



‘We Will Show Something Special’

Bahrain Begin Training Ahead of Gulf Cup Opener

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Bahrain held their first training session in Jeddah yesterday as preparations gathered pace for their title defence at the 27th Arabian Gulf Cup, also known as Khaleeji 27.

The defending champions took to the training pitch following their arrival in Saudi Arabia, with attention firmly on Thursday’s Group B opener against Qatar.

Head coach Dragan Talajic said the players would use the coming days to recover from their journey and ready themselves for what he expects to be a demanding campaign.

“A very big tournament is waiting for us,” the Croatian told the media. “It is a big challenge to defend our trophy and bring it back home. It will be difficult.”

Conditions in Jeddah will not be used as an excuse, he insisted, pointing out that every team faces the same circumstances.



Players jog during training in Jeddah

“Whoever wants to be champion will show it on the pitch,” he added. “We will show something special and hopefully stay for a long time here in Jeddah.”

The Reds head into Khaleeji 27 looking to retain the crown they won with a 2-1 comeback victory over Oman in the 2025 final in Kuwait. That triumph secured Bahrain’s second Gulf

Cup title following their maiden success in 2019.

Group A gets the tournament underway tomorrow, with Iraq facing Oman at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City Stadium at 5.30pm before hosts Saudi Arabia take on Kuwait at Alinma Bank Stadium at 9pm.

Group B begins on Thursday, with the UAE meeting Yemen

at Alinma at 6pm before Bahrain launch their title defence against Qatar at 9pm.

The kingdom then face the UAE on Sunday before rounding off their preliminary-round campaign against Yemen next Wednesday, with all three of their matches taking place at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City Stadium.

Muharraq Win Reversed By BFA



Mohammed Al Banna, second from right, with his teammates

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Muharraq have been stripped of their victory over Manama in the Nasser bin Hamad Premier League after fielding Mohammed Al Banna despite the player not being included on their official match list.

The Bahrain Football Association’s Disciplinary Committee ruled that the defending champions would forfeit the Matchweek Three encounter 3-0 and also fined the club BD100.

Al Banna came on as a substitute despite his name not appearing on the team sheet submitted to the match commissioner or referee, in breach of competition regulations.

The Red Wolves had initially won the September 10 fix-

ture 3-1, with Arthur Rezende opening the scoring before Zachary Al Hadji equalised. Juninho then struck twice in the second half to seal what had appeared to be Muharraq’s first victory of the campaign.

Following the ruling, newly promoted Manama are instead credited with their first win of the season, having drawn their opening match before losing their second.

The match had come after a difficult start to Muharraq’s title defence, with the champions collecting just one point from their opening two games, prompting the departure of Bahraini coach Isa Al Saadoon.

Mohammed Adnan Ayoub subsequently took charge on an interim basis before the club appointed Portuguese tactician Helder Cristovao as their new head coach.

‘Best is yet to come,’ says De la Fuente after Spain extension

AFP | Madrid

Spain’s World Cup-winning coach Luis de la Fuente said he is convinced “the best is yet to come” with the national team after renewing his contract until 2032 yesterday.

De la Fuente, 65, has led Spain to their second World Cup triumph, Euro 2024 glory and a UEFA Nations League title since taking over from Luis Enrique four years ago.

“There are still many good things that we’re going to be able to enjoy,” De la Fuente said during an event at the Spanish football federation (RFEF) headquarters near Madrid, shortly after his extension was announced.

De la Fuente spent a decade working with Spain’s youth teams before stepping up to the senior role in 2022, winning 38 of 50 matches in charge.

He also led Spain’s Under-17s and Under-21s to European titles, and guided the country to a silver medal at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021.

“We’re talking about the most successful head coach in the history of the national team, and after 14 years with us, this is something Luis de la Fuente



Spain’s coach Luis de la Fuente (C) smiles after being tossed by players as they celebrate on a stage at Cibeles Square in Madrid (file photo)

deserves, a long-term future at the RFEF,” said federation president Rafael Louzan.

“We are seeking stability and confidence, for Luis, for his entire staff and for the players.”

Louzan explained that although the focus had been on 2030, when Spain will co-host with World Cup with neighbours Portugal and Morocco, he decided to extend the offer by a further two years.

“Hopefully he can continue beyond 2032, but the least we could do was offer a contract

”
There are still many good things that we’re going to be able to enjoy

LUIS DE LA FUENTE

until 2032 to what is probably Spain’s most decorated national team coach, with all due respect to great coaches such as Vicente del Bosque and others,” said Louzan.

“I think it is the right thing

to do, what Luis deserves,” he added.

While no details of the new contract have been disclosed, local media reported that the Spain coach has secured a significant pay rise.

Plotting more success

De la Fuente said in the aftermath of the World Cup final victory over Argentina in New Jersey in July that his focus had already turned to the future, and he reiterated that message yesterday.

“We are not satisfied with what we have achieved so far. The best is yet to come,” said De la Fuente.

“I’m especially excited about making it to the 2030 World Cup, but I am also excited about reaching Euro 2032,” he added.

“And because I am very competitive, I’m going to give it everything I’ve got.”

Spain travel to England on September 26 in their first game since lifting the World Cup before hosting Croatia three days later in Seville, to start their Nations League campaign.

They return home to play the Czech Republic in Oviedo on October 3 and end the international window by heading to Croatia three days later.

Bahrain endure tough 3x3 start



Alanzoor drives past an Indonesian opponent

Hussain Almaskati
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Bahrain suffered back-to-back defeats on their Asian Games 3x3 basketball debut yesterday, going down 21-2 to holders Chinese Taipei before a closer 14-10 loss to Indonesia.

Competing in Group C at Nagoya’s Kinjo Futo Station Square, the Bahrainis endured a difficult start before putting up a stronger challenge in their second outing.

Chinese Taipei reached the 21-point winning mark after eight minutes and 26 seconds, led by Chang Chun-sheng with nine points.

Naser Alanzoor scored Bahrain’s only two points, with his team converting just one of 12 attempts from two-point range.

Against Indonesia, the nationals remained within striking distance throughout the 10-minute contest, with Mohamed Qambar and Alanzoor scoring four points apiece and Isa Jasim adding two.

Bahrain converted seven of their 13 one-point attempts, but struggled from distance once again, making only one of 11 two-pointers as Indonesia held on for victory.

Elsewhere in Group C, Qatar made a perfect start with a 10-7 win over Indonesia before beating Chinese Taipei 18-15.

Back-to-back losses leave the kingdom seeking its first win when it faces the Qataris in tomorrow’s final preliminary-round fixture at 8.30am, Bahrain time.

Attention then turns to Thursday’s knockout phase, with the men’s play-in games followed by the quarter-finals later that day.

Friday brings the semi-finals and medal contests, culminating in the men’s gold-medal game at 1.30pm.

This marks Bahrain’s first appearance in Asian Games 3x3 basketball, with the discipline featuring at the continental showpiece for only the third time since its 2018 debut.