

Bahrain qualify for Asian Cup 2023

Senior men's national football team secure berth in next year's continental showcase with unbeaten run in three matches in Group E of final qualification round held in Kuala Lumpur

● **Bahrain wrap up qualifying bid with 1-0 victory over Turkmenistan**

● **Striker Abdulla Yusuf supplies winner from penalty spot in first half**

TDI | Manama

Bahrain secured their berth in the AFC Asian Cup 2023 yesterday with a 1-0 victory over Turkmenistan in their concluding Group E match of their qualification competition, held at Bukit Jalil National Stadium in Kuala Lumpur.

A first-half penalty from Abdulla Yusuf was enough to propel the Bahrainis to their win, although the nationals had several more chances to score, particularly after the break.

The result gave Bahrain an undefeated record in three matches, claiming the full nine points on their divisional table, where they finished in first place. That top spot earned them their automatic berth in next year's continental showcase.

Turkmenistan suffered their second loss and finished third



Midfielder Abdulwahab Al Malood looks to create a play for Bahrain against Turkmenistan yesterday

Group E standings

	P	W	D	L	+/-	Pts
Bahrain	3	3	0	0	4	9
Malaysia	3	2	0	1	4	6
Turkmenistan	3	1	0	2	-2	3
Bangladesh	3	0	0	3	-6	0

in the group, eliminating them from Asian Cup contention.

Malaysia booked a second berth from Group E. They defeated Bangladesh 4-1 in yesterday's other fixture, earning them second overall on the group table with six points.

Bahrain head coach Helio

Sousa started yesterday's match with Sayed Mohammed Jaafar between the posts; Sayed Redha Isa, Amine Benadi, Waleed Al Hayam and Rashed Al Hooti in defence; Abdulwahab Al Malood, Ali Haram and Sayed Dhiya Saeed in a three-man midfield; and Yusuf, Ali Madan and

Mohammed Jassim Marhoon in a three-man strike-force.

Bahrain had opportunities from the get-go and should have taken the lead in the 16th minute, but a Marhoon low effort from close range and a rocket from distance by Haram were both saved by Turkmenistan goalkeeper Mammet Orazmammedow.

The nationals then took the lead in the 23rd minute when Yusuf converted a penalty. Midfielder Ali Madan was on the receiving end of a fine through-pass from Al Hayam on the right wing, and as he made his



Bahrain's Abdulla Yusuf is fouled by Turkmenistan's Zafar Babajanow during yesterday's match

way towards goal, was brought down by a hard-charging Orazmammedow, who came off his line.

The referee did not hesitate to give the spot kick, which Yusuf stepped forward to take. He coolly slotted the ball into the bottom-right corner of the net, giving him a penalty conversion for the second game in a row.

That put the Bahrainis in the lead at the interval.

In the second half, the nationals continued to press for a second goal. Marhoon once again had a golden opportunity from close range but was again de-

nied by Orazmammedow, and then had a shot from beyond 20 metres tipped over the crossbar.

Towards the end, Jaafar helped the Bahrainis maintain their advantage with a couple of crucial saves, including one on Turkmenistan's very last possession of the contest.

The third and final round of AFC Asian Cup 2023 qualification was scheduled to end last night. There were 24 teams in all, divided into six groups, each of which was played at a centralised venue. All six group winners plus the five best runners-up earned berths in the Asian Cup.

Tchouameni says Mbappe tried to convince him to reject Real Madrid

Reuters | Paris

France midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni said yesterday Kylian Mbappe tried in vain to convince him to reject Real Madrid's offer and join him at Paris St Germain instead.

The 22-year-old ended up signing a six-year deal with the LaLiga and European champions, who reportedly paid a fee of 80 million euros (\$83.65 million) with another 20 million in add-ons to AS Monaco at the weekend.

After months of negotiations with Real, PSG forward Mbappe ended up signing a three year extension with the Ligue 1 champions.

"Kylian decided to stay in Paris and called me knowing that I would surely leave Monaco," Tchouameni told a news conference as he was unveiled as a Real player.

"But I told him right away that my first option was Real Madrid and he understood perfectly. I get to be at the best club in the world and I'm not afraid of the competition. I must demonstrate my quality and I really look forward to it."

Capable of playing both as a defensive and centre midfielder, Tchouameni will strengthen a stellar but ageing Real Madrid midfield led by Luka Modric, 36, Toni Kroos 32, and Casemiro, 30.

Named Ligue 1 Young Play-



Kylian Mbappe (R) reacts with Aurelien Tchouameni during a training session (file photo)

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AURELIEN TCHOUAMENI

er of the Year in 2020-21 after joining Monaco from Bordeaux, Tchouameni was in high demand, with Liverpool also bidding to sign him.

"Today a magnificent soccer player arrives at our club;

we welcome one of the best midfielders in the world," Real president Florentino Perez said.

Tchouameni will join fellow France midfielder Eduardo Camavinga, 19, who signed for Real in August last year from Stade Rennais in a deal worth up to 40 million euros.

He said that he also received a phone call from another France team mate, Real Madrid forward Karim Benzema, and that he had helped his decision.

"Benzema is the best player in the world and when the negotiations were advancing with Real he wrote to me to offer his help and tell me about the club. We later talked and it was all great," Tchouameni said.

Serena Williams says she is set for a comeback at Wimbledon

AFP | London

Serena Williams is set to make her comeback at Wimbledon a year after her last match in any competition, writing on Instagram yesterday: "See you there."

The 23-time Grand Slam singles champion, who suffered an injury during her first-round match at the All England Club 12 months ago, posted an image of her white trainers on grass along with the caption: "SW and SW19. It's a date. 2022, see you there."

The 40-year-old also tagged Eastbourne in her post, indicating she could potentially play in next week's grasscourt tournament on England's south coast.

It is unclear whether Williams, now ranked a lowly 1,208th in the world, is intending to play singles or doubles at Wimbledon.

The American could have entered using a protected ranking reserved for players who have been sidelined through a long-term injury but did not do so and will therefore need a wild card.

The initial batch of wild cards for singles and doubles at the tournament, which starts on June 27, will be announced on Wednesday.

Williams won the last of her seven Wimbledon singles titles in 2016 but reached the final in 2018 and 2019 after returning

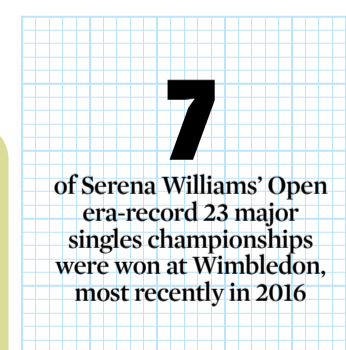


Serena Williams of the United States holds up the trophy after winning the women's title at Wimbledon in 2015 (file photo)



In 2021, Williams lost her footing on the slick grass and then her right leg buckled, leading to just the second mid-match retirement at any Grand Slam tournament of her career and first since 1998

from having a baby. She made a tearful exit last



year after retiring during the first set against Aliaksandra Sasnovich due to a leg injury and doubts had been growing about whether she would return to the sport.

Her long-time coach, Patrick Mouratoglou, revealed in April that he had taken on a new role with Simona Halep.