

# SPORTS

## sports

## Bahrain, UAE look to extend relations to combat sports

AFP | London

The Kingdom of Bahrain played host to a pivotal meeting regarding the future of combat sports in Asia and beyond. KHK Sports CEO Mohammed Shahid met with officials from the UAE Muay Thai and Kickboxing Federation in the presence of Ahmed Al-Wazzan, president of Bahrain Kickboxing Federation, as the parties discussed ways of developing all combat sports in the region.

The UAE Muay Thai and Kickboxing Federation is held under the patronage of His Highness Shaikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the deputy prime minister for the United Arab Emirates, while KHK Sports is an organization that represents the vision of His Highness Shaikh Khaled bin Hamad Al Khalifa and all his collective efforts toward the development of a global ecosystem for all sports, including mixed



From the left Farah Salem Saeed, Ahmed Al-Wazzan, Yasser Salem Al Saadi, Mohammed Shahid, Tareq Al Mheiri, Fahad Khalfan Al Abduoli and Valeria Lang

martial arts and other combat sports.

Attending the meeting on behalf of UAE was Yasser Salem Al Saadi, the vice-chairman for the federation. He was joined by Tareq Al Mheiri, board member and executive director of the federation, aside from being a

member of the executive board at IFMA (International Federation of Muaythai Associations), the Head of Activities department, Fahad Khalfan Al Abduoli, who's also a board member, as well as Farah Salem Saeed, a board member for the federation.

The discussion revolved around mutual contributions that could be made between two giants of the combat sports scene worldwide, in order to develop all sports in Asia and beyond. Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates want to make sure their great relationship

in all areas can also extend to the development of combat sports.

"It was a very productive meeting as we look to strengthen the development of combat sports across the Arab world, Asia, and beyond. I look forward to continuing that special rela-

tionship with the shared goals of improving and developing combat sports", said Shahid.

Al-Wazzan received an open invitation from the Federation to send a Bahrain team to the next tournaments in the organization's calendar.

"It's great to see GCC nations joining hands in order to develop combat sports in the region and beyond. I'm excited for the next steps of this collaboration", said Al-Wazzan.

Between September 5th and 7th, the UAE Federation will host the Muay-Thay Open Championship in Yas Island, and the Asian Muay Thai Championships will also take place in UAE, between December 16th and 22nd. The Bahrain Federation was invited to send a team to both tournaments, marking the start of a long and prosperous collaboration between the two friendly countries also on the field of combat sports.

## Top seeds Paire, Shapovalov reach Winston-Salem third round

● Paire rallies past Gunneswaran into round of 16

● Shapovalov downs Sandgren to advance

AFP | Washington

Top-seeded Benoit Paire reached the third round of the ATP Winston-Salem Open Tuesday, beating Prajnesh Gunneswaran 6-3, 7-5.

France's Paire, ranked 30th in the world, avenged a loss to India's Gunneswaran at Indian Wells in March.

Paire broke Gunneswaran in the penultimate game, then capped the contest with his 14th ace on match point to book a round of 16 meeting with fellow Frenchman Ugo Humbert, who defeated American Bjorn Fratangelo 3-6, 6-3, 6-2.

After enjoying a first-round bye, Paire was glad to get to work in the heat and humidity of North Carolina as part of his build-up to the US Open, which starts on Monday at Flushing Meadows in New York.

"Honestly, I like to play before the Slam," he said. "I did the same in Lyon the week before Roland Garros and I won the tournament and after I made the last 16 at Roland Garros so it was good preparation.

"I'll try to do the same -- I'll try to win a lot of matches here. I think it's important for me to play before the US Open."

Second-seeded Canadian Denis Shapovalov also advanced, beating American Ten-



Benoit Paire of France returns a shot against Prajnesh Gunneswaran of India

nys Sandgren 6-2, 6-4.

Sandgren, ranked 73rd in the world, was coming off a first-round victory over three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray, who was playing just his second singles match since the Australian Open as he bids to return to peak form in the wake of career-threatening hip surgery.

Sandgren battled back from 0-3 down in the second set -- going up a service break before Shapovalov came through with a break in the final game to seal the victory.

"It was definitely a great win," said Shapovalov, who hadn't made it past the second round of an ATP event since Lyon in May and, like Paire, said he hoped

a strong performance in Winston-Salem would be a springboard into the US Open.

"I've been struggling a little bit during the clay and grass court season and the hardcourt swing," he said. "I thought it would be perfect to come play Winston-Salem, get a couple more matches under my belt and get ready for the Open.

"So far, so good," said Shapovalov, who next faces Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic, a 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 winner over Australian Alexei Popyrin.

South Korean Lee Duck-hee's ground-breaking tournament came to an end with a 4-6, 6-0, 6-3 loss to third-seeded Hubert Hurkacz of Poland.

Lee had become the first deaf player to win an ATP match with his first-round win over Henri Laaksonen.

"I'm a little bit disappointed right now," Lee admitted. "I had many chances that I didn't utilise, but it was a great experience overall."

## Ajax finish with 10 men and a goalless draw in Cyprus

AFP | Paris

Ajax finished with 10 men on Tuesday but moved closer to the Champions League group stage with a 0-0 draw away to APOEL in Nicosia in a playoff round first-leg match.

The game was goalless but packed with incident. Ajax, a four-time winner of the competition and a semifinalist last season, dominated possession and created a string of promising situations.

But the lively home attack, with 22-year-old Jordanian Musa Suleiman showing some eye-catching form, created the most dangerous chances.

Ajax conceded a string of free kicks in the second half and Noussair Mazraoui paid the price when a flailing tackle on Uros Matic earned him a second yellow card with 10 minutes to play.

Veteran striker Klass Jan Huntelaar, who came on with 12 minutes left, had a clear opportunity to win the game in added time, but the 36-year-old's tame chip was cleared.

"We gave the ball away too easily and we must improve

next week," said Ajax attacker Dusan Tadic. "I expect the same compact defensive zone from APOEL in the second game. But we need to play much better."

While Ajax were disappointed with an away draw, Nicholas Ioannou, APOEL captain, was happy with his team's chances. "We played really well," he said. "We defended very well and had some good chances at the other end to score. We were quite unlucky not to. We still believe we can go through."

There was only goal from open play in the night's three matches, but it was a pretty strike to give Slavia Prague a 1-0 victory in Cluj.

Nicolae Stanciu played a 28th-minute corner to Lukas Masopust, lurking outside the penalty area. The midfielder flighted the ball into the far corner of the net with the gentlest of long-range volleys.

"We practiced those corner kicks two days ago and I couldn't hit the ball well," said Masopust adding that team captain Tomas Soucek "told me today to try it with the side-foot and it worked."



APOEL's midfielder Musa Suliman (C) is marked by Ajax's defender Nicolas Taglifico (L) and defender Daley Blind

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