

Bahrain Victorious hail Martinez’s tour breakthrough

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Bahrain Victorious have praised Lenny Martinez’s breakthrough performance at the 2026 Tour de France, with sports director Enrico Gasparotto highlighting the French rider’s maturity and leadership during the three-week race.

Martinez, who turned 23 during this year’s Tour, finished fifth overall after emerging as Bahrain Victorious’ general classification leader when pre-race team leader Antonio Tiberi struggled in the opening week.

The Italian outfit had initially built their campaign around Tiberi but shifted their strategy as Martinez continued to impress.

“We began with Antonio Ti-



Lenny Martínez at the 2026 Tour de France

beri as our rider for the general classification, but he did not have the legs for it,” Gasparotto said. “The internal dynamics changed, and it took us about a week to adapt and focus on the general classification with Lenny, with Antonio moving into a support role.”

Gasparotto said Martinez’s calm personality proved vital as Bahrain Victorious rallied around him during the second half of the race.

“When you have a personality who brings calm and composure to his teammates, as Lenny did during the second and third weeks, you already have a major advantage,” he said. “Lenny helped the group grow and, from a certain point onwards, united everyone.”

He also praised Martinez’s consistency throughout the

Tour.

“Finishing fifth in a Tour de France of this level, and above all doing so while getting stronger, is an excellent sign.”

Gasparotto also compared Martinez’s performance with that of highly rated French teenager Paul Seixas, who finished one place ahead of him in fourth.

While Seixas faded during the closing stages of the race, Gasparotto said Martinez continued to improve as the Tour progressed.

“It was exactly the opposite with Martinez,” he said. “His performance was outstanding. He played a key role during the final two days. When you consider that even Paul Seixas, the most highly rated young talent, paid the price, it was exactly the opposite with Martinez.”

Gasparotto also urged French fans and media to avoid placing excessive expectations on the young rider following his breakout Tour.

“I just hope the French do not put too much pressure on him,” he said. “Lenny comes from a cycling family. Both his father and grandfather were riders. I think this result makes the entire Martinez family proud.”

Bahrain Victorious will now turn their attention to the Rennewi Tour, which takes place from August 19 to 23, before also competing in La Vuelta a España, running from August 22 to September 13, where Pau Miquel is set to represent the team. The squad will then race in the Bretagne Classic - CIC on August 30 as they continue their UCI WorldTour campaign.

FIFA hit by furious backlash over plans to sell stake in competitions

Opposition grows as FIFA defends plans to raise billions through new commercial entity

- Infantino offers associations \$40 million for backing
- Opponents label offered payments as pure bribery
- Regional bodies express deep concern and disappointment
- Council approval still pending

AFP | Paris

There was a furious backlash on Wednesday to FIFA’s controversial plans to sell a stake in the business operations of the World Cup and its other competitions through the creation of a private subsidiary.

World football’s governing body had said yesterday it would retain a majority share in FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE) but hoped to raise \$4.2 billion later this year by “carefully selecting long-term investors who will purchase minority, non-controlling interests”.

Various media outlets reported on Wednesday that FIFA president Gianni Infantino had sent a letter to the associations saying they will each receive \$40 million if they back the plan -- but they must sign up by September 19.

“In total for the upcoming cycle starting as of January 1, 2027, each member association will have the possibility of access up to \$40 million per member association under this proposal,” said Infantino.

The Times -- which broke the original story yesterday -- said sources opposed to the plan had labelled it “pure bribery”.



President Donald Trump and FIFA President Gianni Infantino hold the FIFA World Cup Winner’s Trophy (file photo)

\$40mn

is offered by FIFA President Gianni Infantino to each member association that backs the controversial World Cup stake sale by September 19

UEFA had issued a blunt statement regarding the plan and was due to hold an emergency meeting later on Wednesday according to France’s sports minister.

“Many in European football see FIFA’s plans as an outright attack on football. I share this view. A line has been crossed here,” Hans-Joachim Watzke, a vice-president of UEFA’s executive committee, told Germany’s Kicker.

The Times reported Infantino, 56, stood to profit from the scheme by becoming com-

missioner of the FFE after his expected next term expires in 2031. FIFA denied that this had been discussed.

The article also said discussion had started with financial advisors and potential investors.

Those include Thrive capital, an investment company founded and led by Joshua Kushner, brother of US President Donald Trump’s son-in-law Jared, as well as an arm of JP Morgan Chase, the US bank that attempted to finance the failed breakaway European Super League.

UEFA, which has regularly criticised Infantino, said the plan “crosses a line”.

“The soul and governance of football are not assets to trade -- especially with zero transparency as to who gains financially. None of us are the owners of football. It is not FIFA’s to sell.”

The European Union made no bones about their disdain for the plan.

“Hands off our game,” Glenn

BETTER YOU KNOW

FIFA aims to raise \$4.2 billion by selling minority, non-controlling stakes in its newly proposed subsidiary, FIFA Forward Enterprise, which it values at an initial equity valuation of \$20 billion

Micallef, the EU commissioner for Sport, posted on X.

CONCACAF, which governs North and Central American football, said it was “deeply concerned by the lack of due process”.

The Asian Football Confederation said it was “disappointed” it had not been consulted.

The plan would still have to be approved by the 38-member FIFA council and the majority of its 211 member associations (MAS). FIFA said it intends to present the plans to the council soon.

‘Further expanded’

FIFA said in its statement that it “would retain sole control of FFE and exclusive authority over football governance, competitions, match calendar, and all regulatory and sporting decisions”.

It said it believed FFE would achieve an “initial equity valuation of \$20bn”.

FIFA said each of its MAS would be given the chance to take a one-off stake of \$20mn in FFE.

That represents only 0.1 percent of the total, but would be a significant sum for the leaderships of FIFA’s poorer or smaller members.

Muharraq step up season preparations



Players depart for their pre-season training camp in Turkey

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Bahraini football giants Muharraq have departed for a two-week pre-season training camp in Turkey as they begin preparations for the 2026-27 campaign under new head coach Isa Al Saadoon.

The Bahraini tactician takes charge following the departure of Portuguese coach Fernando Manuel de Jesus Santos, who guided Muharraq to a remarkable domestic double last season.

Muharraq enter the new campaign as reigning Nasser bin Hamad Premier League champions after securing a record-extending 35th league title, while also lifting their 20th His Majesty the King’s Cup. The club also retained the league crown to complete back-to-back championship-winning seasons.

The training camp will run from July 29 to August 13 and includes four friendly matches

as Al Saadoon begins shaping his squad ahead of the new season.

Muharraq will face UAE side Fujairah on August 2, Egyptian club ZED FC on August 6, and Algerian outfit ES Sétif on August 9. Their final warm-up fixture is scheduled for August 12 against an opponent yet to be confirmed.

The travelling squad comprises 27 players: Sayed Mohammed Jaafar, Waleed Al Hayam, Amine Benaddi, Hussain Jameel, Ahmed Al Sherooqi, Abdulla Al Khulasi, Hasan Al Karrani, Ahmed Ra-beea, Mohamed Al Banna, Abdulwahab Al Malood, Soufian Mahrouq, Hussain Abdulkarim, Ashraf Al Sebaei, Edimar Ribeiro da Costa Junior, Mohammed Al Hardan, Ahmed Bughammar, Abdulkarim Diarra, Elliott Simoes, Gervasio Oliveira, Abdulwahab Hanan, Vladan Dekic, Arthur Rezende, Ibrahim Sanad, Abdulla Jamal, Anderson Leite, Facundo Tobares and Sami Bassam.

Tel on target as Tottenham held to 1-1 draw by Sydney FC

AFP | Sydney

Tottenham striker Mathys Tel scored a stunning freekick as the London club were held to a 1-1 draw by Sydney FC on Wednesday in a setback to their pre-season momentum.

Frenchman Tel produced a glorious strike on 29 minutes but Roberto De Zerbi’s team failed to capitalise and Sydney’s new Japanese signing Takahiro Sekine levelled early in the second half.

They played a penalty shoot-out, which Spurs won 4-2.