

Ismail Abdullatif eyes coaching after retirement

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Two weeks after hanging his shoes, Bahrain's record goalscorer Ismail Abdullatif (Soma) has declared his retirement a tabula rasa as he weighs coaching, club work and a possible move into the media.

The former Bahrain striker said he was already in talks with Al-Khaldiya over what comes next. He had once favoured an office role, but now feels drawn towards coaching and work on the football side.

'I am against someone judging Ismail and saying, "This is your limit. Retire",' he said. 'I believe this is the right time.'

He does not see retirement as a break with football, nor as a chance to reopen old rows.

He said he bore no ill will towards the clubs or people he had dealt with and wanted to keep sound ties across the game.

His career took in one of Bahraini football's most bitter transfer rows, when he left Al-Hala for Al-Nasr of Oman in a bid to win control over his own future.

Abdullatif said players at the time often had no sound contracts, fixed pay or freedom to choose where they played. He likened the system to 'slavery', saying clubs held power over a player's career and income.

With help from a Kuwaiti agent, he moved to Oman in a planned bid to become a free player. Al-Hala responded by banning him for two years.

Many supporters believed Al-Muharraq had arranged the move. Abdullatif denied this, saying he acted alone and had no talks with the club while the deal was being worked on.



Ismail Abdullatif

He later moved to Al-Muharraq and spent much of his career there before leaving for Al-Khaldiya.

That switch, he said, was the hardest choice of his playing life.

Abdullatif said he chose to take the risk despite the strain of leaving a club with which he had become closely linked.

'I am a bit stubborn,' he said. 'I like a challenge. You say Ismail cannot do it? Let us see.'

Abdullatif also spoke of Bahrain's golden generation and the huge support it received from His Highness Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa and His Highness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

Yet the side never reached the World Cup.

He blamed uneven form and missed chances, pointing to the qualifier against Hong Kong as a match that badly hurt Bahrain's hopes.

The greatest prize of his international career came in 2019, when Bahrain won the Gulf Cup for the first time.

Injury kept him out of the playing squad, but Abdullatif stayed close to the players, coaches and club staff throughout the tournament.

He said the win still felt as though he had played every minute because the joy spread far beyond those on the pitch.

The lasting image came when he and goalkeeper Sayed Mohammed Jaffer were chosen to receive and lift the cup in Doha.

Plans had been made for the two senior players to take part in the ceremony, giving them a place in a victory that had taken Bahrain decades to reach.

Abdullatif described receiving the trophy from the Amir of Qatar as almost unreal. The scenes in Doha, followed by the celebrations in Bahrain, remain among his strongest memories.

He also recalled words from His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa that drove him on late in his career.

'Do not listen to them when they say you are old,' the King told him, according to Abdullatif.



Retirement is a new beginning, not the end of my journey in football

ISMAIL ABDULLATIF

He said the words pushed him to carry on for several years and helped him shut out calls to retire before he felt ready.

His mother, he added, was the main force behind him throughout his playing years. Her prayers and support mattered more to him than praise from the stands.

He also said football should bring people together rather than split them by club colours, arguing that friendships made away from the pitch outlast old rivalries.

Years at Al-Muharraq and with the national side also taught him how to deal with public criticism.

He said he built a mental 'shield' against attacks on social media and learnt to judge himself by his work rather than outside noise.

Abdullatif has tried business before, including a gym, but said his main strength and interest still lie within football.

Coaching and club management remain the clearest paths. Media work and podcasting are also under consideration.

He admitted that formal events can still make him nervous, but said he feels at ease in open interviews and long-form talks.

For now, there is no bitterness and no wish to settle old scores.

His playing days are over. The next page, he said, is blank.

Ebrahim Nader Secures Historic British Race Victory



Ebrahim Nader
Manama



Yusuf Buheji



Bahraini jockey Ebrahim Nader's achievement on British racecourses reflects the competence and ability of Bahraini jockeys to compete and achieve international success

YUSUF BUHEJI

Bahraini jockey Ebrahim Nader achieved a new milestone for Bahraini horseracing by claiming his first victory on British racecourses with a win in a handicap race riding the horse Distinct Spirit at Ffos Las Racecourse in the United Kingdom.

On this occasion, Mr. Yusuf Osama Buheji, Undersecretary for Research and Projects at the Prime Minister's Office, Member of the High Committee of the Rashid Equestrian and Horseracing Club (REHC), and Acting Chief Executive Officer, affirmed that this outstanding achievement reflects the continued support extended to Bahrain's sports sector, particularly equestrianism and horseracing, by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, and the directives of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister. He noted that this has contributed to strengthening the Kingdom of Bahrain's standing on the sporting stage and enhancing its presence at regional and international championships and sporting events. He also highlighted the significant efforts and continued support of His Highness Shaikh Isa bin Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Minister of the Prime Minister's Court and Chairman of the REHC High Committee, in developing the sport, which have contributed to further achievements and enabled the Kingdom of Bahrain to reach regional and international podiums.

Mr. Buheji congratulated jockey Ebrahim Nader on this achievement, praising his outstanding performance, which earned him his first victory on British racecourses. He emphasized that this accomplishment reflects the success of the development programmes implemented by the Bahrain Jockey Foundation in preparing and developing Bahraini jockeys, and demonstrates the competence and ability of Bahraini jockeys to compete suc-

cessfully and achieve international success. He wished him continued success and further positive results in his upcoming competitions.

In line with the vision of the High Committee of the REHC, chaired by His Highness Shaikh Isa bin Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Club, through the Bahrain Jockey Foundation, continues to implement programmes aimed at investing in Bahraini talent and providing development opportunities that enable Bahraini jockeys to gain further experience and strengthen their presence on international racecourses.

This victory came during Ebrahim Nader's participation in the training programme implemented by the Bahrain Jockey Foundation. The programme aims to prepare Bahraini jockeys and provide them with the opportunity to gain practical experience through training and participation in British races, contributing to the further development of their abilities and the refinement of their skills in a professional racing environment.

U18 Gulf basketball championship reaches climax

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Bahrain's U18 men's national basketball team will take on hosts Qatar today with the Gulf Basketball Association (GBA) U18 Championship title on the line in Doha.

The game is scheduled to tip off at 7pm Bahrain time.

Both teams have already secured qualification for the Fiba U18 Asia Cup 2026 in Ahmedabad, India, after sealing the top two places in the Gulf qualifying tournament. Today's meeting will determine the championship winners.

Bahrain head into the contest with an unbeaten record after opening their campaign with a commanding 106-51 victory over Kuwait. The kingdom followed that with a 62-54 win over Saudi Arabia before cruising to a 94-49 triumph over Oman.

Arab Youth Championship Most Valuable Player Somto Patrick Onoduenyi has been one of Bahrain's standout performers. He registered 19 points



Yousif Meshael in action for Bahrain

and 15 rebounds against Oman, while Mohamed Adel Abdulla and Yousif Yaqoob Meshael each contributed 14 points.

Qatar have also enjoyed an impressive run on home court. The hosts edged Saudi Arabia 80-76 in their opener, with Abdullah Yassin leading the way with 24 points, before defeating Kuwait 81-53. They then overcame Oman yesterday to remain unbeaten heading into today's decisive encounter.

Head coach Salman Ramadhan will be hoping Bahrain can finish the tournament on a high by adding the Gulf title to the Arab Youth Men's Basketball Championship crown they captured earlier this month.

With Bahrain's qualification confirmed, 15 of the 16 places at this year's Fiba U18 Asia Cup have now been decided. The kingdom joins defending champions Australia, China, Chinese Taipei, hosts India, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Lebanon, New Zealand, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Syria and Thailand. One place remains available.