

encouraging signs that Bahrain can compete under pressure. Hosts Switzerland claimed the title for the tenth time after a 29-all draw with North Macedonia, who finished as runners-up. Despite not recording a win, none of Bahrain’s three losses exceeded a four-goal margin, which is a small but significant indicator of their competitive level against strong European opposition.

Following their return to Bahrain yesterday, the national team will have a short recovery period before departing for Kuwait City on Wednesday to begin their continental campaign, ensuring players are rested and ready for the intense schedule ahead.

Bahrain will compete in Group B alongside Jordan, China, and Iraq. They open their campaign against Jordan at 4pm on Friday, face China on Sunday at 6pm, and conclude the preliminary round against Iraq next Tuesday at 4pm, all times local to Bahrain. A strong start in the group

will be key, as every point could prove decisive in the race for an Asian qualifying spot for the World Championship.

The squad, led by captain Hussain Al Sayyad, also includes: Hassan Al Samaheji, Mohammed Abdulhussain, Mohammed Habib Ahmed, Mohammed Habib Nasser, Hussain Mahfoudh, Jaffar Abdulshaheed, Mohammed Hameed, Hesham Ahmed, Salman Al Showaikh, Qassim Qamber, Ahmed Redha, Sayed Ali Basem, Hassan Madan, Ahmed Almaqabi, Ali Mahmood, Jassim Khamis, Ali Redha, and Ali Alasheeri.

Robert Hedin’s men, gold medal winners at last year’s sixth Islamic Solidarity Games, will be aiming for a strong start in the Kuwaiti capital. Observers will be watching to see if the lessons learned in Switzerland translate into sharper performances as the “Warriors” compete for one of the Asian qualifying spots for the 2027 World Championship.



Action from Bahrain's penultimate Yellow Cup match against Switzerland

‘Fragile’ Man United hit new low with FA Cup exit

AFP | London

Darren Fletcher admitted Manchester United’s “fragile” players have lost their confidence after Sunday’s FA Cup exit against Brighton left Old Trafford in turmoil.

Managerless, out of both domestic cups at the first hurdle for the first time since 1981-82 and sitting a disappointing seventh in the Premier League, United have rarely been at a lower ebb in their history.

Caretaker boss Fletcher, who stepped up from his role as United’s Under-18 coach after Ruben Amorim’s dismissal last Monday, experienced the club’s glory days as a midfielder under legendary manager Alex Ferguson.

But those trophy-filled years



Brighton’s Greek striker #19 Charalampos Kostoulas (L) vies with Manchester United’s Portuguese midfielder #08 Bruno Fernandes (R)

seem a lifetime ago for Fletcher the air with boos throughout the 2-1 loss against Brighton.

United’s first FA Cup third round defeat since 2014 underscored the litany of problems scarring the club at present.

For now, United’s hierarchy plan to hire an interim boss until the end of the season, buying them time to search for Amorim’s permanent successor.

Former United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, who failed in his first spell in charge, and Michael Carrick, a decorated ex-United midfielder sacked by second tier Middlesbrough this season, have been linked with the temporary post.

Few have faith that United will hire the right manager after Amorim lasted just 14 turbulent months following the equally chaotic reign of Erik ten Hag, who was axed in 2024.

Swiatek insists ‘everything is fine’ after back-to-back defeats



Iga Swiatek in action

AFP | Sydney

Iga Swiatek insists “everything is fine” despite back-to-back losses in the lead-up to the Australian Open, with the world number two “super sore” but confident of recovering for the season-opening Grand Slam.

The Polish star crashed 3-6, 6-0, 6-3 to Switzerland’s Belinda Bencic in the mixed-teams United Cup final in Sydney on Sunday, which came on the back of a lacklustre 6-4, 6-2 defeat to Coco Gauff in the semi-finals.

A shellshocked Swiatek lost seven games in a row against Bencic, including a

rare set to love, with a racquet toss and tears at the end of the match summing up her frustration.

It was uncharacteristic for the six-time Grand Slam winner, who rarely loses consecutive matches.

She most recently did so at the WTA Finals in Riyadh in November, falling to Elena Rybakina and Amanda Anisimova. Before that, her previous back-to-back defeats were in 2021.

“Everything is fine,” she said after the final, which Poland won 2-1 courtesy of Katarzyna Kawa and Jan Zielinski clinching the deciding mixed doubles.

Shabab Al Ahli Snatch Victory from Muharraq

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Bahrain champions Muharraq came agonizingly close to avenging an earlier narrow loss to UAE giants Shabab Al Ahli, but fell 84-83 at the BBA Arena yesterday in Group A of the 2025-26 FIBA WASL Gulf League. The Red Wolves were chasing a third straight Gulf League win, hoping to climb the group standings while settling the score after a prior 89-87 defeat to the same opponents.

Muharraq dominated early, storming out to a 21-9 lead in the first quarter. Nicholas Simon West powered the paint with inside scoring, while Kerwin Roach Jr. drove repeatedly to the basket. Timothy Lamont Bond Jr. contributed fast-break points and dunks, as the Red Wolves forced turnovers and outrebounded Shabab Al Ahli 10-5 in the opening frame, energizing the home crowd and setting the stage for a dramatic rematch.

By halftime, Peter Schomers’ side extended their advantage



Nicholas West of Muharraq fired up at the BBA Arena yesterday

to 48-35, controlling the paint and moving the ball efficiently. Roach Jr. and West kept the scoreboard ticking with mid-range jumpers and drives, while Mahmood Khalifa knocked down timely three-pointers.

Shabab Al Ahli, under Miodrag Perisic, responded in the third quarter, outscoring

Muharraq 28-22. Deshawn Washington and Bryon Allen provided key baskets, and the UAE side grabbed second-chance points while hitting crucial outside shots, trimming the deficit to seven and turning the game into a nail-biter.

The fourth quarter delivered end-to-end drama. Washing-

ton’s all-around performance, supported by Allen and Dikembe Dixon, proved decisive for the UAE side. A lead change with four seconds remaining gave Shabab Al Ahli the 84-83 edge, and Muharraq’s final shot fell short, leaving the home crowd stunned and the Red Wolves’ bid for payback just out of reach.

All of Muharraq’s starters played over 30 minutes. West finished with 25 points and 11 rebounds, Bond Jr. added 19 points, and Roach Jr. scored 22 points. On Shabab Al Ahli’s side, Washington collected 21 points and 15 rebounds, while Allen and Dixon contributed timely baskets that fueled the comeback.

The loss leaves Muharraq third in Group A with a 2-3 record. Their preliminary-phase campaign concludes against Saudi Arabia’s Al Ittihad at Prince Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Hall in Medina on January 19. A strong showing there will be crucial in determining which teams advance to the Final Phase.

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