

# Sunbirds, Police lead the way!

Japanese, Qatari clubs stay undefeated and headline semi-finalists in 2023 Asian Men's Club Volleyball Championship in Bahrain

● Japan's Suntory Sunbirds to face Shahdab Yazd of Iran in semi-finals

● Qatar's Police Sports Team to play Jakarta Bhayangkara Presisi of Indonesia

TDT | Manama

Japan's Suntory Sunbirds and Qatar's Police Sports Team headline today's semi-finalists in the 2023 Asian Men's Club Volleyball Championship, currently being hosted by the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The Sunbirds and Police both won their respective quarter-final pools yesterday and head into the knockouts as the only unbeaten teams remaining in the competition.

The Sunbirds will take on Shahdab Yazd of Iran in a mouth-watering final four encounter, while Police will face Jakarta Bhayangkara Presisi of Indonesia in the other game.

Both contests highlight today's exciting programme at Isa Sports City in Riffa. The day's action is scheduled to begin from 11.30am and continue until the night, with the last fixtures set for 7pm starts. Entrance is free to all games.

The Sunbirds secured first place in quarter-final Pool E after taking care of business against Bhayangkara. Russian Dmitriy Muserskiy had a game-high 17 points for the Japanese while Cuban Alain Junior de Armas chipped in with 15.

"This was a great victory," said de Armas. "We are doing a great



Al Ahli's Mohammed Yaqoob looks to score against the Thais

## Semi-Finals and Classification Brackets

**SEMI-FINALS:** Suntory Sunbirds (Japan), Shahdab Yazd (Iran), Jakarta Bhayangkara Presisi (Indonesia), Police Sports Team (Qatar)

**5th-8th:** Korean Air Jumbos Pro-Volleyball Club (Korea), Kuwait Sports Club (Kuwait), Bayankhongor Crowdnd Geo VC (Mongolia), South Gas Sports Club (Iraq)

**9th-12th:** Al Ahli (Bahrain), Canberra Heat (Australia), Atyrau VC (Kazakhstan), Taichung Bank (Chinese Taipei)

**13th-16th:** Diamond Food Fine Chef-Air Force (Thailand), Khaypil Sports Club (Yemen), Kam Air (Afghanistan), Aspiring Volleyball Team (Hong Kong, China)

job. I hope we keep this up until the finals. We are in great shape but I think that we can do better and everyone is giving their best on the court.

"Whoever we face in the semi-finals is strong. But we have come to play and to win. We respect everyone, but we expect to win."

Daudi Okello from Uganda scored 14 points to pace the Indonesians in the setback, while Farhan Halim finished with nine markers.

"We lost today to a stronger team and a more composed team than us," said Okello. "We hope that tomorrow we play our A game. We need to work on our

serve and receive, and even our blocking is still shaky.

"All of us in the semi-finals are good teams. We've fought so hard to be in the top four. It doesn't matter who comes our way, we are ready to flex."

Qatar's Police won their Pool F fixture against Shahdab in a five-set thriller that went nearly two-and-a-half hours. The Qatars won the opening set but then conceded the next two, before roaring back for a scintillating 3-2 (25-20, 22-25, 22-25, 25-23, 15-12) result.

Croatian Petar Dirlc had 26 points to lead Police, while Nikola Vasic added 17 and Youssef Oughlaf 12. For the Shahdab,

Amir Ghafour scored 18 and Meisam Salehi chipped in with 14.

Dirlc said post-game: "Even though we've already qualified for the semi-finals, we knew it was a really important game for us and we wanted to continue our winning streak."

"We believe that whoever we have to play against in the semi-finals, we are the better team, and we're trying to show this in each match."

In yesterday's other quarter-final Pool E clash, Korean Air Jumbos Pro-Volleyball Club defeated Mongolia's Bayankhongor Crowdnd Geo VC 3-1 (25-21, 22-25, 25-16, 25-19). Hanyong Jeong scored 22 points while Jun Lee added 14. For the Mongolians, Khangal Tamiraa was the top scorer with 19 points, while Bayarsaikhan Batsukh contributed 13 markers.

The Bahrainis wrapped up this stage with the full nine points from three games and are now headed for the ninth-to-12th placement bracket in their final two assignments of the championship.

There, they will be joined by Australia's Canberra Heat, who defeated Khaypil Sports Club of Yemen 3-1 (25-18, 16-25, 25-16, 25-23) in today's other Pool G affair. Matthew Aubrey scored 23 points while Trent O'Dea had 17. Gamal Khairalah finished with 26 points for the Yemenis while Egyptian Essa Mohamed Elhossiny scored 15.

The Yemenis will contend for places 13 to 16, along with the Thais.

Also in the ninth-to-12th placement bracket are Atyrau VC of Kazakhstan Taichung Bank from Chinese Taipei.

The Kazakhs defeated their Taichung rivals 3-1 (35-33, 20-25, 25-20, 31-29) in a tightly contested consolation Pool H clash last night. Zhaksylyk Tleulin had 23 points and Vitaliy Vorovidin chipped in with 23 in the victory. Yu-Sheng Chang had a fine performance of 35 points in the losing effort, while Rayshon Jackman had 12. With the result, the Kazakhs topped Pool H.

In the group's other match yesterday, Kam Air of Afghanistan defeated Aspiring Volleyball Team from Hong Kong, China 3-0 (25-23, 25-17, 25-12). Ghulam Rasool Hidari scored 15 points while Sayed Habib Yousfi had 12 for the Afghans.

Yin Chun Lee was the top scorer for Aspiring with 11, while Chi Leung Poon added 10 markers.

Despite their win, Kam Air are set to compete for 13th through 16th places, along with Aspiring.

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All of us in the semi-finals are good teams. We've fought so hard to be in the top four. It doesn't matter who comes our way, we are ready to flex

DAUDI OKELLO



Japan's Suntory Sunbirds team celebrate their win

South Gas today in fifth-to-eighth placement games.

## Consolation pools

Bahrain's Al Ahli Club completed their consolation Pool G campaign with a resounding 3-0 (25-19, 25-23, 25-20) victory.

Mohammed Anan impressed with a game-high 23 points while Mohammed Yaqoob added 16. Chaiwat Thungkham paced the Thais with 14 and Brazilian Evandro Dias de Souza contributed 13 markers.

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Qatar Sports Team after their victory

## Today's Schedule

### COURT 1

11.30am: Korean Air Jumbos Pro-Volleyball Club (Korea) vs Kuwait Sports Club (Kuwait)

2pm: Bayankhongor Crowdnd Geo VC (Mongolia) vs South Gas Sports Club (Iraq)

4.30pm: Suntory Sunbirds (Japan) vs Shahdab Yazd (Iran)

7pm: Jakarta Bhayangkara Presisi (Indonesia) vs Police Sports Team (Qatar)

### COURT 2

11.30am: Khaypil Sports Club (Yemen) vs Kam Air (Afghanistan)

2pm: Diamond Food Fine Chef-Air Force (Thailand) vs Aspiring Volleyball Team (Hong Kong, China)

4.30pm: Al Ahli (Bahrain) vs Taichung Bank (Chinese Taipei)

7pm: Canberra Heat (Australia) vs Atyrau VC (Kazakhstan)

## Lampard told Chelsea to sign Haaland before Man City star's rise

AFP | London

Frank Lampard tried to persuade Chelsea to sign Erling Haaland before the Manchester City star established himself as the world's most feared striker.

Haaland can fire City to the Premier League title when the leaders host Chelsea on Sunday.

The 22-year-old has enjoyed an incredible season with 52 goals in all competitions, including a record 36 in the Premier League.

Lampard got a glimpse of

Haaland's potential during his first spell in charge of Chelsea when he came up against the young Norwegian in a pre-season friendly while he was playing for RB Salzburg in 2019.

Haaland scored 28 goals in 22 matches that season, but stiff competition for his signature, combined with the fact not everybody at Chelsea was convinced about him, meant Lampard was left frustrated.

He eventually signed for Borussia Dortmund in 2020 and

I was really keen to get him here but obviously that couldn't happen. His level at that point

was very clear, we played against him in a pre-season game for Salzburg. I think he's special, I thought he'd adapt straight away just because of his level

FRANK LAMPARD

moved to City two years later after shining in the Bundesliga.

"I've got huge respect for him as a player, he's a player I tried to bring to Chelsea the first time I was here," Lampard told reporters yesterday.

"I was really keen to get him here but obviously that couldn't happen. His level at that point was very clear, we played against him in a pre-season game for Salzburg.

"I think he's special, I thought he'd adapt straight away just because of his level."



Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland (C) headers the ball clear during a match against Chelsea (file photo)