

Third Asian title beckons for Bahrain

Young Warriors battle past Iran to set up Qatar title clash

Hussain Almaskati

Bahrain marched into the final of the 11th Asian Men's Youth Handball Championship last night after overcoming Iran 26-23 in a hard-fought semi-final at Princess Sumaya Hall in Amman, Jordan.

The kingdom's under-19 handball team, who secured qualification for next year's IHF Men's Youth Handball World Championship with their quarter-final victory over Saudi Arabia, held a slender 14-13 advantage at half-time before outscoring the Iranians 12-10 over the final 30 minutes.

Bahrain will now face Gulf rivals Qatar in the gold medal game tomorrow as they bid to capture their third Asian youth crown.

Qatar booked their place in the final with a 32-28 victory over South Korea in yesterday's other semi-final.

The Bahrainis, coached by Mohamed Soliman, made the brighter start despite conceding the opening goal, responding with four unanswered strikes to move 4-1 ahead after eight minutes.

Sayed Majeed Almuhafda

struck twice on breakthroughs during that early surge, but Mohammadreza Rajabi's Iran gradually fought their way back and drew level at 6-6 in the 17th minute.

Little separated the teams for the remainder of the opening period, with the scores level on several occasions. Sayed Omran Almahafdha converted three seven-metre penalties to help keep Bahrain in front, before Hasan Saif struck from centre back to make it 13-12.

Iran levelled once more, but Mohamed Marzooq finished a fast break in the closing seconds to send Bahrain into the interval 14-13 ahead.

The youngsters carried that momentum into the second half as Saif struck from centre back and Mahmood Ahmed followed with a long-range effort to stretch their advantage to 16-13.

Ahmed then converted on the fast break to make it 17-14, but Iran refused to go away and eventually restored parity at 18-18 in the 42nd minute, setting up a tense final stretch.

The Warriors responded superbly.



Bahrain's U19 handball team celebrate after booking their spot in the final

Ahmed put them back in front with a strike from the left wing before Mahdi Ali scored twice on breakthroughs to help establish a 21-19 advantage. Marzooq then struck from the left wing to make it 22-20, before Ali converted a seven-metre penalty to stretch the gap to three with four minutes remaining.

Bahrain goalkeeper Ali Almahroos also played a key role

in keeping Iran at bay, finishing the contest with 12 saves from 33 shots. His performance earned him the Man of the Match award.

Almahroos produced another important stop in the 57th minute before Ahmed Abdullah found an empty net from long range to make it 24-20 with two minutes remaining.

Abdulla then struck again, this time on a breakthrough, before

Ali put the result beyond doubt with another breakthrough goal for Bahrain's 26th in the final minute. Iran managed a final consolation before the buzzer.

Four Bahrain players shared the scoring honours with four goals apiece. Almuhafda and Almahafdha were joined by Ahmed and Ali on four, while Saif contributed three.

Marzooq, Abdulla and Ali

Hasan each added two goals, with Hussain Abadi also on the scoresheet.

Iran's Shayan Sousani was the game's leading scorer with eight goals.

The victory extends an impressive tournament for the nationals, who progressed through preliminary-round action unbeaten before defeating Saudi Arabia 30-28 in their quarter-final to reach the last four and secure a seventh appearance at next year's youth world championship.

Tomorrow's final-day programme begins with hosts Jordan facing Uzbekistan in the seventh-place play-off at noon, followed by Kuwait against Saudi Arabia for fifth place at 2pm.

South Korea and Iran will contest the bronze medal match at 4pm, before Bahrain and Qatar bring the championship to a close with the gold medal showdown at 6pm.

That final will conclude Bahrain's 10th continental championship appearance, with the kingdom now one victory away from adding to their titles won in 2016 and 2018.

Riffa start strong as A'ali strike late

Hussain Almaskati

Riffa made a winning start to their 2026-27 Nasser bin Hamad Premier League campaign with a 2-0 victory over Al Ettifaq last night as the opening matchweek drew to a close.

Samuel Toscas and Yacouba Diarra were on target for the Riffa-based outfit at the National Stadium, giving Kuwaiti head coach Mohamed Mashan a perfect start to the new season.

Elsewhere, newly promoted Manama were denied victory in dramatic fashion as A'ali struck in stoppage time to salvage a 1-1 draw at Al Ahli Club Stadium in Mahooz.

Riffa needed just three minutes to break the deadlock against an Al Ettifaq side coached by former Bahrain star Fawzi Ayyash.

A quickly taken corner created space for Brazilian Rodrigo Yuri on the left, whose cross was



Toscas celebrates his early goal with Riffa teammates

headed home by compatriot Toscas to give the Sky Blues an early advantage.

Another set-piece situation produced their second goal around the hour mark. Bahrain international Ali Madan delivered an inviting ball from deep on the right, with Malian Diarra meeting it to double the lead.

Riffa entered the new campaign looking to build on a strong

2025-26 season in which they finished third behind champions Muharraq and runners-up Al Khaldiya, while also lifting the Khalid bin Hamad Cup.

At Al Ahli Club Stadium, Ismael Karami's Manama appeared set for a winning return to the top flight when new signing Zachary Hadji broke the deadlock in the 82nd minute.

Full-back Rivaldo Morais pro-

Standings			
Pos	Team	Pts	GD
1	Al Khaldiya	3	+5
2	Sitra	3	+3
3	Hidd	3	+2
4	Riffa	3	+2
5	Al Ahli	1	0
6	Muharraq	1	0
7	Manama	1	0
8	A'ali	1	0
9	Al Ettifaq	0	-2
10	East Riffa	0	-2
11	Malkiya	0	-3
12	Al Najma	0	-5



Santos races away after netting A'ali's equaliser against Manama

duced a clever piece of skill on the right to beat his marker before sending the ball across the face of goal, where Hadji was on hand to convert at the far post.

The striker, who joined Manama from Al Najma ahead of the new season, is the son of former Morocco star Mustapha Hadji.

A'ali, coached by Brazilian Vinicius Eutr pio, however, snatched a point in stoppage

time. Brazilian centre-half Matheus Santos rose highest to meet a corner and guided his header into the far corner to break Manama hearts and make it 1-1.

Attention now turns to matchweek two, which gets underway on Wednesday with Malkiya facing Al Najma at Al Ahli Club Stadium and East Riffa taking on Sitra at the National Stadium.

All six matches are scheduled for 7pm kick-offs.

National spikers suffer friendly defeats

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Bahrain's senior men's volleyball team suffered back-to-back friendly defeats during their training camp in South Korea as they prepare for next month's AVC Volleyball Men's Continental Championship 2026.

The Bahrainis were beaten 3-1 by South Korean club KB Stars in their opening warm-up before going down by the same scoreline against the South Korean national team.

The latter encounter had been



Bahrain's senior men's volleyball team with their South Korean counterparts

arranged as part of celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Bahrain and South Korea.

Prior to the camp, South Kore-

an Ambassador to Bahrain Choi Byung-sun visited the national team's training session at Isa bin Rashid Volleyball Arena at Isa Sports City in Riffa, where

he was received by Bahrain Volleyball Association president Shaikh Ali bin Mohammed Al Khalifa and other officials.

Montenegrin head coach Ivan

Joksimovic has used the camp as the final stage of preparations ahead of the continental championship, which will be held in Fukuoka, Japan, from September 4 to

13. Bahrain have been drawn in Group A alongside hosts Japan, Australia and Oman, with the coaching staff looking to raise the players' technical and physical readiness ahead of the tournament.

The Kingdom head into the championship following a strong year, having claimed gold at the fourth GCC Games in Doha in May before reaching the semi-finals and finishing fourth at the AVC Men's Cup in Ahmedabad.