The Peninsula
Local focus, Global vision
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SPORT

AFC ASIAN CUP QATAR 2023

Champions Qatar aim to maintain fine form as resolute Palestine eye upset

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

Coach Marquez Lopez has said Qatar must maintain their fine run at the AFC Asian Cup as he warned the defending champions against making errors in their last 16 match against a determined Palestine side at Al Bayt Stadium tonight.

The hosts started their title defence with three consecutive victories without conceding a goal, but they are up against a side which has nothing to lose after achieving its main target of reaching the knockout stage for first time.

Makram Daboub's Palestine will return to action after an impressive performance in the group stage, outclassing Hong Kong 3-0 to earn their maiden victory in the Asian Cup in their third appearance and advance as third-placed side from their group.

"We see Palestine as a team that plays with bravery and power. We know their strengths and we will do our best to deal with them. We have a lot of respect for them as a team, but we want to do everything to get the result," Lopez told a press conference yesterday.





AL BAYT STADIUM 19:00 JANUARY 29, 2024

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>
> **Marquez Lopez**
> Qatar coach

> They [Qatar] are the home team and will have a lot of fans in the stadium, so there will be more pressure on them. We have already achieved our primary objective in this tournament so we will play with no pressure.
>
> **Makram Daboub**
> Palestine coach

"There are no easy games in football, especially in tournaments like this. We are aware that the margin of error is very small in the finals," the coach added.

The 2019 champions started their campaign with a 3-0 victory over Lebanon before beating Tajikistan and China with identical 1-0 scorelines. The hosts have been impressive both in defence and attack with playmaker Akram Afif enjoying a sublime form, scoring three goals and creating several scoring opportunities.

"We are happy with how we have played in the group stage. We were very competitive in every game, there are small changes to make and improve on, but overall, we played well and tried to give all players an opportunity to play," Lopez, who took charge from coach Carlos Queiroz last month said.

"I love attacking football, but we always have to find the right balance between attack and defence. It is to the credit of the players that we have yet to concede a goal, because they implemented my ideas on the pitch very well, so I'm thankful for them for absorbing the ideas well and being disciplined," he added.

"I trust my players, not 100%, but 200%. I trust the work they do in training. It will be a difficult match, but we want to qualify to the next round. As always, our main principle is to take it one match at a time."

Qatar are on a 10-match winning streak at the Asian Cup and they conceded only one goal – a strike from Japan's Takumi Minamino in the UAE 2019 final in their 3-1 win – during the feat.

But Palestine, ranked 41 places lower than Qatar in the world, would give their best to stop Al Annabi as coach Daboub reposed confidence in his spirited side, saying his team will have no pressure in the match.

"They [Qatar] are the home team and will have a lot of fans in the stadium, so there will be more pressure on them. We have already achieved our primary objective in this tournament so we will play with no pressure. We will do our best and play the same way we did in previous matches, keeping our upward trajectory. In 90 minutes of football, anything can happen," he told reporters yesterday.

"There is a ticket to the quarter-finals at stake. We respect Qatar as reigning champions and hosts, but that doesn't mean we are here just to be here. We want to win and everything is possible, we want to fight for our chances and hopefully we can win," the Palestine coach added.



Advantage Qatar
Qatar are undefeated in their 10 previous matches against Palestine (W8 D2), keeping a clean sheet in each of their last five encounters. This will, however, be the first meeting between the two at the AFC Asian Cup.

Solid run
Qatar have won their last 10 AFC Asian Cup matches, the second-longest winning streak in tournament history (Islamic Republic of Iran – W13 from 1968 to 1976); though, they had never won a knockout game at the tournament prior to the 2019 edition when they clinched the trophy.

Firing on all cylinders
Palestine have scored at least one goal in each of their three games at Qatar 2023 after finding the back of the net in only one of their previous six games at the tournament.

Cross master
Palestine's Mus'ab Al Battat made more open play crosses (20) and more tackles (18) than any other player throughout the Qatar 2023 group stage.

Daboub expressed his delight as Palestine found back their goal-scoring form in their last group match against Hong Kong.

"We played 5-6 friendly matches before the tournament where we scored goals but also missed a lot of chances, we faced some challenges, but we are convinced with the level of work we are doing. In the qualifiers we scored a lot of goals. I would say it is just down to lack of concentration at times or bad luck, but thankfully the goals came against Hong Kong at the right time and hopefully we can continue the same way."

The match will kick off at 7pm with the 68,895-capacity venue expected to be filled with spectators.


Qatar players during a training session ahead of their Round of 16 clash against Palestine.


Palestine players during a training session.


Palestine players and officials hold a team meeting during a training session.

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Team Qatar top priority not records, says striker Almoez



Qatar's Almoez celebrates after scoring against Lebanon during Asian Cup opening match at Lusail Stadium on January 12.

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

Almoez Ali is just four goals behind legendary Iranian striker Ali Daei's record of overall 14 goals in the Asian Cup.

The striker will continue his hunt for more goals, not with an aim to become the all-time top scorer in the tournament but to help Qatar clinch back-to-back titles.

"The goals will come but the team comes first and Almoez Ali comes second," the Al Duhail striker said on the eve of Qatar's last 16 clash against Palestine at Bayt Stadium tonight.

Almoez scored one goal in Qatar's opening 3-0 victory against Lebanon after smashing nine goals in team's title triumph at the UAE 2019. That feat itself was a record for highest number of goals in a single edition of the continental showpiece.

> I'm very proud to represent Qatar in 107 international games. I always think of trying to help my teammates and the team. At the end of the day, it's the team that needs to score, not which player is scoring. We work hard and we hope for the best.
> **Almoez Ali**

"Personal achievements are not what I focus on. I focus on the team. We take it one match at a time," the 27-year-old said.

"I'm very proud to represent Qatar in 107 international games. I always think of trying to help my teammates and the team. At the end of the day, it's the team that needs to score, not which player is scoring. We work hard and we hope for the best."

After being rested by coach Marquez Lopez in the last group match against China, Almoez is looking forward to excel against a resolute Palestine side.

"We're responsible; we treat the match just like any other qualifying game. We will be ready for the match. We will try to create chances and we will try to be aggressive in the box and hopefully, we can break the Palestinian defence to score.

"The match will be very important for the Qatari team. We're the champions and we know the importance of this stage. Hopefully our tactics will lead us to victory and move onto the next stage."

Almoez also praised playmaker Akram Afif with whom he has formed a formidable pair in the tournament.

"Yes, the relationship with my brother Akram is close, 10 years of communication and friendship. I call him Mr Assister because he creates so much for me and the other players. We're always helping each other and we're all like a family. Akram is a player and a coach for us because he finds solutions for us and we're lucky to have him in our team."

Iraq, Jordan brace for tough test

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Iraq and Jordan are gearing up for a tough test as they meet in the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Round of 16 at the Khalifa International Stadium (KIS) today.

The Lions of Mesopotamia head into the tie in impressive form, winning all three group stage matches - including against four-time winners Japan - while Jordan advanced as one of the four best third-placed teams.

Head coach Jesus Casas believes his Iraqi side have the quality to win the title, reminiscent of their triumph in the 2007 edition.

"I think we are in the same position as in the beginning of the tournament. We are very confident after three matches; it was amazing to beat Japan. If we want to win the Asian Cup, we have to win four more matches. It won't be easy, as there are strong teams but we are in a good position to win the title. We will fight to win this tournament," said Casas.

"It's going to be a very difficult match for both teams. Both have undergone challenging qualifications, and we share a similar style of play. We both want to win and Jordan won't be easy opponents. We can win all matches if we give 200 percent effort in every game. In football, perfection is key and if we play a perfect match, winning is possible. However, mistakes can be costly as seen when Saudi beat Argentina (in the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022). In football, anything is possible."

Casas said his side will have the same attacking mindset as they did in the group stage.

"Our style is very clear – we aim to be offensive, maintain control of possession, and create numerous chances. We won't change our style. Against Japan, we tried to be offensive, and in the second half, they came back fighting. However, our approach remains clear – we want to attack.

"No, we are not the favourites; the favourites are Japan, Korea Republic and Islamic Republic of Iran. We are happy with what we have done, and the Iraqi players are proud of their performance. Jordan has a very good team, and one mistake can change the whole game. We must be careful."

Despite having qualified as one of the four best third-placed teams, Jordan head coach Hussein Ammouta is optimistic about his team's quarter-final chances.

"We will face a very organised Iraqi team and we will try our best to win the match. Our focus is on the responsibilities and duties against Iraq, and we are determined to secure a victory. Iraq has good players - not only in attack but throughout the whole team," said Ammouta.

"However, morale is very high, and everyone is united with big responsibilities on their shoulders. We have prepared very well, and our team is ready to give their best effort."

Jordan have not defeated Iraq in their last five meetings, as well as losing 1-0 in their only previous encounter in the AFC Asian Cup - in the 2015 edition group stage but Ammouta promised an attacking approach.

"No team that wants to win focuses solely on defence. We have a strong attack, and we aim to surprise Iraq. Of course, we want to strike a balance between both attacking and defensive aspects, paying attention to all the small details for a good performance in this challenging match.

"Our team has big aspirations. We've shown our true selves as a team and we aim to reach as far as we can, working hard to qualify for the next stage.We are actively working to strengthen our defence and limit the opponents' spaces. I trust my team and defensive players." AFC



> We will face a very organised Iraqi team and we will try our best to win the match. Our focus is on the responsibilities and duties against Iraq, and we are determined to secure a victory.
> **Hussein Ammouta**
> Jordan coach

> It's going to be a very difficult match for both teams. Both have undergone challenging qualifications, and we share a similar style of play. We both want to win and Jordan won't be easy opponents.
> **Jesus Casas**
> Iraq coach



Unbeaten Iraq
Iraq are undefeated in their last five meetings with Jordan (W2 D3) and won 1-0 in their only previous encounter at the AFC Asian Cup (2015 group stage).

Looking to maintain momentum
Iraq have won their last three games in a row at the AFC Asian Cup – their longest ever winning streak at the tournament – but are winless in five knockout games at the tournament since defeating Saudia Arabia 1-0 in the final of the 2007 edition.

Jordan's knockout stage blues
This will be Jordan's fourth knockout game at the AFC Asian Cup having lost all three of their previous attempts including two defeats on penalties; though, they have scored exactly one goal in each of their three previous post-group games at the tournament.

On fire
Iraq's Aymen Hussein has scored five goals so far at Qatar 2023, two more than any other player; indeed, it is the most goals by an Iraq player at a single edition of the tournament.



Coach Hussein Ammouta (second right) supervises Jordan's training session.

Seyam thriving under Daboub's guidance



Tamer Seyam (right) hopes Palestine to give a good performance against Qatar in their last 16 match at Al Bayt Stadium tonight.

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Tamer Seyam believes that the current iteration of Palestine under the guidance of Makram Daboub is the key to the team's historic qualification to the knockout stage of the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023.

The Prachuap FC forward is enjoying playing under the Tunisian tactician, scoring in the opening Group C match against Iran.

Five years ago, Palestine lost all three of their matches at the AFC Asian Cup but Qatar 2023 has so far seen them register a first ever win (3-0 v Hong Kong, China) and a draw (1-1 v United Arab Emirates).

"Of course I'm thankful that I was able to score but it's not my own effort, also the coach and teammates," said Seyam.

"Every coach has different tactics. In the past we played a defensive style, under the current coach we are playing a different style as you can see from our match in the World Cup qualifier against Australia.

"It's the effort of the coach and tactics he used. It's down to a lot of training and exercise. The Palestinian achievement is not only in terms of goals but also the performance and so far you can see that from our group matches."

Having helped Palestine reach new heights at this edition of the AFC Asian Cup, the 31-year-old does not feel their journey has reached its conclusion yet even though reigning champions Qatar stand in their way of a place in the quarter-finals.

"All the players understand the importance of this competition. This is our third participation and the majority of the players have the experience from the last edition."

"We have made a historic achievement by qualifying for the Round of 16 but it's not the end yet, the players will enter this match with full preparedness and we will try to get a positive result for Palestine.

"The pressure on the players is huge. We have seen very good support from all fans, this is an honour for us and we appreciate that. We hope tomorrow we can show a good performance."





Australia's Jackson Irvine shoots at the goal as the ball deflects off Indonesia's Elkan Baggott into the net, giving the Socceroos their opening goal. RIGHT: Australia players celebrate.

SOCCEROOS BOOK HEAVYWEIGHT CLASH

Australia thrash Indonesia 4-0 to storm into quarter-finals

The Graham Arnold's side remained solid against Indonesia, who put up a spirited fight but fatigue cost them two late goals as they bowed out of the tournament with their best-ever finish in the tournament.

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

Australia yesterday cruised into the quarter-finals of the AFC Asian Cup after a 4-0 thrashing of Indonesia, setting up a heavyweight clash against Saudi Arabia or South Korea.

The Graham Arnold's side remained solid against Indonesia, who put up a spirited fight but fatigue cost them two late goals as they bowed out of the tournament with their best-ever finish in the tournament.

At the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, Australia went ahead early in the match with Elkan Baggott's own-goal while Martin Boyle doubled their lead just before the break.

Craig Goodwin came off the bench to score late in the match before Harry Souttar's injury-time goal sealed an emphatic victory for the Socceroos, who are seeking their second title.

They will now wait for tomorrow's last 16 clash between title contenders Saudi Arabia and South Korea to determine their rivals for the Friday's quarter-finals.

"Indonesia made it tough for us, physically they were very big and strong. They put up a lot of pressure on us. We told the boys to be ready for a fight and a physical battle," Arnold said after the win.

Backed by their passionate fans, Indonesia had their moments in the match as Shin Tae-yong's side started their maiden Asian Cup last 16 match on a bright note putting pressure on the 2015 champions with attempts from Rafael Struick and Yakob Sayuri in first 10 minutes.

But they soon suffered a setback when Baggott deflected Jackson Irvine's strike into his own net in the 12th minute as Australia got the lead they wanted.



Australia's Harry Souttar celebrates after scoring his team's fourth goal. AFP

Ranked 121 places below their opponents in FIFA Rankings, Indonesia were building up well and saw Justin Hubner's shot from outside the box blocked by goalkeeper Maty Ryan before Yakob Sayuri missed the target three minutes before half-time.

By that time, Australia, who were busy in slowing down Indonesia's pace, had no shot on target but their first attempt of the match in 45th minute was enough to extend their lead.

Gethin Jones with a remarkable cross from the right picked up Boyle, who headed the ball in from a close range as Australia went comfortably for a break.

Indonesia again had a strong start as they pushed for a goal but they ran out of gas as the match progressed.

That opened opportunities for Arnold's side for more goals and Mitchell Duke should have scored in 80th minute but he missed the target with only the goalkeeper to beat.

Goodwin, who did not play in Australia's last two games due to injury, was substituted in 87th minute and he took just two minutes to make an impact.

The Al Wehda player volleyed the ball in from the centre of the box on a rebound after goalkeeper Ernando Ari blocked Irvine's shot.

Souttar then headed the ball from a close range off Goodwin's cross to wrap up win in first minute of injury-time.

Coach Shin was disappointed at 4-0 defeat, saying an own-goal cost his team which was impressive against their higher-ranked opponents.

"If we had not conceded this unlucky deflected first goal maybe things could have been different. We did not play badly and regardless of the four goals, I want to thank my players," he said.



Australia's players applaud the fans after defeating Indonesia.



Fans celebrate Australia's victory.



R16: Things to look out for

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

The AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 has reached the knockout rounds and 16 teams remain in the race to be crowned champions of the 18th edition of the continental showpiece.

Among them are defending champions Qatar, four-time winners Japan and five other nations who have lifted the prestigious title, while four countries – including debutants Tajikistan – will compete in the Round of 16 for the first time.

Ahead of the eight matches between January 28 and 31, the-AFC.com has selected five things to look out for.

Koreans and Saudis to serve up heavyweight clash

With five continental titles between them and 17 FIFA World Cup appearances, South Korea and Saudi Arabia are two giants of Asian football. Both nations will have begun the competition with serious aspirations of being crowned champions, but one of them will exit at the Round of 16 after the draw threw up a mouthwatering clash in the first knockout round.

On the pitch, Korea have no shortage of star power, with Son Heung-min, Kim Min-jae and Lee Kang-in consistently performing at the highest level in Europe. The Saudis, meanwhile, boast their own star man in the reigning AFC Player of the Year Salem Al Dawsari, who is no stranger to the big stage having netted a stunning winner against Argentina at the 2022 FIFA World Cup here in Qatar.

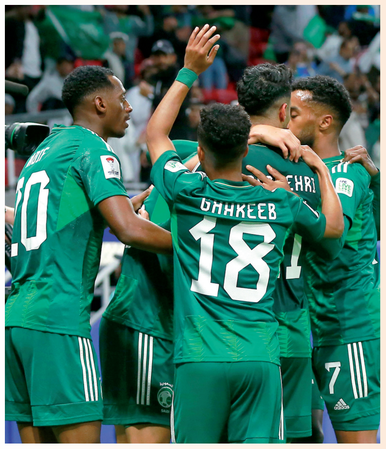
Off the pitch, both head coaches have been crowned continental champions before - Roberto Mancini in guiding Italy to the 2020 UEFA European Championship title and Jurgen Klinsmann when he led the United States to CONCACAF Gold Cup glory in 2013. The stage is set for an exhilarating encounter on Tuesday, when only one side's quest for the title will continue.

Will hot shot Hussein continue scoring streak?

Only one player has managed to find the back of the net in all three matches and, with five goals so far, Iraq's Aymen Hussein goes into the knockout rounds in red-hot form and leading the scoring charts by two goals from Japan's Ayase Ueda, Korea Republic's Lee Kang-in and Qatar's Akram Afif.

Having wrapped up a 3-1 win over Indonesia with an emphatic finish, Hussein bagged a brace as the Lions of Mesopotamia stunned Japan 2-1 to end their 11-game winning run. Another double, this time against Vietnam and including a 102nd-minute penalty, ensured Iraq advanced to the knockout rounds with a perfect three wins from three.

The win over Japan in particular has raised expectations and led to talk of a repeat of Iraq's historic title back in 2007. Jesus Casas's side may be some way from repeating that feat, but should their prolific striker's form in front of goal continue, the Iraqis' chances of going deeper in the tournament will only be heightened.



Qatar aiming for 11 on the bounce

Holders Qatar's winning run at the AFC Asian Cup now stands at an incredible 10 in a row following group stage victories over Lebanon, Tajikistan and China PR. The three wins in a row added to the seven successive victories achieved en route to being crowned champions in the United Arab Emirates five years ago.

It's a formidable run of form that has also seen them concede just once in those 10 games – against Japan in the 3-1 win in the 2019 final – as Asia's biggest competition continues to bring the best out of them. Up next, they face a Palestine side whose 3-0 victory over Hong Kong, China on Matchday Three took them into the knockout rounds for the first time.

Last time out against China, Qatar head coach Marquez Lopez rested Afif and Almoez Ali, but the star duo will surely be recalled against the Palestinians. A full crowd awaits at Al Bayt Stadium as the Maroons target an 11th consecutive win, while knockout round newcomers Palestine will aim to spring a surprise to prolong their own remarkable tournament.





Can Uzbekistan breach water-tight Thai defence?

It's not only Qatar who have yet to concede as Thailand, too, advanced to the knockout rounds on the back of three successive clean sheets. While the hosts did so with three wins, a pair of scoreless draws that the Thais claimed went a long way towards sealing their place in the last 16 for a second AFC Asian Cup in a row.

Supachai Chaided's double in a 2-0 opening-day win over Kyrgyz Republic remains the War Elephants' only goals. Masatada Ishii's well-drilled side have since picked up 0-0 draws against Oman and Saudi Arabia to finish runners-up in Group F and, perhaps most impressively, those stalemates were achieved with a completely different goalkeeper and back four with Saranon Anuin catching the eye by saving a penalty on his international debut against the Saudis.

Up next come Uzbekistan, who themselves have conceded just once. Thailand-based forward Igor Sergeev is out with a serious injury, but with the likes of Jaloliddin Masharipov and Abbosbek Fayzullaev within their ranks, the White Wolves have plenty of talent going forward as they try to become the first team to score past Thailand as well as progress to a fifth quarter-final appearance.







PICS: RAJAN VADAKKEMURIYIL, MOHAMMED FARAJ / THE PENINSULA & AFP

































AFC eAsian Cup 2023: All you need to know

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

The AFC eAsian Cup 2023 is all set to take place in Doha from February 1 to 5. As players from across Asia get set to converge to celebrate the Asian Football Confederation (AFC)'s first-ever esports event, the-AFC.com brings to you a deep-dive into what to expect.

The AFC eAsian Cup is set to showcase 20 teams from the AFC's Member Associations who are currently participating in the ongoing AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023. Divided into four groups of three teams and two groups of four, each team comprises two main players and one substitute and will participate in highly competitive 12-minute matches in a 2v2 format.

The matches will be played on Konami's eFootball 2024 and will see the participants use PS5 consoles as they aim to go down in history as the winners of the first-ever AFC eAsian Cup.

In the group stage, each team engages in two showdowns against every other team in its group. Following the footsteps of the ongoing AFC Asian Cup, the event will see the top two teams from each group, alongside the four best third-place finishers, earning a berth in the knockout stage.

Hereon, the winners of each round will be decided on the basis of a best of three format, culminating in the final on February 5.

The Venue

The AFC eAsian Cup is set to take center stage at Doha's Virtuocity eSports Arena, the region's first and only year-round esports facility, allowing gamers of all ages the unique opportunity of widespread participation in the world of gaming.

Where to Watch:

Passionate fans of both Asian football and esports can follow all the excitement on the AFC's official YouTube channel

Sensational Sinner wins Australian Open

AFP – MELBOURNE


Italy's Jannik Sinner celebrates with the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup trophy after winning the Australian Open men's singles final. AFP

Jannik Sinner stormed back from two sets down to beat Daniil Medvedev in an energy-sapping five-set Australian Open final yesterday, claiming his first Grand Slam title.

The Italian fourth seed had no answer to the Russian's aggression in the first two sets but dug deep to win 3-6, 3-6, 6-4, 6-4, 6-3 in three hours and 44 minutes.

He collapsed to the floor before returning to his feet to savour his moment on Rod Laver Arena, climbing into his box to hug coaches Simone Vagnozzi and Darren Cahill.

Sinner thundered 14 aces, hit 50 winners and broke Medvedev's serve four times to become the first Italian champion in the tournament's history. The 22-year-old is the first Italian man to win a Slam since Adriano Panatta in 1976 and the youngest man to win the Australian Open since Novak Djokovic in 2008.

Sinner's semi-final victory over 10-time winner Djokovic had guaranteed there would be a new name on the trophy.

But the result is a bitter blow for the third-ranked Russian, who also blew a two-set lead against Rafael Nadal in the 2022 final.

"I'm feeling great, I just have to process it all," said Sinner. "It was a great match and a great opportunity and I took it in the right way.

Sinner admitted he had been forced to scramble for answers because Medvedev was "crushing" it in the first two sets.

Former US Open champion Medvedev, who has now lost five of his six finals in the majors, said Sinner deserved to win.

"You fought to the end and you managed to raise your level," said the 27-year-old. The Russian, in his previous six matches, had spent nearly six hours longer on court than Sinner, who had only lost one set. But, looking fresh, he was quickly into his stride, unsettling the usually calm Italian, who was unable to find any sort of rhythm.

Sinner, playing in his first Grand Slam final, had been broken just twice in the tournament before the final but Medvedev doubled that tally in the first set. Sinner was again in deep trouble at the start of the second set, fending off multiple break points and pleading for backing from the crowd.

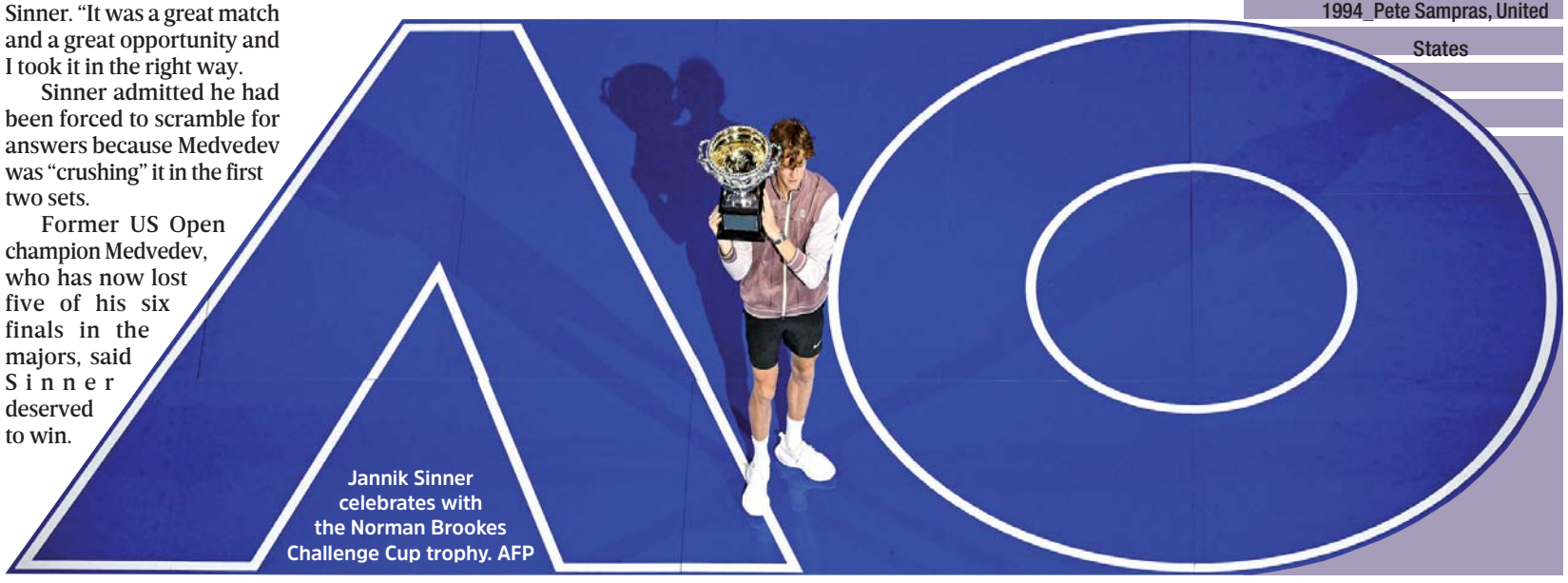
He survived that onslaught but was broken for a third time in the fourth game when a poor drop shot allowed the Russian to set up a winner. Medvedev raced through his service game to love, giving Sinner no time to gather his thoughts.

He hit a fierce forehand to set up two more break points in the sixth game and Sinner went wide with a forehand to slip 5-1 down. The Italian broke back immediately but Medvedev snuffed out the mini-revival to surge into a two-set lead.

The third set was tighter until the decisive 10th game when Sinner, who did not face a break point in the set, pounced to break and close the gap. The momentum was now all with the Italian and the tiring Medvedev, who required strapping for his foot, had to fight hard to hold early in the fourth set.

Sinner fired three aces to edge 4-3 ahead and broke in the 10th game when Medvedev fired long to take the match into a fifth set. With the tension mounting, both players stayed solid on serve until the sixth game of the final set, when Medvedev dumped a backhand into the net to give Sinner three break points.

A forehand crosscourt winner gave the Italian the crucial break and he closed out on serve to earn the biggest win of his life.


Jannik Sinner celebrates with the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup trophy. AFP

AUSTRALIAN OPEN
MEN'S SINGLES CHAMPIONS (PAST 20 YEARS)

- 2024_Jannik Sinner, Italy
- 2023_Novak Djokovic, Serbia
- 2022_Rafael Nadal, Spain
- 2021_Novak Djokovic, Serbia
- 2020_Novak Djokovic, Serbia
- 2019_Novak Djokovic, Serbia
- 2018_Roger Federer, Switzerland
- 2017_Roger Federer, Switzerland
- 2016_Novak Djokovic, Serbia
- 2015_Novak Djokovic, Serbia
- 2014_Stan Wawrinka, Switzerland
- 2013_Novak Djokovic, Serbia
- 2012_Novak Djokovic, Serbia
- 2011_Novak Djokovic, Serbia
- 2010_Roger Federer, Switzerland
- 2009_Rafael Nadal, Spain
- 2008_Novak Djokovic, Serbia
- 2007_Roger Federer, Switzerland
- 2006_Roger Federer, Switzerland
- 2005_Marat Safin, Russia
- 2004_Roger Federer, Switzerland
- 2003_Andre Agassi, United States
- 2002_Thomas Johansson, Sweden
- 2001_Andre Agassi, United States
- 2000_Andre Agassi, United States
- 1999_Yevgeny Kafelnikov, Russia
- 1998_Petr Korda, Czech Republic
- 1997_Pete Sampras, United States
- 1996_Boris Becker, Germany
- 1995_Andre Agassi, USA
- 1994_Pete Sampras, United States



PSG, Jordan Brand unveil Fourth Kit for 2023/2024 season

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

After celebrating the 5th anniversary of their partnership, Paris Saint-Germain and Jordan Brand unveil today the final jersey of the 2023/2024 season.

This latest range completes PSG's 2023/2024 dressing room and, for the second time in the history of football and the Club, features the emblematic elephant print.

The kit will be presented by the Club's women's team on pitch during the return of the UEFA Women's Champions League and the reception of Ajax Amsterdam on 24 January at the Parc des Princes.

For this Fourth campaign, PSG women's players (Korbin Albert, Elisa De Almeida, Grace Geyoro, Jackie Gronen and Sakina Karchaoui) travelled to the Qatar National Museum in Doha for an exclusive and unique photo shoot.

This symbolic venue, with its distinctive sand-pink architecture offered a visually striking setting matching with colours inspirations of the kit.

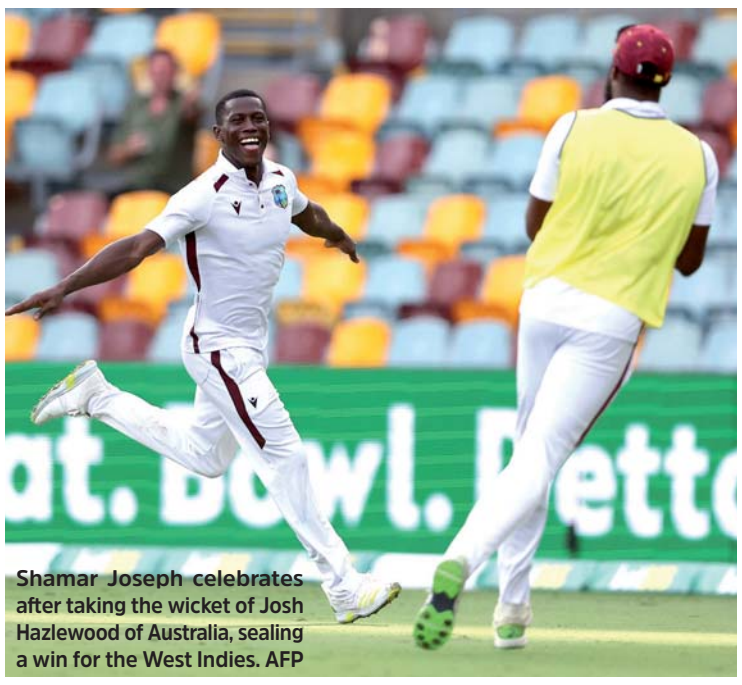
The Fourth collection is accompanied by a training and lifestyle range, as well as an exclusive Air Jordan Legacy 312 Low, also featuring the elephant print, and for the very first time, the branding "Air Jordan" even appear on pieces from the lifestyle collection, marking a new stage in the partnership between the two brands.

The collaboration extends beyond the pitch, with a number of exclusive pieces inspired by the harmonious colours of the series, designed to fit into the lifestyle of anyone who simply wants to take a discreet stroll down the street, highly inspired by Michael Jordan's visits to Paris back in time where we could walk around without being noticed.

The Fourth jersey is now available in PSG Stores Qatar with the complete lifestyle collection coming soon.

Joseph bowls West Indies to stunning win over Australia

AFP – BRISBANE


Shamar Joseph celebrates after taking the wicket of Josh Hazlewood of Australia, sealing a win for the West Indies. AFP

Injured pace bowler Shamar Joseph produced a stunning spell of fast bowling to lead his side to one of the greatest upsets in Test history to stun Australia by eight runs in Brisbane yesterday.

The West Indies, who brought an understrength side to Australia for the Test series, gave debuts to four players, including Joseph, in the two Tests.

They were beaten inside three days in Adelaide last week and were expected to suffer a similar fate in the day-night Test in Brisbane.

But after bowling Australia out for 207 in the second session Sunday, the West Indies recorded their first win in Australia since they last tasted victory in Perth in 1997.

Joseph was outstanding Sunday, bowling 11.5 overs of hostile pace to finish with 7-68 in just his second Test.

Australia had resumed the day at 60-2 with Steve Smith, who carried his bat for a superb 91 not out, and Cameron Green looking comfortable against Kemar Roach and Alzarri Joseph.

Shamar Joseph, who had to retire hurt after being hit on the toe in the second innings on Saturday night, did not bowl Saturday and only came into the attack 45 minutes into the first session.

He dismissed Green when the Australian No.4 chopped on, then bowled Travis Head with a beautiful yorker, Head's second first-ball duck of the match.

Australia, cruising at 113-2, were suddenly 113-4, although Smith looked unperturbed as he reached his half-century.

However, Joseph struck again when Mitchell Marsh edged to Alick Athanaze at third slip and, although the ball popped out of Athanaze's hands, it went straight to Justin Greaves to leave Australia 132-5, 84 runs from victory.

Alex Carey was next to go, clean bowled by a 145 km/h thunderbolt that crashed into off stump, with Australia 136-6.

Mitchell Starc decided the best path to victory was attack and smashed 21 runs from just 14 balls before trying one big hit too many and holing out to Kevin Sinclair in the covers. Cummins was next to go, getting an edge to a diving Joshua Da Silva behind the stumps.

After the break, Alzarri Joseph claimed Nathan Lyon caught behind before Shamar Joseph wrapped up the innings when he beat Josh Hazlewood for pace and bowled him through the gate.

BRIEF SCORES
West Indies 311 and 193 **beat Australia** 289 for 9 dec and 207 (Smith 91*, Green 42, S Joseph 7-68) **by 8 runs**


England's captain Ben Stokes (second left) celebrates with teammates after winning the first Test against India. AFP

Hartley stars as England stun India in opening Test

AFP – HYDERABAD

Debutant spinner Tom Hartley took seven wickets as England pulled off a dramatic 28-run upset win over India on day four of the opening Test yesterday.

Chasing 231 for victory, India were bowled out for 202 in the final over of an extended third session of play in Hyderabad, as Hartley got Mohammed Siraj stumped with his left-arm spin to trigger celebrations from the England camp.

Ollie Pope stood out with his 196 to bring England bouncing back from being 190 behind at the start of their second innings to lead the five-match series 1-0. Hartley, who got his five-wicket haul after he bowled wicketkeeper-batsman K.S. Bharat, kept coming back to return figures of 7-62 and a match tally of nine wickets.

India started well in their chase, before Hartley struck twice in one over to send back Yashasvi Jaiswal (15) and Shubman Gill (0) in the space of three deliveries.

Skipper Rohit Sharma looked good in his knock of 39, but got rapped on the pads by Hartley's darting ball into the right-hander and walked back after his failed review on the lbw.

The left-handed Axar Patel (17) was promoted up the order and he attacked the bowling but got out after the tea break and India soon slipped to 119-7.

Premier spinner Jack Leach took the field with an injured knee, after he banged it on day one and two, and bowled 10 overs and got the wicket of Shreyas Iyer, for 13.

Bharat and Ravichandran Ashwin attempted to pull things back in their partnership of 57 but Hartley got them out to end India's hopes.

Rohit's team posted 436 in their first innings in response to 246 by England and had the tourists in trouble at 163-5 on day three, when Pope played an innings for the ages and struck his fifth Test ton.

Pope, who blunted the spinners with sweeps and reverse sweeps, resumed the day on 148.

He was dropped twice on 110 and 184 but his key partnerships with overnight partner Rehan Ahmed (28) and Hartley (34) after a 112-run stand with Ben Foakes (34) on Saturday proved decisive.

He finally went for an audacious reverse scoop in his attempt to get his double ton when England were nine down, but Jasprit Bumrah's ball rattled the stumps and lunch was called.

BRIEF SCORES
England 246 (Stokes 70, Bairstow 37, Ashwin 3-68, Jadeja 3-88) and 420 (Pope 196, Duckett 47, Bumrah 4-41, Ashwin 3-126) **beat India** 436 (Jadeja 87, Rahul 86, Jaiswal 80) and 202 (Rohit 39, Hartley 7-62) **by 28 runs**

Brilliant Team QMMF seals victory at 24H Dubai

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

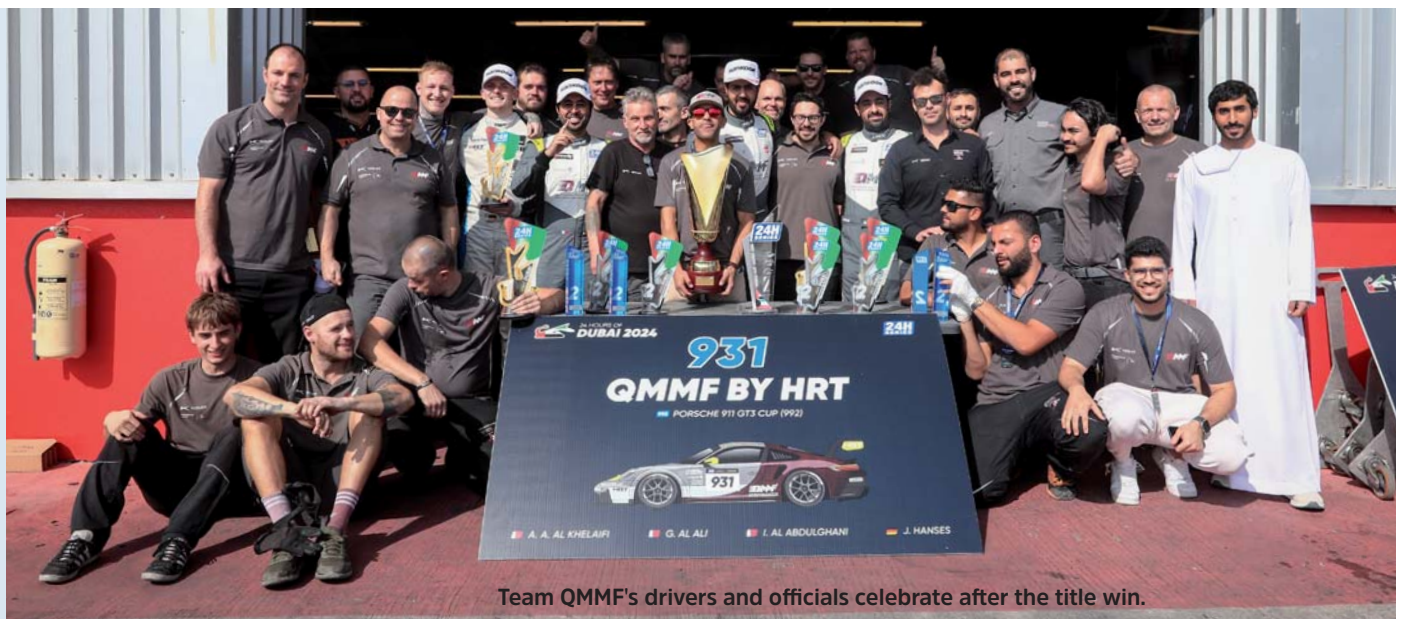
Team QMMF (Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation) by HRT achieved a significant victory in the fiercely competitive Porsche 911 GT3 (992 AM) class during the Hankook 24H Dubai, part of the 24H Series Middle East Trophy Challenge, at the Dubai Autodrome, yesterday.

The significant accomplishment marks a milestone in Qatar's endurance racing history.

The team, consisting of Qatari drivers Abdullah Al Khelaifi, Ghanem Al Ali, Ibrahim Al Abdulghani, and German semi-professional racer Julian Henses, demonstrated their skills by completing 583 laps on the famed 5.4-kilometer track.

Additionally, the team secured a commendable second place overall in the 992 category.

Notably, a week prior to this victory, Team QMMF achieved their first triumph of the season at the Abu Dhabi 6 Hours Challenge held at the Yas Marina Circuit in the UAE, topping in the same class.



Team QMMF's drivers and officials celebrate after the title win.



Qatar Racing Club Director Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid bin Jabor Al Thani crowned the podium winners in each category at the conclusion of the third round of 2024 Arabian Drag Racing League.

ADRL Round 3 concludes with thrilling duels at QRC

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

Under the gracious patronage of Qatar Racing Club Chairman H E Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Thani, and amidst thrilling atmospheres and intense dual battles that ignited the excitement of the audience in the elimination confrontations, the competitions of the third round of 2024 Arabian Drag Racing League (ADRL) concluded.

The results revealed in the competitions shuffled the cards of the struggle for the titles of the nine categories, promising that the remaining two rounds of the championship will be a summit of excitement and breath-holding.

For the second consecutive time, the final race of the strongest category in the championship, Index 4.0, brought together racers Musallam Al Qallaf and Jaber Al Maghribi.

The latter repeated his achievement from the previous round by securing his second victory in the championship, while Al Qallaf settled for second place for the second consecutive round. The winner of the opening round, Badr Khourshid, returned to the podium after missing out in the previous round, clinching third place.

Al Maghribi returned to make his presence felt in another final, the Super Street Outlaw final, where he faced Hussein Akbar.

This marked the third consecutive time the two racers met in the final, exchanging victories, but this time Hussein Akbar claimed his second victory in the championship in this category.

The third spot on the podium was secured by Youssef Al Zayani in his first participation this season.

In the Index 4.80 category, we witnessed a new champion in each round, and this time it was the runner-up of the previous round, Nawaf Misear Al Khalidi, who triumphed in the final race over the runner-up of the opening round, Ahmed Al Abdullah, while young racer Mohammed Al Furaih made his first appearance on the podium this season, finishing third.

Moving on to the Index 4.50 category, the final race saw the runner-up of the previous round, Hassan Ashkanani, and newcomer Basil Abbas from the 4.0 category.

Abbas managed to clinch his first title this season, while the winner of the opening round, Fawaz Ibrahim Ahmed Ali, settled for third place.

The competitions in the Index 8.50 category saw Qatari racer Nawaf Al Ansari crowned champion, with the second place left vacant due to a false start by both semifinalists, while Hassan Ashkanani, the winner of the previous round, ascended to the podium in third place. In his first appearance in the championship, racer Musbah Ali Musbah claimed the top spot in the Index 9.0 category after winning the final race against Majid Al Sharshani, while Mohammed Al Ansari completed the podium with a third-place finish.

Ben Belal, Al Balushi and Abdullah clinch bikes titles

Ahmed Ben Belal managed to secure the title of the third round in the strongest categories of motorcycle racing, the Super Street Bike category, marking his second victory in the championship after being crowned the champion of the opening round.

This time, he triumphed in the final race over the champion of the second round, Badr bin Eidan, while the third place went to the runner-up of the previous round, Mashari Al Turki.

Additionally, racer Musa Al Balushi secured his third podium finish in the championship and his second consecutive victory after defeating the champion of the opening round, Mohammed Bo Rashid, in a repeat final from the first round, but with a reversed outcome, while the runner-up of the previous round, Saad Turki, settled for third place in this round.

The final of the Index 8.5 category brought together the winner of the previous round, Khalid Al Dossari, and Hamad Ali Abdullah, with the latter securing his first title in the championship, while Al Dossari settled for the runner-up position, and Youssef Mansour Hilal claimed third place.

At the conclusion of the competitions, QRC Director Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid bin Jabor Al Thani crowned the top three winners in each category amid a splendid celebratory atmosphere, thus concluding the events of the third round of ADRL and commencing preparations directly for the fourth and penultimate round scheduled to take place on the first and second of February.



Action during the third round of 2024 Arabian Drag Racing League.

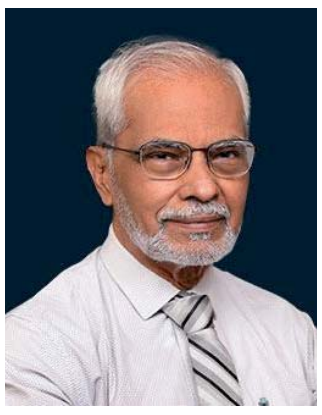
Qatar-based former Indian national badminton player Manoj Sahibjan undergoes major knee surgery

Qatar Based Former Indian National Badminton Player Manoj Sahibjan underwent a major surgery on his right knee on January 18th, 2024 performed by Dr. David V Rajan at Ortho One Hospital in Coimbatore, India. The surgery was performed ahead of the player's planned comeback to the game. In 2003 he got injured in both of his knees and on November 2004, he underwent a major surgery on both knees which was done by David Sir. After the surgery, in 2008 he achieved District Championship Winner in Men Singles category competing against a highly competitive field of players in the Trivandrum District Kerala and achieved even more district winnings. He not only dominated district championships but also delivered impressive achievements in men singles at the state and national level. Despite turning 35, he made a significant impact in international performances which helped him to put his foot on the World Badminton Map and achieved BWF 554th Rank in Men Singles.


Manoj Sahibjan

In 2021, after a span of 17 years, his racket hand biceps muscle got torn and shoulder cup was dislocated while playing and it was also Dr. David V Rajan who did the major surgery. After the surgery, he played in 2021 and became the winner of District and State in 35 plus category Men Singles. Finally, he represented Kerala in All India National Level and achieved bronze medal in 40 plus category in Men Singles.

He truly believed, because of David Sir performed his surgery in 2004 and 2021, he was able to accomplish his achievements. His dream was to represent India in the World Championship in 40 plus category, but unfortunately, his knee got injured in 2023. On January 18th, 2024 he underwent a major surgery on his right knee and with the blessings of the Almighty, he was fortunate to have the same doctor David V Rajan as his surgeon once again. He is sincerely grateful to have David Sir as his esteemed physician through his three major surgeries over a span of 20 years gap. The doctor has advised him against playing aggressively due to the major surgery, however he remains confident in David Sir's expertise. He is confident and believes that he will make a speedy recovery and be able to resume his playing and achieve his dream.


Dr. David V Rajan

Sahibjan believes Ortho One Hospital is the finest hospital he has encountered. "The moment we step inside the hospital, we are enveloped by a positive atmosphere. It is really impressive how the hospital treats all patients equally, without any discrimination. This makes the hospital even more remarkable. David Sir has helped so many players achieve their dreams through his treatment. We need more passionate, committed and talented doctors like him in the world," Sahibjan said.

Manoj Sahibjan is the founder and chief coach of NVBS (New Vision Badminton Sport), which is legally licensed by the Ministry of Culture and Sports in Qatar. He has successfully lead the organization for the past eight years with his wife Benazir by his side. The organization is consistently producing talented players at the district, state, national and international levels. Their partnership and dedication have undoubtedly played a crucial role in the ongoing success of NVBS.



Qatar National Sprint season begins

Mansour Chebli and Paide de Jager clinched two wins each in the opening round as the Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation (QMMF)-organised Qatar National Sprint season got off to a flying start. At the Lusail Circuit Sports Club Karting Track, Chebli won the Open Class 1 and Production Class 1 in his Renault Clio, while Jager came on top in the Open Class 3 and the women's event in her Mitsubishi Eclipse. Jad Alawar won Open Class 2, while the remaining Production classes, 2 and 3 were won by Maher Serre and Francesco Fornaciari, respectively. The second round takes place on February 23.

The Peninsula Local focus, Global vision
MONDAY 29 JANUARY 2024
SPORT

History-makers Tajikistan stun UAE on penalties to reach quarter-finals

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

AFC Asian Cup debutants Tajikistan yesterday stunned three-time semi-finalists United Arab Emirates in a thrilling 5-3 penalty shootout following a 1-1 score at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium. The last 16 victory achieved in front of 33,584 spectators, also made the Central Asian team only the second nation since Japan in 1992 to win their maiden knockout stage match.

Vahdat Hanonov's goal in the 30th minute had almost secured Tajikistan an early victory, but Khalifa Al Hammadi gave UAE hopes with a late equalizer, scoring in the fifth minute added time.

The status remained the same in extra time, forcing a spot kick fest that turned out to be a display of Tajikistan's precise kicking capabilities and fine glove work of their custodian Rustam Yatimov.

Akhtam Nazarov, Vahdat Hanonov, Ehson Panjshanbe, Rustam Soirov and Alisher Shukurov were all on target for Tajikistan during the shootout, while Abdulla Idrees, Fabio Lima and Ali Saleh did so for UAE, ranked more than 40 places above the Central Asian side.

Yatimov played the hero's role in Tajikistan's success, denying Caio Canedo's penalty when the shootout was tied at 1-1.

With the score reading 4-3 in favour of Tajikistan, Shukurov, a 21-year-old, who had just one cap before the tournament, rose to the occasion by taking the last kick and beat UAE goalkeeper Khalid Eisa with a shot to the bottom left corner as the Tajikistan camp burst into tears of joy.



Tajikistan's players toss coach Petar Segrt in the air as they celebrate their memorable victory against UAE.

PICTURES: RAJAN VADEKKEMURIYIL / THE PENINSULA, AFP, AFC

Tajikistan coach Petar Segrt looked the happiest of them all.

"I have no limits for the players because every game they surprise me again," Segrt said.

Segrt hailed his goalkeeper as the best.

"Yatimov is the best player for me because he saved his penalty but it's not the first time," Segrt said.

"My next dream is to go to the next round again. I think in Tajikistan tonight, nobody will sleep," he said.

Tajikistan will meet the winners of today's last 16 clash between Iraq and Jordan in the quarter-finals.

The match witnessed both teams displaying attacking intent.

> I have no limits for the players because every game they surprise me again. My next dream is to go to the next round again. I think in Tajikistan tonight, nobody will sleep. Nobody knows how far we can go.
> **Tajikistan head coach Petar Segrt**

Despite UAE's continued efforts in the first half, they failed to breach Tajikistan's defense.

The second half saw Tajikistan having chances to extend their lead through Ehson Panjshabe and Alisher Dzhalilov, who tested Eisa.

Tajikistan almost doubled the lead in the 60th minute when Parvizdzhon Umarbayev's pass found Dzhalilov, but the Eisa foiled the attempt before UAE equalized in the dying moments of regular time, with Al Hammadi headed home Ali Saleh's free-kick.



Tajikistan's goalkeeper Rustam Yatimov makes a save during the shootout.

UAE had early opportunities, including a free-kick by Fabio Lima and an attempt by striker Canedo, both of which were foiled by Yatimov.

But Tajikistan took the lead when defender Zoir Dzhuraboev delivered a precise cross, which was headed into the bottom left corner by Hanonov.

UAE responded soon with an attempt from Zayed Sultan, but Yatimov was too good once again.

Tajikistan advanced to yesterday's Round of 16 clash after drawing with China and beating Lebanon in the first round.

Speaking to beIN Sport after the match, the Croatian tactician Segrt called his team "the black horses of the tournament."

"Nobody knows how far we can go," he said.

"In the end, my friends, it was also luck."



Tajikistan's goalkeeper Rustam Yatimov celebrates with teammates.

Scan to download Round of 16 match schedule

Iraq's Jasim eager to continue shining in Qatar

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Ali Jasim is determined to play a major role for Iraq in their AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Round of 16 tie against Jordan today.

Jasim and Youssef Amyn are the youngest members of the Iraq side with the midfielder admitting he is pleased with his performances so far but wanting to do more.

"It's a privilege to be part of the national team, whether it is at the senior level or at an age-group.

"Personally, I am quite pleased with how I have played but I hope Amyn and I can put up a good show that takes us through to the next round and makes our fans happy."

In their most recent encounter last October, Iraq played Jordan in a friendly with the match ending in a 2-2 stalemate but Jasim believes that a lot has changed in the months since.

"We obviously have a lot of respect for our opponents, and we are fully aware that it won't be an easy game," said Jasim.

"In a way, it is good that we have faced them recently and we know how tough they can be. However, this is the Asian Cup, and everything, from our mindset to our calculations, is different and we are optimistic about our chances."

With Iraq's stunning victory over Japan raising hopes of a repeat of their 2007 title-winning campaign, Jasim asserted that the team's focus is solely directed towards victory against Jordan and not any further.

"The win against Japan is already behind us and it is way too early in the competition to start thinking about becoming champions," said the 20-year-old. "Of course we want to make our fans happy and hopefully, with our hard work along with the support of the coaching staff, we will come away with a positive result and win ourselves a quarter-final berth. But we know how Jordan play and we are expecting a very difficult game."



Ali Jasim

> We obviously have a lot of respect for our opponents, and we are fully aware that it won't be an easy game. In a way, it is good that we have faced them recently and we know how tough they can be. However, this is the Asian Cup, and everything, from our mindset to our calculations, is different and we are optimistic about our chances.
> **Ali Jasim**