

Bahrain advance into round two

Brilliant Bahrain book historic second round berth in FIVB U21 World Championship

● Bahrain defeated Morocco for the second victory in the tournament

● Russia, China, Korea, Brazil and Italy also claimed their second successive wins

TDI | Manama

Bahrain continued their inspired play and barged into the second round of the FIVB Volleyball Men's U21 World Championship 2019 yesterday night at Shaikh Isa Sports City in Riffa.

The hosts enjoyed a heart-stopping 3-2 (25-14, 23-25, 25-21, 22-25, 15-12) win over a spirited Morocco for their second triumph in as many games in Pool A. The result made history for the Bahrainis as they advanced past the preliminary stage for the first time in this Federation Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) competition.

Russia, China, Korea, Brazil and Italy also claimed their second successive wins and all five joined Bahrain in advancing to the tournament's second phase.

Russia took down Asian champions Iran in a five-set thriller, while the other four all had comfortable victories in straight sets. The Koreans defeated Egypt, China took care of Puerto Rico, Brazil ousted Canada and Italy eliminated defending champions Poland.

Meanwhile, bouncing back from losses in their first games were Cuba and the Czech Republic. Cuba overcame fellow-South Americans Argentina in a tightly contested five-setter, while the Czech Republic beat Tunisia. They both kept their hopes alive for a berth in round two.

Despite their losses yesterday, Argentina and Iran are also still with a chance to march through.

Tournament action continues today with the final day of the first round. Matches begin from 11.30am and continue until the



Bahrain's Mohamed Haroona looks to set up teammate Mohamed Jasim in attack

night. All are welcome to attend. Entrance is free of charge.

In Bahrain's win over Morocco, the two teams split the first two sets but the home side did well to respond in set three. Morocco halted their momentum in the fourth, however, and in a see-saw fifth, Bahrain were able to overcome a three-point deficit and secure the win in the end.

Hasan Mohamed top scored for Bahrain with 23 points, while skipper Mahmood Abdulhusain added 15. Abdulhusain said after the win: "We feel a little tired now, we have been working very hard, but we are happy because we achieved our goal of qualifying for the next round."

"We made some mistakes because we were a little nervous. But in the fifth set, we concentrated on our weaknesses and our mistakes, and that really helped us win."

Bahrain head coach Yousuf Khalifa added: "This is a big achievement for Bahrain. We are really happy. Morocco have a good team, and we can say that this five set match we enjoyed very much."

In Russia's hugely exciting match with Iran in Pool C, the victors fought back valiantly after twice going down a set. In the decisive fifth, they lost an

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YOUSUF KHALIFA
BAHRAIN HEAD COACH

early lead and then from 12-all onwards, it was a see-saw affair. Things could have gone either way before the Russians finally closed things out for a 3-2 (21-25, 25-19, 23-25, 25-21, 16-14) result.

Maksim Sapozhkov top scored for Russia with an impressive 34 points. Ivan Kuznetsov added 14 in the win. For Iran, Porya Yali had 30 while Amirhossein Esfandiari had 18.

"It's a game; when you lose the first or second set, it is nothing; it is normal," said Russia team captain Konstantin Abaev. "I think Iran are one of the three or four strongest teams in the tournament and I think we will

see them again in the semi-final or final. I hope we will play well enough to reach these stages. It will be really good for us and I hope we play better and better."

On securing a berth in round two, Abaev added: "Yes, we are going to the next round but still we must play every match and do everything for the win and to get better."

The Iranians must now defeat the Czech Republic today to secure their place in the next stage.

The Czech bounced back from a loss on opening night in a 3-0 (25-21, 25-21, 25-21) sweep of Tunisia in the other Pool C encounter yesterday. Their triumph set up their do-or-die clash with their Iranian counterparts.

Marek Sotola had 12 points to pace the Czech side, while Yassine Abdelhedi led Tunisia with 10.

"It looks like an easy match but the truth is different," said Czech Republic team captain Ondrej Piskacek. "Tunisia played very well on service, especially on float service, so we had problems receiving."

"I also think we started a little bit nervous, but in the end of the sets we played with good defence and blocking. I think that was the key in winning the match."

YESTERDAY'S RESULTS

Pool A

China bt Puerto Rico 3-0 (25-23, 25-22, 25-23)

Bahrain bt Morocco 3-2 (25-14, 23-25, 25-21, 22-25, 15-12)

Pool B

Korea bt Egypt 3-0 (25-22, 25-18, 25-21)

Cuba bt Argentina 3-2 (25-23, 25-23, 19-25, 22-25, 15-13)

Pool C

Czech Republic bt Tunisia 3-0 (25-21, 25-21, 25-21)

Russia bt Iran 3-2 (21-25, 25-19, 23-25, 25-21, 16-14)

Pool D

Brazil bt Canada 3-0 (25-15, 25-19, 25-13)

Italy bt Poland 3-0 (25-23, 25-21, 28-26)

TODAY'S SCHEDULE

11.30am: Korea vs Argentina, Tunisia vs Russia

2pm: Cuba vs Egypt, Iran vs Czech Republic

4.30pm: Puerto Rico vs Morocco, Brazil vs Italy

7pm: China vs Bahrain, Poland vs Canada

For Korea, they enjoyed a straightforward 3-0 (25-22, 25-18, 25-21) win over Egypt and have assured they advance from Pool B. They face Argentina today in their final game of this phase. Cuba still have an outside chance but must win against Egypt and hope Korea beat Argentina.

Korea captain Donghyeok Im had 19 points to pace the winners. Donghyeok later commented: "This is just the first stage of the competition. We are happy now and quite satisfied to win,

but we still have a lot of matches to play. We will go one step at a time and we can show more of our abilities."

In Pool D, Brazil cruised past Canada 3-0 (25-15, 25-19, 25-13), led by the 14 points of Victor Aleksander Almeida Cardoso.

Brazil captain Rhendrick Resley Rosa commented: "We came to play this match in a very decisive manner. We came in for the kill. We didn't really start in the best situations but towards the third set, we had it all figured out and we played a lot better."



Bahrain's Hasan Mohamed goes for a power smash

Solskjaer targets more signings

AFP | Singapore

Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said yesterday the club is working on one or two more signings as he hopes to hit the ground running in the new campaign after stuttering badly towards the end of last season. Solskjaer enjoyed a stellar start after replacing Jose Mourinho in December, winning 10 and drawing two of his first 12 Premier League fixtures.

But a stunning slump in form saw the side finish sixth in the standings, 32 points behind champions Manchester City.

Aware that his imbalanced squad needed a major overhaul, Solskjaer has already recruited midfielder Daniel James and



Manchester United's Eric Bailly (C) takes part in a training session in Singapore

fullback Aaron Wan-Bissaka, with the club strongly linked to England central defender Harry Maguire and Portuguese playmaker Bruno Fernandes.

"We are working on one or two (signings). My objective here though is we have got to

get ready for the games and the training sessions," the Norwegian told reporters in Singapore on the eve of a pre-season friendly against Inter Milan.

"We are working on putting a squad together which can compete, we have lots of ways which

can play. The Premier League is a very competitive league. Our aim is to focus on ourselves, we have to be better and be our only focus. I am sure we will get closer to the top."

United have already seen midfielder Ander Herrera depart for Paris Saint-Germain and while question marks remain over the futures of Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku and the talismanic Paul Pogba, Solskjaer is continuing to prepare for the new season with the Frenchman central to his plans. "I am looking to get everyone to get their form back to when we first came in. It is not just about Pogba, it is about all of us as a team," he said, adding that Lukaku was not fit to face the Italian side today.

England's Stokes nominated for New Zealander of the Year award

Reuters | Wellington

After ripping the heart out of New Zealand's bleary-eyed cricket fans on Sunday with a man-of-the-match performance in the Cricket World Cup final, England all-rounder Ben Stokes has now been nominated for the New Zealander of the Year award.

The 28-year-old Stokes was born in New Zealand but grew up in England when his father Gerard moved there to take a rugby league coaching job.

Stokes remained in England when his parents returned home and carved out a successful cricketing career, scoring 84 not out in the final that helped his side to their maid-



England's Ben Stokes

en 50-over World Cup title at Lord's on Sunday. His exploits in the final earned some early nominations for the awards, as did New Zealand captain Kane Williamson, local media reported yesterday.

Nominations for the award only opened on July 1 and close on Sept. 15. A shortlist is confirmed in December with the winner named next February.

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