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FOOTBALL | Page 2

Klopp calls for calm after shock news of his exit at Liverpool



MOTORSPORT | Page 3

Bernacchini joins legend al-Attiyah again for new MERC season

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SPORT



South Korea's Kim Young-gwon scores a penalty during the shootout against Saudi Arabia in their AFC Asian Cup Round of 16 clash at Education City Stadium in Doha yesterday. **Right:** South Korea's midfielder Hwang Hee-chan celebrates after scoring the winning penalty. (Reuters/AFP)

MATCH REPORT

South Korea break Saudi hearts, reach quarter-finals

South Korea 'keeper Jo Hyeon-woo was hero, saving penalties from Sami al-Najei, Abdulrahman Ghareeb

AFP
Doha

South Korea came back from the dead to beat Saudi Arabia 4-2 on penalties yesterday and set up an Asian Cup quarter-final with Australia. After a nail-biting game ended 1-1, Hwang Hee-chan scored the decisive penalty for Jurgen Klinsmann's side, who are aiming to end a 64-year Asian Cup title drought. South Korea goalkeeper Jo Hyeon-woo was the hero in Doha, saving penalties from Sami al-Najei and Abdulrahman Ghareeb in the shootout. Saudi coach Roberto Mancini disappeared down the tunnel before Hwang took the final penalty. Cho Gue-sung scored a 99th-minute equaliser in normal time to rescue the Koreans and force extra time. Abdullah Radif had opened the scoring for the Saudis 33 seconds after coming on as a half-time substitute. Saudi Pro League sides have shelled out to lure big-name players while Saudi Arabia is set to host the 2034 World Cup, all part of a broader move into global sport. But they are now out of the Asian Cup after a tense encounter in front of over 40,000 fans at Education City Stadium. Klinsmann dropped the misfiring Cho to the

bench and started with Son at the point of South Korea's attack. Chances were at a premium in a cagey opening period, with the Saudi defence quick to snuff out the threat when Son got his first chance to stretch his legs. Ahmed al-Kassar made a comfortable save when the Spurs striker threatened again, before Saleh al-Shehri pulled a shot wide at the other end after South Korea had given possession away cheaply. The Saudis had the best chance of the first half when they came agonisingly close to hitting the target with three headers in quick succession. Al-Shehri hit the crossbar and Ali Lajami did the same with the rebound, before Salem al-Dawsari finally nodded the ball just wide of the post. The second half had barely kicked off when substitute Radif made his mark. Al-Dawsari redirected a pass into the path of Radif and the substitute lashed the ball past Jo. Klinsmann brought on Wolverhampton Wanderers forward Hwang in the 54th minute as South Korea looked for a response. Klinsmann's side threw everything at the Saudis in a frantic end to the 90 minutes and Cho hit the bar with an injury-time header. The striker got his reward in the 99th minute, nodding home to send the game into extra time. South Korea dominated both periods of extra time but were guilty of over-elaborating and could not put the ball in the net.



South Korea players react during the penalty shootout. (Reuters)

SPOTLIGHT

Uzbekistan beat Thailand 2-1, set Qatar date



Uzbekistan players celebrate after the AFC Asian Cup, Round of 16, match against Thailand at Al Janoub Stadium, Al Wakra, yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Doha

Uzbekistan will face hosts and holders Qatar in the Asian Cup quarter-finals after highly rated Abbsobek Fayzullaev hit the winner in a 2-1 victory over Thailand yesterday. The Uzbeks have been touted as dark horses for the title and took the lead in the first half with a cool Azizbek Turgunboev finish through the legs of the goalkeeper. Thailand were the lowest-ranked team left at the tournament but they struck back just before the hour with an even better goal, from distance, by substitute Supachok Sara-chat. Uzbekistan were the more accomplished team and went ahead again midway through the second half when 20-year-old CSKA Moscow winger Fayzullaev rolled the ball in from outside the box.

This time Thailand had no reply, despite some late pressure. Qatar booked their spot in the last eight on Monday with a 2-1 victory over Palestine. Thailand were underdogs but did not concede a goal in three matches as they finished second to Saudi Arabia in their group. Oston Urunov had three decent chances to breach the Thai defence in the first 25 minutes and then Thai goalkeeper Patiwat Khammal had to stretch to deny Jaloliddin Masharipov. Thailand's early enthusiasm evaporated and it looked only a matter of time until the Uzbeks went ahead. In the 37th minute they did, Turgunboev chesting the ball down in the box and sweeping the ball first time through the legs of Patiwat. It was his second goal of the tournament and a moment of class. The Uzbeks racked up 10 shots to Thailand's one in a one-sided opening period in

front of 19,000 at Al Janoub Stadium. Thailand's Japanese coach Ishii Masatada made a double change and it paid off in spectacular style on 58 minutes. The newly introduced Supachok exchanged passes with Supachai Chaideb before bending the ball wonderfully into the bottom corner from outside the box. The two teams were level for just seven minutes. Fayzullaev turned on the edge of the box and stroked the ball through the legs of a Thai defender and into the bottom corner. It was the youngster's second goal of the competition. Defender Elias Dolah had Thailand's best chance to draw level in the match for a second time but his header flew just over in stoppage time. In the other last-16 match yesterday, Jurgen Klinsmann's South Korea beat a dogged Saudi side coached by another European great in Roberto Mancini to reach the quarter-finals

FOOTBALL

Klopp calls for calm after shock news of his exit

‘Everything will be fine, I’m 100 percent sure. No one has to worry’

AFP
Liverpool

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp has called for calm surrounding speculation over a number of the club's star players following the news he will leave Anfield at the end of the season.

Virgil van Dijk, Mohamed Salah and Trent Alexander-Arnold have 18 months left to run on their contracts and captain Van Dijk raised alarm bells when the Dutchman said he was “curious which direction the club will go” once Klopp leaves.

“It’s completely normal,” said Klopp at his pre-match press conference ahead of today’s Premier League clash against Chelsea.

“A week ago no one knew about my situation. There was still 18 months on their contracts and no one asked, so give us a break. No one has to worry.

“Write what you want, the club is stable. Everything will be fine, I’m 100 percent sure. I would recommend to stay calm. Very often the fans’ concerns are not as big as you might think. You underestimate the intelligence of our supporters.”

Klopp revealed on Friday that he had told the club two months ago of his plans to leave but that it would have been a show of bad



Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp celebrates after the FA Cup - Fourth Round - match against Norwich City at Anfield, Liverpool, Britain, on Sunday. (Reuters)

faith to try and tie players down to longer deals before announcing the news publicly.

“You cannot work like that, especially not with the relationship we have. There is enough time to do everything,” he added.

“These players love to be here, I know that for a fact, don’t forget that. It is not that they have one foot out. They want to know

a little bit of perspective but that will happen, especially behind the scenes.”

Liverpool could give Klopp an unforgettable send off as they lead the Premier League by five points and are still in the running for trophies in the League Cup, FA Cup and Europa League.

But Klopp insisted there was no rush Salah back from a hamstring

injury he suffered with Egypt at the Africa Cup of Nations.

“There was no pressure on him other than wanting to get fit as quickly as possible anyway. But we don’t rush,” said Klopp.

“You do what you can do and, whilst that happens, we have to wait. Mo’s not ready for this game or the next. He’s injured and a muscle injury takes time.”

Russia demoted to team skating Olympic bronze without banned Valieva



Kamila Valieva’s doping ban has resulted in the Russia Olympic Committee team being demoted from the gold to bronze medal in the 2022 Winter Olympics team skating event, the International Skating Union (ISU) said yesterday.

The then 15-year-old’s positive test in December 2021, for which she received a four year ban on Monday, has led the ISU to perform “a re-ranking of the Team event” from the Beijing Games. The USA has been promoted to the gold medal with Japan moving up to silver.

Canada will be disappointed as they finished fourth in Beijing and in other sports would have expected to be promoted to bronze.

However, unlike in athletics, the regulations of the ISU only provide for collective disqualification in the event of a positive doping control of one of the athletes during the competition, not eight weeks before as was the case with Valieva.

Her four-year ban from the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) was confirmed on Monday.

In her defence, Valieva blamed “contamination by cutlery” she shared with her grandfather, who was treated with the drug trimetazidine after receiving an artificial heart, and who drove her to training every day.

However doubt surrounds the value of trimetazidine to athletes, which is normally used to treat angina, due in particular to its

“numerous side effects” ranging from “gait disorders” to “hallucinations”.

In Beijing in February 2022, Valieva became the first female skater to land a quadruple jump in Olympic competition, as she helped Russia secure team gold. The next day, she was told she had tested positive before the Games for trimetazidine.

From the start, the case has presented a dilemma. Valieva’s age should have guaranteed her confidentiality under WADA rules for “protected persons” younger than 16. Partly as a result of the Valieva case, the ISU is raising the lower age limit for its senior category from 15 to 17 from this year, citing the “physical, mental and emotional health” of competitors.

RUSADA tested the skater on December 25, 2021, as she won the Russian championships. They sent the sample to the WADA-accredited laboratory in Stockholm. The laboratory found a minute concentration of trimetazidine but, delayed by the Covid pandemic, the result was not delivered until during the Beijing Olympics.

Under the pressure of suspicion and the worldwide media attention, Valieva cracked in the individual event in Beijing, stumbling four times in the free skate and finishing in tears as she tumbled from first to fourth.

At the end of the year, RUSADA ruled that Valieva bore “no fault or negligence” for the positive test.

FOCUS

Guardiola loving his ‘dream’ Man City job

AFP
Manchester

Pep Guardiola said he has “everything a manager could dream of” at Manchester City as Erling Haaland is set to return from a two-month injury layoff against Burnley today.

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp, and Guardiola’s former player Xavi, who is now in coach of Barcelona, both announced their intention to step down at the end of the season in recent days, citing the emotional strain that comes with management at the top level.

Guardiola also cut short his hugely successful spell in charge of Barca after four years and spent only three seasons at Bayern Munich before arriving in Manchester in 2016.

Now into his eighth season at City, Guardiola has racked up

five Premier League titles and the club’s first ever Champions League among 15 major trophies.

But the 53-year-old said he had no intention of stepping down soon, praising the environment that surrounds him at the Etihad.

“I have everything that a manager could dream of,” he said at his pre-match press conference yesterday.

“The hierarchy they always support me. We have changed a lot of players in seven years but all of them have been incredibly supportive.

“(It’s a) good environment so I have everything. Still, I feel good and of course one day it is going to finish but I don’t think about that right now.”

City look primed to add to that trophy haul with Haaland back fit for the business end of the season.

Haaland is the joint-top goalscorer in the league this season with 14, level with Liverpool’s Moham-



ed Salah, but has not played since fracturing a bone in his foot in a 1-0 loss to Aston Villa on Dec 6.

“Apparently he will be selected,

yeah. The first time he’s back,” Guardiola told reporters. “We have all the squad (fit), we are stronger. He is an important player for us.”

Haaland’s return could prove pivotal for holders City, who are second in the Premier League standings and trail leaders Liverpool by five points but have a game in hand. City also have Champions League and FA Cup fixtures in February.

The 23-year-old Norwegian has 19 goals in 22 games in all competitions this season.

“Erling is an important player for us. Two months out, but he feels good - we have a training session (today), but apparently tomorrow he will be with us,” added Guardiola.

Kevin De Bruyne and Jeremy Doku have also recently returned from injuries, while defenders John Stones and Manuel Akanji could also make their comeback in midweek.

“The most important news is almost all the squad are fit,” added Guardiola.

“That is the best news. The im-

portant part of season starts now. FA Cup, the Champions League is around the corner and of course the Premier League - it’s important that we have everyone available. We have all the squad, we are stronger definitely.”

City are five points behind Liverpool at the top of the Premier League but have a game in hand.

Guardiola’s men ended their hex at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on Friday to progress to the fifth round of the FA Cup and are huge favourites to progress when they face FC Copenhagen in the Champions League last 16 next month.

And Guardiola said he can afford to throw Haaland back into the thick of the action quicker than De Bruyne, whose return has been managed after five months out with a hamstring tear.

“Kevin’s was muscular with surgery,” he said. “Erling’s was a stress on the bone, so a different approach.”

BOTTOMLINE

Coach Pochettino wants Chelsea to spoil Klopp’s farewell ‘party’

AFP
Liverpool

Mauricio Pochettino is hoping Chelsea do not give Liverpool cause for celebration as the pair clash yesterday in the Reds’ first Premier League match since Jurgen Klopp announced he will leave at the end of the season.

Klopp was serenaded by his adoring Anfield audience during Sunday’s 5-2 FA Cup win over Norwich just 48 hours after he made the shock announcement he will depart in May after nearly nine years in charge.

Liverpool will also meet Chelsea in next month’s League Cup final at Wembley but Pochettino is hoping to rain on Klopp’s parade despite his admiration for the German.

“It’s a special game for him. Until the end it’s going to be special,” Pochettino said at his pre-match press conference

“Every time they play at Anfield it is going to be a party to celebrate



and give him all the love the fans feel for him and I think he deserves it. But we are thinking to go there and win the game. Sorry, but we don’t want to be involved as part of the celebration. We want to be party poopers, but that is on us to perform well and win the game.”

Klopp, 56, said he no longer had the energy to carry on and vowed to take at least a one-year sabbatical.

But Pochettino, who had nearly a year out of the game before joining Chelsea in July, believes the German could return sooner than anticipated.

“After a few months at home,

Jurgen will for sure start to miss the training sessions, the players. When you are in another part of your life you start to miss the part that was really important for you,” added Pochettino.

“It’s a coach and person I am going to miss. I love to watch him on the touchline and the team he manages. I hope he will only be away a few months, maybe one year, and then will come back.”

Pochettino endured a difficult start to his reign at Stamford Bridge, but he is beginning to find the right blend amidst a talented young squad that cost over £1bn (\$1.3bn) in transfer fees over the past 18 months.

Chelsea have lost just twice in their last 10 games to climb up to ninth in the Premier League as well as reaching the League Cup final.

The Blues’ injury problems are also easing with Christopher Nkunku and Malo Gusto set to be included in the squad for the trip to Anfield. Nicolas Jackson could also return after Senegal’s elimination at the Africa Cup of Nations, but Levi Colwill misses out.

England pacer Wood ‘not annoyed’ by limited role in win over India

Hyderabad: England quick Mark Wood said he has no complaints about his limited role in their thrilling win over India in the first Test in Hyderabad despite bowling just eight overs in the second innings.

Ollie Pope’s knock of 196 and a seven-wicket haul from debutant Tom Hartley inspired England to a 28-run victory on Sunday in the opener of a five-match series.

Captain Ben Stokes opted to go for four spinners, with Wood being the sole seamer in the starting line-up, and the move paid off as they handed India just their fourth defeat in their last 48 home tests.

“When we were at the ground, he (Stokes) said probably one or two,” Wood told ESPNcricinfo.

“I mean, I thought I may not even open the bowling second innings. But it was like, ‘one over; that’s it’.

“Very rarely would you think you’d bowl one over and then be off. But weirdly, I trust what he says. One over? Right, okay, I’ll give it everything for this over.

“And then he said ‘rest’ and I’m not annoyed. Like, I get it, we’re going to spin now. So it’s just a bit different.”

India quick Jasprit Bumrah picked up six wickets in the Test, including four for 41 runs in the second innings.

Wood went wicket-less after bowling 25 overs in the match.

“Bumrah didn’t do me any favours by bowling like a genius,” Wood said.

“I’m disappointed that I didn’t get any wickets



Mark Wood (right) claps as England’s Tom Hartley (third left) celebrates after taking a five-wicket haul during the fourth day of the first Test against India at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad on Sunday. (AFP)

but not really fussed, because the team played amazing.”

Wood said the victory would have given the hosts “something to think about” for the remainder of the series.

“India have got the potential to produce any wicket here,” he added.

“I’ve played in World Cup games and Indian Premier League games where it’s seamed, flat pitches, spinning wickets.”

The second Test will take place in Visakhapatnam from Feb 2-6.

QATAR INTERNATIONAL RALLY

Bernacchini rejoins al-Attiyah for new MERC season in Qatar

Competitors from 17 nations will take part in the opening round of the Middle East Rally Championship

By Sports Reporter
Lusail

The diminutive Italian Giovanni Bernacchini was officially confirmed as Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah's co-driver during yesterday's administration checks for this weekend's Qatar International Rally at the Lusail Sports Arena.

Twenty-three crews and competitors from 17 nations will take part in the opening round of the 2024 FIA Middle East Rally Championship.

Bernacchini replaces Andorra-based Mathieu Baumel, who has been a regular fixture alongside al-Attiyah since the start of the 2015 season. Baumel cut his teeth in the FIA Middle East Rally Championship with Khalifa al-Attiyah, Yazeed al-Rajhi and Abdullah al-Kuwari. Together, he and al-Attiyah won four Dakars, two W2RC titles, 30 MERC rallies and nine regional FIA championships.

Fifty-year-old Bernacchini last competed with al-Attiyah in 2014 and secured the fourth of his Qatar International Rally victories to add to wins in 2010, 2011 and 2013. In total, he has won 25 rallies in the MERC, a number equalled by Chris Patterson but still adrift of the record-holding Ronan Morgan (41) and Baumel (32). He will now co-drive for the Qatari on all five rounds of the regional rally series.

Al-Attiyah said: "It's not a new challenge with Giovanni. He was with me for a long time and we won the championship together several times. This year I decided to have him again. For me, it was not really working like what I wanted with Mathieu. Still, we have a good relationship and now he is free. I also have my decision for the next co-driver for the Dakar and cross-country (Edouard Boulanger).

"At the moment I don't know if we will do some more rallies. We will do Middle East and, in the event of the sponsor Visit Qatar, I think they want to have three or four race in WRC, maybe WRC2. Maybe Portugal, Sardinia, Greece, basically the



Co-driver Giovanni Bernacchini (left) and Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah during yesterday's administration checks for Qatar International Rally at the Lusail Sports Arena.

ones that I like. We will also be very busy with the new programme of Dacia.

"After several months with the cross-country car, this morning the car felt very slow. I did 30km of testing this morning and I adjust myself and we changed a lot of things, just to be sure and to make a good start for the Qatar Rally."

Bernacchini added: "It is a pleasure for me to come back after 10 years with Nasser. We won four times here together and I really hope that this new adventure after 10 years can be as successful. It's something surprising me in a very good way but I really hope our agreement can bring back

the same victories. When I left Nasser, I still tried to win some races in the Middle East. Now I have the chance again. I really hope to increase my number of victories."

Bernacchini competed alongside al-Attiyah's cousin Nasser Khalifa al-Atya last year in both the Oman and Qatar rallies and finished fifth and sixth overall. He has also co-driven in the region for Khalid al-Suwaidi, Rashed al-Ketbi and Roger Feghali.

Several drivers, including al-Attiyah and the trio of Mads Ostberg, Pierre-Louis Loubet and Martins Sesks (who are competing in Sports Racing Technology-run



Abdullah al-Rawahi's car undergoes pre-event preparation.

Skoda Fabia RS Rally2s) tested their cars in the desert to the north of Doha yesterday morning.

Loubet will be co-driven by Boris Pascaud this season in the WRC2 category of the FIA World Rally Championship. He and Pascaud, who has worked as an integral member of the Frenchman's gravel crew for the last two seasons, will use the event in Qatar as an invaluable acclimatisation exercise. After taking part in the Africa Eco Race at the start of January and claiming five stage wins in an Apache SSV, Loubet spent last weekend in the commentary box for Canal+ Sport at the Monte-Carlo Rally.

Sesks was testing at the helm of a Toyota GR Yaris Rally2 in central Finland recently and Ostberg was involved in testing for the recent Sigdalsrally in Norway. Both events were a far cry from the deserts of northern Qatar.

Today, competitors carry out a detailed

reconnaissance of the dozen gravel stages that have been laid on by the QMMF through Qatar's northern deserts.

The Waab Al Mashrab stage is similar to 2023 but there have been minor changes to sections of both the Al Waab and Umm Birka specials, with new tracks added into the middle part of both specials.

The Al Khor stage features a new start section and will be run in the opposite direction to 2023, while the majority of the Ras Laffan and Al Thakira stages remain unchanged except for a new start and finish section for the Ras Laffan special and a short change near the end of Al Thakira.

The 2024 Qatar International Rally gets underway from Lusail Boulevard at 7pm tomorrow evening, before competitors tackle an exciting opening super special stage at the LCSC Karting Academy from 8pm. There is a chance of light rain tomorrow and blustery and less settled weather conditions for Friday and Saturday.

EQUESTRIAN

Doha Tour 2024 a huge success, secures annual spot on calendar



The 2024 Doha Tour saw a high percentage of public attendance with more than 15,000 tickets sold.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Following the success of this year's edition of the Doha International Equestrian Tour Championship, the tournament's organising committee has announced the decision to continuously hold the event in the coming years starting 2025, with the participation of more quality of riders locally, regionally and internationally, and categories with different grades, multiple heights, and prize money of more than 2mn Euros.

The 2024 Doha Tour held over three rounds, by the Qatar Equestrian Federation (QEF) in a strategic partnership with the Qatar Olympic Committee and Al Shaqab, in as many weeks recently concluded at Al Shaqab's Longines outdoor arena on January 27 and with stupendous success. It saw a high percentage of public attendance with more than 15,000 tickets sold. As many as 201 riders from 21 countries took part in the opening round including 93 Qatari riders and 32 from GCC countries. The second round had 248 male and female riders, including 89 internationally ranked riders. The third round had the highest participation with 265 male and female riders, including 93 internationally ranked riders.

The Tour consisted of 3 interna-



Sheikh Ahmed bin Noah al-Thani, Chairman of the Doha Tour Organising Committee.

tional rounds, where the first and second rounds were allocated to the two-star and four-star categories, while the third and final round was allocated to the five-star and two-star categories. The Tour also witnessed the allocation of rounds for future riders, with the Qatar Equestrian Federation providing them the opportunity to compete at international level.

Sheikh Ahmed bin Noah al-Thani, Chairman of the Supreme Organising Committee of the tournament, praised the great success achieved by the Doha Tour, stressing that this success was an impetus in taking the decision to extend the contract for organising the tournament.

Sheikh Ahmed stressed that the championship embodies one of

the most important strategic goals of the QEF, which is to develop and raise the level of riders' performance and enhance their experience, especially giving them the opportunity to interact with the best riders in the world in the sport of show jumping.

He stated: "We look forward to organising the next edition with higher financial prizes with an increase in the number of riders and the number of rounds. All of this will be after an evaluation study of the current edition by the relevant work teams of the organising committee. The Doha International Equestrian Tour has become a tournament approved on the federation's calendar.

"The International Equestrian Club will give participating riders the opportunity to earn points that will enhance their international ranking," he added.

It is worth noting that the Doha International Equestrian Tours reflect the efforts of the QEF, in cooperation with relevant authorities, in promoting sports tourism and Doha as the sports capital.

Saudi rider Abdullah al-Sharbatly won the Grand Prix title for the five-star category at Doha Tour 2024 after an exciting round of distinction in which four riders competed, achieving a time of 39.43 seconds. Brazilian rider Santiago Lamber had finished second place and Denmark's Rikki Belinda Parker was third.

FOOTBALL

Sinayoko scores as Mali set up AFCON clash with Ivory Coast

AFP
Korhogo, Ivory Coast

Lassine Sinayoko scored his third goal at the Africa Cup of Nations as Mali reached the quarter-finals for the first time since 2013 by defeating Burkina Faso 2-1 yesterday.

An early Edmond Tapsoba own goal got Mali off to a great start in the last 16 tie and Auxerre's Sinayoko doubled the lead just after half-time. Bertrand Traore reduced arrears from a penalty for Burkina Faso, who had the ball in the net again only for Issoufou Dayo to be ruled offside.

Mali, who have had two first round and two last-16 exits since finishing third 11 years ago, face hosts Ivory Coast in Bouake on Saturday with a semi-final place on the line. Shock 2022 World Cup semi-finalists Morocco meet South Africa in San-Pedro later in the final last 16 match.

Premier League duo Yves Bissouma of Tottenham Hotspur and Dango Ouattara of Bournemouth both started on the bench for Mali and Burkina Faso respectively.

Mali made six changes from the side that fought a 0-0 draw with Namibia to top Group E, including a new four-man midfield.

Group D runners-up Burkina Faso changed four of the side beaten 2-0 by Angola with out-of-favour Aston Villa forward Traore the captain. This was only the second Cup of Nations meeting be-

tween the west African neighbours with Mali winning a group match 3-1 in Tunisia 20 years ago.

The match in the northern Ivorian city kicked off in 36 degrees Celsius (97 Fahrenheit) heat and Mali needed only 133 seconds to score the second fastest goal in the tournament. A powerful Amadou Haidara header off a cross rebounded off the post, struck the left foot of Tapsoba and rebounded into the net for an own goal.

Watched by Confederation of African Football (CAF) president Patrice Motsepe from South Africa, the football rarely excited the almost-capacity 19,154 crowd until the half-hour mark. Then, Sinayoko stung the fingers of goalkeeper Herve Koffi with a hard close-range shot that was parried.

Only Mali were threatening to score and Kamory Doumbia fired narrowly wide with a low shot from just outside the area. They went two goals ahead two minutes into the second half as Sinayoko broke clear of Tapsoba and beat Koffi with an angled shot.

But the lead was halved on 57 minutes when Boubakar Kouyate handled a cross and Traore converted his third penalty of the tournament as Mali goalkeeper Djigui Diarra dived the wrong way. France-born Burkina Faso coach Hubert Veud brought on Dango Ouattara for Traore with 13 minutes of regular time remaining as the Stallions sought an equaliser.

Long-serving defender Dayo thought he had levelled in the final minute of regular time by heading a free-kick past Diarra, but was ruled offside.

Qatar University clinch Universities Cricket League



Qatar University (QU) emerged triumphant in the Universities Cricket League held at the Educational City cricket stadium. In the final, held under the patronage of the Qatar Collegiate Sports Federation (QCSF), QU outclassed University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST). Rashid Saeed Adiba, Secretary-General of the QCSF, Dr Senaid al-Marri, Director of the Sports Affairs Department at QU, and a spirited gathering of QU students, attended the event. The American University of Afghanistan team secured the third position.

PREVIEW

SPOTLIGHT

Japan flak at Asian Cup ‘a sign of respect’: Coach

Moriyasu’s men have struggled to live up to their billing as favourites

AFP
Doha

Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu said criticism of his team at the Asian Cup was “a sign of respect” as they prepare to face Bahrain in the last 16 today.

Japan have struggled to live up to their billing as pre-tournament favourites in Qatar and went through as Group D runners-up after a shock defeat to Iraq. Moriyasu’s side beat Germany and Spain at the 2022 World Cup and went into the Asian Cup on the back of a run of nine straight wins in which they scored 39 goals.

The coach said he was glad they were being held to high standards as they gear up to face a Bahrain side that topped Group E ahead of South Korea. The winner will face Iran or Syria in the quarter-finals.

“It feels like a sign of respect when people say we have been struggling because they expect us to play well, so I’m happy to hear that,” said Moriyasu. “All of the teams at the Asian Cup have a lot of quality and we have had difficult games because they are getting better.”

Japan conceded at least one goal in all three of their group games, with inexperienced goalkeeper Zion Suzuki at fault on more than one occasion. Moriyasu said Japan would learn from their defensive mistakes but would have “no sense of uneasiness” as they begin the knockout stage.

Moriyasu’s side came into the tournament in a rich vein of form having won nine matches in a row – including defeating Germany 4-1 in Wolfsburg in September – scoring 39 goals in the process to build on their impressive performances at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

But, after the loss to Iraq and conceding five goals so far at the Asian Cup, doubts have been raised over their ability to sustain a challenge for a record-extending fifth continental crown. “We have to learn from our mistakes in the first three games but that doesn’t mean we have any worries about our defence for tomorrow’s match,” said Moriyasu. “Bahrain are a strong side so we have to be careful of their attacking play, but I’m confident my players will play up to 100 per cent of their potential. Bahrain are a very talented side. They have individual talents, but also they can work as a team, as a unit. They are strong as a team, they can not only counterattack but they have also talented players up front who can play good football.”

Bahrain lost their opening game, to South Korea, but qualified from their group in first place after beating Malaysia and Jordan. Coach



Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu speaks during a press conference in Doha yesterday.



Bahrain coach Juan Antonio Pizzi has vowed to exploit Japan’s weaknesses.

Juan Antonio Pizzi said Japan being labelled favourites “could play into our hands” and vowed to exploit their weaknesses.

“It will be a very tough match but I have full confidence in my players and we are very optimistic that we can win,” said Pizzi, who lifted the Copa America with Chile in 2016. “Of course optimism and enthusiasm will help us compete and help us play every game as if it is a final.”

The return of Czech Republic-based striker Abdulla Yusuf against the Jordanians, after starting the first two games on the bench, bolstered Pizzi’s side and the Argentinian could look for the towering forward again to cause problems for Japan’s backline.

“Japan are a tough team with a lot of strengths but they have weaknesses that we need to exploit in order to be able to come out on top,” said Pizzi. “Hopefully we will be able to implement our philosophy. We learned a few lessons from the game against South Korea and before the tournament we also played Australia (losing 2-0). When you compete against big national teams this makes the team stronger collectively and individually. Unfortunately the results of these two matches were not up to our expectations but we still felt comfortable because the level was high and it reassured us that we can compete against anybody.”

Equaliser before the break was crucial for Qatar: Salman



Tarek Salman said Qatar’s equaliser just before half time was the turning point as the defending champions edged Palestine 2-1 to seal their place in the AFC Asian Cup quarter-finals at Al Bayt Stadium on Monday.

The host nation survived a tough test from Palestine, who took the lead before succumbing to goals from Hassan al-Haydos and Akram Afif either side of the break. “It was not an easy game and Palestine proved to be a very tough opponent, so we are happy to win,” said Salman. “I would like to thank the fans for showing up and supporting us from start to finish. The team is thankful to have qualified for the quarter-finals and now we will work towards continuing to move ahead. Although it was a tough game, once we enter the knockout stage, the most important thing is to win and not how we perform.”

Reflecting on the team’s cagey

start, Salman admitted that conceding was due to a lapse in concentration, with Palestine’s Oday Dabbagh the first to score against Qatar at this edition of the continental showpiece. “The goal we conceded was due to a momentary break in our focus. But thankfully, we were able to get back into the game and equalise. That was the turning point in the game, and of course, getting the second goal early after the break also helped a lot.”

The defender said that now that the jitters of their first knockout stage tie had been overcome, there would be renewed energy in the squad, with Qatar to meet Uzbekistan on Saturday.

“I thought we played really well and what is crucial is that we got the much needed win. Now, Qatar are through to the last eight and the team is feeling happy and confident and, hopefully, this win will help us play even better in the next game.”

Jordan’s record scorer sent home after bust-up

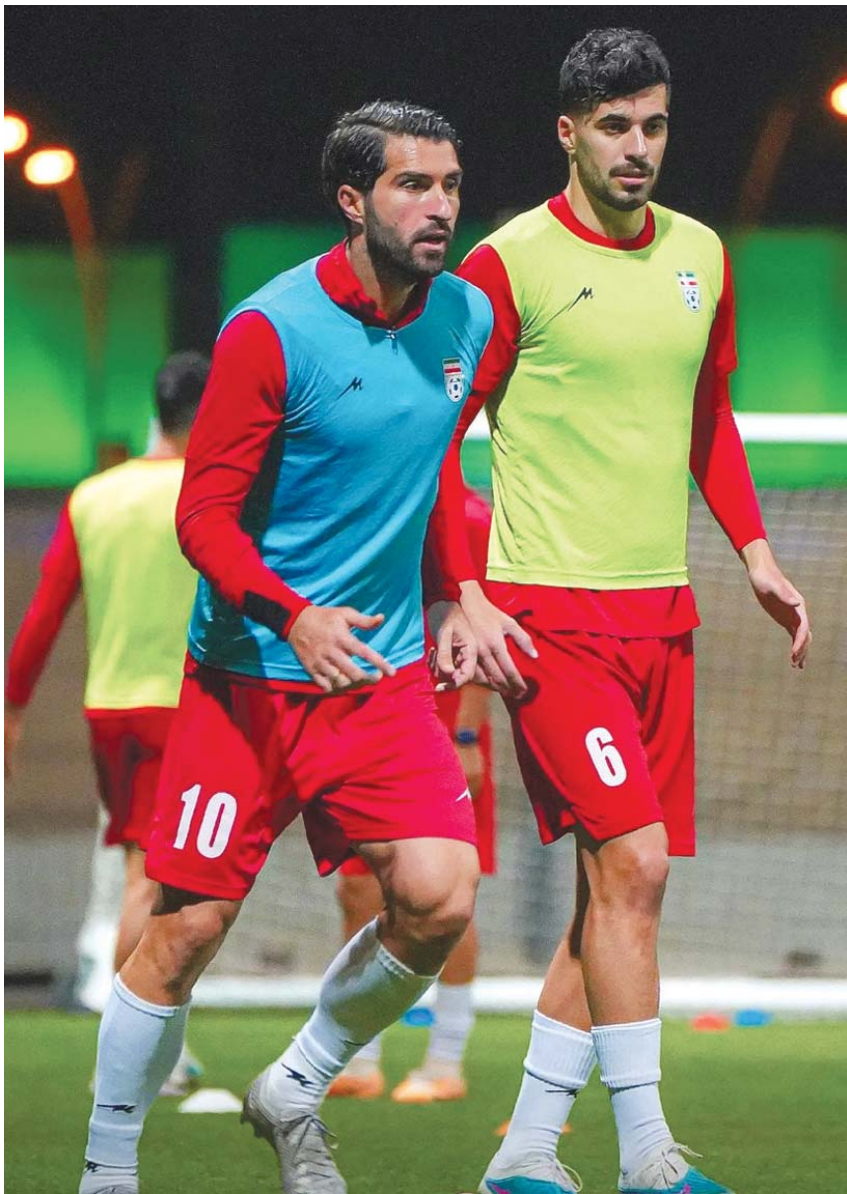
Doha: Jordan have sent record goal-scorer Hamza al-Dardour home from the Asian Cup after a public bust-up with coach Hussein Ammouta during their last-16 win over Iraq.

Dardour, who has 35 goals for his country, clashed with Ammouta on the sidelines in the dying minutes of the 3-2 win over Iraq in Doha on Monday. The 32-year-old was shown a red card by the referee despite being an unused substitute.

Jordan said in a statement that Dardour had “violated the team’s instructions”. Video footage showed the forward being restrained by teammates after the confrontation with Ammouta. Dardour made two substitute appearances in Jordan’s first-round games against Malaysia and Bahrain. His goal haul includes four in one game against Palestine at the 2015 Asian Cup. Jordan face Tajikistan in the quarter-finals.

FOCUS

Iran ‘dreaming’ of winning first Asian title since 1976



Iran players at a training session in Doha yesterday.

AFP
Doha

Iran are “following our dreams” in trying to win the Asian Cup for the first time in 48 years, winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh said on the eve of today’s last-16 clash with Syria.

Three-time champions Iran face Syria in Qatar with a quarter-final against Bahrain or pre-tournament favourites Japan up for grabs. Along with holders Qatar, Iran are the only team left in the competition who went through the group stage with a 100 per cent record.

“We know the importance of this tournament for the people of Iran and for ourselves,” Feyenoord’s Jahanbakhsh said yesterday. “We are doing our best to follow our dreams.”

Syria are in the knockout rounds for the first time and Iran are clear favourites, but Jahanbakhsh warned: “It’s going to be very difficult, they are very physical. They only conceded one goal in the group phase and are very good defensively.

“It is all about details,” the 30-year-old former Brighton player, who captained Iran in their 1-0 group-stage win over Hong Kong, added. “The biggest difference between the group phase and the knockouts is that if you make one mistake, you can easily go out.”

Iran’s coach Amir Ghalenoei identified his Syrian counterpart, the experienced Argentine Hector Cuper – who guided Egypt to the 2017 Africa Cup of Nations final – as a formidable opponent. “I think this is one of the most important matches in this tournament,” said Ghalenoei.

“We will face a team that is disciplined. We should make less mistakes and be tactically and technically better than in our previous two matches. We know that we can’t afford to make any mistakes, we saw Iraq and the UAE get eliminated, so we need to be very careful with our performance.”

Iran are set to miss the services of two



Syria’s coach Hector Cuper called Iran one of the strongest teams at the tournament.

key defenders for today’s clash, but Ghalenoei remained confident in his squad’s ability to deliver, urging them to show their quality against a team that is difficult to break down. “At this moment we don’t have Sadegh Moharrami and Morteza Pouraliganji, but not much else. All of the players we have and the squad we have now can be with us until the next World Cup, so we are not planning on making any generational shifts. Any changes will be gradual.”

“I think today football is all about lines and the structure of the team. Hector Cuper had the same style of football in Valencia and all his other teams. We changed the philosophy of the team from defensive to attacking and the stats in the group stage back this up. I hope the players can show their quality from a technical point of view. I always tell them that you always have to follow the tactical instructions from the coaching staff, but it is important that you show your individual technical abilities too.”

Cuper called Iran one of the strongest

teams at the tournament while his men squeezed into the knockout rounds with one win, a 1-0 victory over India, in three games. It was the only goal Syria have scored, but they have also only conceded once, in a defeat to Australia.

At the age of 68, Cuper boasts one of the most impressive managerial resumes in the tournament, having reached European finals with Spanish clubs Mallorca and Valencia as well as an Africa Cup of Nations final with Egypt in 2017, and the Argentina tactician believes that despite not winning any of those finals, he can be proud of his achievements.

“I may have been unfortunate in some of the finals,” said Cuper. “I might have made mistakes that cost me these finals, but to be able to reach so many finals including big competitions like the UEFA Champions League is a success in my opinion. I am happy with my career and will keep fighting until the end. It is the same here in Syria where I want to be able to help the team bring much needed joy to the Syrian people. No one knows about the result, but what I can promise the fans is that my team will fight for the 90 minutes.”

Facing the second highest ranked Asian team in Iran, the challenge will be complicated for the Eagles of Qasioun who are competing in the AFC Asian Cup knockout stage for the first time in their history. “We know it will be a very difficult game against one of the strongest teams in Asia, but we are excited, motivated and optimistic. We have been preparing as usual, we want to use the positive feelings that we have to push us through.

“My ambition right now is to beat Iran, it is not about limited ambition, but in order to reach your bigger ambitions, you always have to pass the first steps first, then we can look into the future. Of course there are always surprises in football. Our focus is fully on tomorrow’s game, we want to create another upset and nothing is impossible in football. We have confidence in the players, we want to remain solid and united and advance to the next round.”