

# Road to Asia 2029 begins

Hussain Almaskati  
TDT | Manama

Bahrain begin their FIBA Asia Cup 2029 pre-qualifying campaign today when they face Gulf rivals Oman in Dubai.

Tip-off is at 4pm Bahrain time, with the contest marking Greek-Slovenian head coach Slobodan Subotic's first official tournament since taking charge of the kingdom's senior men.

Drawn in Group A alongside Oman, hosts the UAE, Kuwait and Nepal, Bahrain must finish among the top three to advance to the second round. All group matches are being staged in Dubai.

Subotic has selected a 12-man squad featuring brothers Mustafa and Ali Hussain, Ahmed Salman, Mohammed Buallay, Mohammed Ghazi, Ali Jaber, Ahmed Bindayneh, Mohammed Nasser, Ahmed Alderazi, Mahmood Abbas, JaKarr Sampson and Somto Patrick Onoduenyi.

Since arriving in the UAE, the Reds have continued their preparations with training sessions in Dubai ahead of today's opener.

Their clash with Oman begins a demanding run of four match-

es in five days. With limited recovery time between games, Bahrain will need to manage the physical and technical demands of the schedule as they chase one of the three qualification places.

Subotic's side return to action tomorrow at 7pm for another Gulf encounter, this time against hosts the UAE.

A rest day follows on Saturday before Bahrain meet Nepal on Sunday at 4pm. They conclude their Group A campaign against Kuwait on Monday at 7pm. All times are Bahrain.

A total of 18 national teams are competing in the opening round of pre-qualification, with 17 from Asia joined by Oceania representatives Fiji. The field is divided into four groups being contested at centralised venues across the continent.

Group B in Almaty features hosts Kazakhstan, Palestine, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Kyrgyzstan. Indonesia, Hong Kong,

Guard Mahmood Khalifa during media day



Singapore and hosts Malaysia make up Group C in Seremban, while Group D in Ulaanbaatar comprises hosts Mongolia, Thailand, Vietnam

and Fiji.

With three teams progressing from each group, 12 nations will advance to the second round, scheduled for the international window from November 23 to December 1.

Those sides will form two groups of six, with the top three from Groups A and B comprising Group E and the top three from Groups C and D forming Group F. The top four from each will earn places in the FIBA Asia Cup 2029 Qualifiers, joining the 16 nations that competed at the 2025 continental tournament in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Beyond their qualifying ambitions, the Dubai campaign also provides Bahrain with competitive action ahead of next month's 20th Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan.

The kingdom are among 12 teams entered in the men's five-on-five basketball competition and have been drawn in Group C alongside defending champions the Philippines, China and Kazakhstan.

## India close in on win despite Sri Lanka fightback



India's wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant (2R) stumps out Sri Lanka's Pasindu Sooriyabandara (C)

AFP | Colombo

India are closing in on a big win in Colombo after Sri Lanka slumped to 229-6 at stumps on day four of the second Test, having been made to follow-on yesterday.

Sri Lanka lead by just 16 runs with four wickets in hand and going into the fifth and final day the tourists will be looking to complete a 2-0 series sweep.

Sonal Dinusha, who batted superbly for a hundred in the first innings, was unbeaten on seven with Keshara Numantha (three) for company when rain forced play to end

early.

Sri Lanka, who resumed the day on 265-8 in response to India's 503-9 declared, were bowled out for 290 and asked to bat again.

"We wanted to insert the follow-on knowing very well that there is lot of rain around," India's spin bowling coach Sairaj Bahutule said on the team's decision to enforce the follow-on.

"We knew that it was going to be tough on the bowlers, but everyone felt that we should put them in again. Great to see the character shown by the bowlers, stay patient and create those opportunities.

# EXCLUSIVE Israel sends statement with another KO

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Okafor Israel continued his unbeaten start to professional boxing with another explosive finish, knocking out India's Devendra Mukkar in the first round at the Rise to Glory event in Bengaluru on Saturday.

The Nigerian-born cruiserweight, who represents Bahrain and fights out of Underground Gym, had prepared for six rounds but required only the opening session to improve his professional record to 4-0.

The victory followed his 57-second stoppage of Egypt's Medhat AlHusiny in Dubai in May.

### Acknowledging support

Speaking exclusively to The Daily Tribune, Israel was quick to shift the credit towards those who have backed him.

"I wanna thank ELROI, the God of my journey, my manager Mr. Miller, my family at Underground Gym, and my sponsors Smallgod, Mr. Ebrahim and Mr. Alem for their support and encouragement," he said.

"They saw what others couldn't."

### Fight strategy

Despite the swift outcome in India, Israel had entered the contest expecting a much longer night. His plan was to work through the six rounds and put on a show for the crowd, but the complexion of the fight soon changed.

"I wanted to go the distance, to entertain the fans," he explained. "However, it changed when I got hit on the back of the head and when I figured that the referee gave him more time to recover after the second knockdown.

"I stayed calm, read his reactions and waited for the right opening. Once I saw the opportunity, I stepped in with the combination we had been working on and landed clean.

"From there, I didn't give him any chance to recover. I trusted my timing and finished the job."



Okafor Israel awaits the opening bell

The fighter also credited his preparations at Underground Gym for helping him arrive ready for the contest.

"My team and I worked a lot on timing, distance, explosive combinations and finishing once the opportunity presented itself," he said.

"We also focused heavily on staying composed under pressure. Everything came together in the fight, and I was able to execute what we worked on in camp."

### Building momentum

The performance carried added significance after his rapid stoppage in his last appearance, with Israel keen to show he could reproduce that level on his next outing.

"I didn't want the Dubai victory to be seen as a one-off," he said. "I wanted to show that I'm consistent, improving and capable of delivering at a high level every time I step into the ring.

"This victory confirms that the hard work is paying off."

Bengaluru also offered a different experience, with Israel relishing the opportunity to perform in front of a new crowd.

"Fighting in India was different from my previous professional appearances, especially with the crowd and the energy in Bengaluru," he said.

"The atmosphere was electric, and being able to perform in front of that crowd made the occasion even more special. I really enjoyed every moment



Israel has his hands wrapped pre-fight

of it."

### Cruiserweight ambitions

Israel is now looking to build on his unbeaten start by taking on bigger challenges in the cruiserweight division.

"I'm not focused on who is noticing me," he said. "I'm focused on improving, staying disciplined and taking on bigger challenges. I want the best opponents in the division."

Competing internationally also carries particular meaning for Israel as he represents Bahrain.

"Every time I compete internationally, I carry Bahrain and my team with me," he said.

"Getting another victory while rep-

resenting the Kingdom, especially on a stage in India, is something I'm very proud of. I'm grateful to everyone who continues to support me and my journey."

### Looking ahead

Attention has already turned to what comes next, with Israel eager to get back in action.

"I'm healthy, motivated and already thinking about the next challenge," he said.

"I'd like to be back in the ring as soon as the right opportunity comes. I'm targeting bigger events, tougher opponents and opportunities that can take my career to the next level."