

Bahrain claim last-gasp win to advance

Nationals edge past Saudi Arabia into semi-finals of Asian Men's Handball, qualify for World championship

TDI | Manama

Ahmed Fadhul sent Bahrain into the semi-finals of the 2020 Asian Men's Handball Championship yesterday after firing in the winning goal in a dramatic 18-17 victory over Saudi Arabia in their concluding main round game at Shaikh Saad Al Abdulla Sports Hall Complex in Kuwait City.

Fadhul scored from the six-metre line on the right wing just as time expired, gifting the Bahrainis the last-gasp win and surviving a scare in the competition, where they have been billed as one of the pre-tournament favourites.

With yesterday's result, the Bahrainis also earned one of the four coveted berths in the 2021 IHF World Men's Handball Championship in Egypt. It will be their fourth appearance at the global competition following their previous participations in 2011, 2017 and 2019.

Bahrain are advancing to the Asian tournament's final four as runners-up from Group One in the main round. They completed the stage with two wins from three matches for four points.

Japan were the group winners with a full six points. They closed out this phase with a comfortable 31-19 win against the UAE yesterday.

The Emiratis end the main round in third place with one victory and they now play in



Bahrain's Almaqabi attempts to score against Saudi

GROUP A STANDINGS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan	3	3	0	0	86	64	6
Bahrain	3	2	0	1	70	60	4
UAE	3	1	0	2	60	80	2
Saudi Arabia	3	0	0	3	59	71	0

the game for fifth place; while Saudi, who were winless in three outings, will play for seventh overall.

Bahrain face Group Two winners Qatar in the semi-finals, which are scheduled to take place tomorrow. It will be a re-match of the final of the 2019 edition of the tournament, which the Qataris won to claim the gold medals. Bahrain will

be hoping to reverse that result this year.

The Japanese, on the other hand, face either South Korea or Iran, whoever finishes as runners-up in Group Two. The other team in their division, hosts Kuwait, have been eliminated from further contention and will take on Saudi for seventh on the final classification.

Bahrain got off to a brilliant



Bahrain's Al Sayyad looks to attack the Saudi defence

start yesterday as they took a commanding 5-0 lead against the Saudis. They continued to have firm control of the contest at the half with a 10-6 advantage.

In the final 30 minutes, however, the Bahrainis were shaky and they began to let their opponents back into the game. In the dying minutes, the Saudis were able to go ahead by a single goal but Bahrain's Ali Mirza was able to level the proceedings once more. The Saudis were then un-

able to find the net on their final possession, giving the ball back to Bahrain with less than half-a-minute to play.

The Bahrainis were initially stopped in their first attempt to score, but after regrouping, Fadhul received the ball at the right corner of the court and then timed his move perfectly, taking a shot at the game's very last second and scoring the winner past the Saudi goalkeeper as the final buzzer went off.

The goal was one of four from Fadhul in the contest. Teammate Ahmed Almaqabi was Bahrain's leading scorer with five. Mirza and Mahdi Saad each finished with two, while Ali Eid, Hasan Al Samahiji, Bilal Askani, Jassim Alsalatna and team captain Hussain Al Sayyad all finished with one goal.

Ahmed Hazazi and Sadiq Al-mohsen both topped the Saudi scoresheet with four goals apiece.

Nadal, Kyrgios through as freak weather hits Australian Open



Spain's Rafael Nadal hits a return against Argentina's Federico Delbonis

AFP | Melbourne

Rafael Nadal and Nick Kyrgios reached the Australian Open third round on Thursday after the weather-disrupted tournament faced a new challenge: dirty rain which left courts muddy and unplayable.

After a day of clean-up operations and delays, Australia's Kyrgios fought his way past Frenchman Gilles Simon in four sets and Wimbledon champion Simona Halep stamped her class with a win over Britain's Harriet Dart.

Nadal, a 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 winner over Argentina's Federico Delbonis, miscued a shot that hit a ballgirl in the head, but he melted hearts when he apologised and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

"I was so scared for her, honestly," the 19-time Grand Slam winner said. "The ball was quick and straight on the head. She's a very brave girl."

Kyrgios, increasingly popular with home fans after his fundraising efforts for Australia's bushfire crisis, was cruising at two sets up when

he dropped the third set and with it, his composure.

But just when it looked like he would suffer one of his trademark implosions, he rallied for a 6-2, 6-4, 4-6, 7-5 victory.

"I definitely lost my way a little bit... but I decided to re-focus," Kyrgios said of his mini-meltdown in the third set. "I could have gone to a very dark place in the fourth set but I put it away."

Kyrgios and Nadal stay on course for a fourth-round clash and the next instalment in their grudge match after the Aussie hit back at criticism from the "super salty" Spaniard last year.

Their victories followed a day of upheaval caused by the dirty rain, the latest weather problem at a tournament which has contended with bushfire smoke, heavy downpours and strong wind.

Rain mixed with a dust storm coated the Melbourne Park facilities in a fine layer of mud which took hours to clean and made many outside courts temporarily unusable.

Vincent names 24 players to prepare for Fiba Asian Cup qualifiers



BBA president Kanoo, seated third from left, and Coach Vincent, seated third from right, with other BBA officials and national team players during their meeting

TDI | Manama

The Bahrain Basketball Association (BBA) have named an initial 24-player national team that will begin training for Bahrain's upcoming qualifiers for the 2021 Fiba Asia Cup.

Those games are scheduled to begin next month and Bahrain are in Group D of the qualifiers along with India, Lebanon and Iraq.

The Bahrainis' first game will be against their Indian counterparts at home on February 21. They then travel directly to Beirut to play against their Lebanese counterparts on February 24.

The 24 players named to the national team include four from defending league champions

Muharrag, namely Bader Abdulla Malabes, Ahmed Aldurazi, Ali Shukrallah and Mohammed Buallay; four from Khalifa bin Salman Cup holders Riffa, including Kuwayed brothers Mohammed and Younes, Subah Hussain and Mohammed Salman; five from Al Ahli including Mohammed Qurban, Maytham Jameel, Hesham Sarhan, Ali Aqel and Hassan Al Arabi; and nine from Manama, namely Mohammed Hussain, Ahmed Najaf, Ahmed Abdulaziz, Mustafa Hussain, Hussain Shaker, Ahmed Salman, Mohammed Jassim and Ameer brothers Mohammed and Muzamel.

The roster is completed by Ahmed Khalifa from Al Hala and naturalised big man CJ Giles from Al Najma.

The BBA recently held a meeting with the players, headed by BBA president Talal Kanoo and attended by newly signed national team head coach Sam Vincent from the US.

Vincent's assistant coach is Ayoub Haji.

Following next month's qualifiers, there will then be a long break before their next game on November 26 away against Iraq, after which they place away once again against India on November 29.

Their final two qualifiers will be held in February of next year, both at home against Lebanon and then Iraq.

The top two teams from each of the six qualification groups book their tickets to the Fiba Asia Cup, while the third-placed

teams go to another stage of qualification, where another four final spots will be up for grabs.

Meanwhile, the draw for the Khalifa bin Salman Cup 2020 will be held on Sunday at Zain Basketball Arena in Um Al-Hassam.

The Bahrain Basketball Association (BBA) have done all the preparations for the event.

BBA board member Osama Al Kooheji said that Muharrag and Manama have been chosen to head the two groups of the competition's first round, based on the results of the preliminary stage of the Bahrain league.

Al Kooheji added that each team will be allowed to field two professional players in the tournament.