

Bahrain barge through to handball final

● Nationals set to lock horns with Qatar in gold medal game, slated for tomorrow

● Skipper Hussain Al Sayyad provides late-game heroics against Japan in semis

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Bahrain punched their tickets to the men's handball gold medal match yesterday at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China.

The nationals earned their place in the title-decider after battling past Japan 30-28 in a hugely thrilling semi-final contest.

Skipper Hussain Al Sayyad was the late-game hero for the Bahrainis. He scored back-to-back goals with less than two minutes to play to build a three-goal cushion after the Japanese got to within one.

Bahrain are now assured of a medal in men's handball and will hope to capture their first-ever Asiad gold when they take on defending champions Qatar in the final, scheduled for tomorrow at 2pm, Bahrain time.

The Qataris booked their place after defeating fellow-Gulf side Kuwait 29-24 in yesterday's other final four affair.

Tomorrow's gold medal clash is a re-match



Hussain Al Sayyad looks to make a play against Japan

of the final in the 2018 edition of the Asian Games, when the Bahrainis had to settle for silver.

The bronze medal game will also be held tomorrow at 10am, Bahrain time. The fixtures will mark the final day of the handball competitions in Hangzhou.

The Bahrainis are looking to secure only their third-ever men's handball Asiad medals. Prior to their runner-up finish in the previous edition of the Asian Games Jakarta, Indonesia, they had clinched bronze in 2014 in Incheon,

South Korea.

In Bahrain's victory yesterday, the nationals enjoyed an impressive first half and took a 17-13 lead into the interval. But in the final 30 minutes, Japan were the aggressors and they gradually cut into the Bahrainis' lead.

A Naoki Sugioka steal and goal brought them to within one, 23-24, with just over 10 minutes remaining, and the Japanese continued to threaten and stay within striking distance over the remainder of regulation.

Conversions from Yuto Agarie, Mahdi Saad and then Shin Izumoto made it 28-27, with Bahrain clinging to the slim, one-goal advantage with under three minutes left. But that set the stage for Al Sayyad's heroics. He fired in both his succeeding goals from the nine-metre line into the bottom-right corner of the net.

Sugioka pegged the final score with a goal following a missed penalty in the very last second of regulation.

Al Sayyad finished as the victors' leading scorer with nine goals, while Mohammed Habib Ahmed added six and Mohammed Habib Nasser five. Ahmed Fadhel chipped in with four makes while Ali Mirza had three and Mahdi Saad two. Mohammed Mirza rounded out Bahrain's scorers with one goal.

Star goalkeeper Mohammed Abdhussain also played a key role in the win. He finished with an impressive 16 saves.

For the Japanese, Izumoto paced his team with six goals, while Adam Yuki Baig had five.



Bahrain players Hussain Al Sayyad, front, Mohammed Habib Nasser, right, and Mohammed Habib Ahmed, behind, celebrate at the end of their game yesterday against Japan

It's three for Kemi!

Elite Bahraini sprinter and former world champion wins women's 400m hurdles for a golden treble at Hangzhou Asian Games

● Kemi Adekoya clinches 400m hurdles win while setting new Asiad record of 54.45s

● Women's 4x100m relay team disqualified after crossing finish line in third place

● Men's 4x400m relay team, Marta Yota advance to medal round of respective events

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Bahraini sprinter and former world champion Kemi Adekoya clinched her third gold medal at the 19th Asian Games yesterday in Hangzhou, China.

Kemi won the women's 400 metres hurdles title and did it in style, setting a new Asiad record in the process. Her victory added to the gold medals she won in the women's 400m and as part of Bahrain's mixed 4x400m relay team.

Kemi's gold was the highlight of the national delegation's medal bids yesterday on the fifth of seven days in track and field events at Hangzhou Olympic Sports Centre Stadium.

The Kingdom's athletes would have also come away with a bronze medal in the women's 4x100m relay. The quartet of Fatima Mubarak, Edidiong Odiong, Zenab Moussa and Hajar Alkhalidi finished third in their final, but were later disqualified.

Yesterday's single-medal haul



Bahrain's Kemi Adekoya celebrates on the podium alongside Jiadie Mo of China, left, and Vithya Ramraj of India

thus brought Bahrain's count to 12 overall in Hangzhou so far. The tally includes seven gold, one silver and four bronze medals—earning the Kingdom's sports heroes ninth on the medal ranking table based on gold and 16th based on total. Bahrain remained the top-ranked Arab country from the 35 nations to medal.

This year's Asian Games are headed to its concluding days, with the multi-sport extravaganza scheduled to come to a close on Saturday.

In the women's 400m hurdles final, Kemi was competing alongside fellow-Bahraini Aminat Jamal.

Kemi had a strong start and was the clear leader around the final bend. The 400m world indoor champion of 2016 maintained a comfortable gap down the home straight until the finish, crossing the line solo and winning in 54.45 seconds. Her time was a new Asian Games record, beating the previous mark of 55.09s

which Kemi clocked herself in the 2014 Asiad in Incheon, South Korea.

Aside from capturing her third gold in Hangzhou, 30-year-old Kemi also brought her Asian Games honours record to five gold medals. She had previously won the 400m hurdles and 400m titles in Incheon.

Jiadie Mo of China took silver in 55.01s, while Vithya Ramraj of India claimed the bronze in 55.68s, narrowly snatching the final podium place from Aminat, who finished in 56.84s.

Disqualified

Meanwhile, in the women's 4x100m relay final, Fatima started things off with a solid run in the opening leg but had trouble passing the baton to Edidiong, which

Kemi Adekoya crosses the finish line

would later prove crucial. Zenab then took over before handing off the finishing duties to Hajar, who put in a fine run down the last stretch to cross the finish line in third.

The Bahrainis should have come away with the bronze medal, but they were later disqualified for passing the baton outside the takeover zone, leading to an early or late takeover.

China won the gold, Thailand silver and Malaysia were promoted as bronze-medallists.

Also yesterday on the athletics track, Bahrain's men's 4 x 400 m relay team qualified for their final race. They finished

fourth in their first-round heat,

which was enough to earn them a place amongst the eight squads who will be vying for the medals.

The Bahraini foursome included Musa Isah, Abbas Yusuf Abbas, Hussain Al Doseri and Abbas Abubakar Abbas, and they finished their four-lap sprint in

Bahrain's Hangzhou Asiad medallists so far

GOLD

Violah Jephumba Women's 10,000m

Kemi Adekoya Women's 400m

Kemi Adekoya Women's 400m hurdles

Birhanu Balew Men's 10,000m

Winfred Yavi Women's 3,000m steeplechase

Winfred Yavi Women's 1,500m

Musa Isah, Kemi Adekoya, Abbas Yusuf Abbas, Salwa Eid Naser

Mixed 4x400m relay

Salwa Eid Naser Women's 400m

SILVER

Abbas Yusuf Abbas Men's 400m

Hajar Alkhalidi Women's 100m

Marta Yota Women's 1,500m

Edidiong Odiong Women's 200m

3:07.38, which was their season's best.

The final will be held today at 3.35pm, Bahrain time, and the other teams to qualify were Iraq, South Korea, India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Qatar and Thailand.

Also advancing to her final was Marta Yota in the women's 800m. She was competing in the first of two heats and finished second in 2:06.85. It was the fifth-quickest of the round, and Marta will be amongst a field of eight that will be going for gold today at 2.25pm, Bahrain time.

Meanwhile, Bahrain's Tigist Mekonen and Bontu Rebitu were sixth and seventh in the women's 5,000m final. Tigist finished the race in 15:36.58, while Bontu clocked a mark of

15:49.05.

In the men's triple jump final, Bahrain's Oumar Mahamat was ranked ninth but he clocked a personal best of 15.65m on his second attempt.

Others to vie for medals today amongst Bahrain's elite athletes are Birhanu Balew and Dawit Fikadu in the men's 5,000m final, scheduled for a 2.40pm start, Bahrain time. The women's 4x400m relay team will also be in action, going for gold at 3.35pm, Bahrain.

Balew will be aiming to complete a long-distance double after having also won the men's 10,000m gold medal earlier this past week in Hangzhou.



Kemi Adekoya has been in fantastic form this athletics season. Her victory yesterday in the women's 400m hurdles—and new Asian Games record—added to the gold medals she won in the women's 400m and mixed 4x400m relay. Prior to the Hangzhou Asiad, she broke the 400m hurdles Asian record three successive times at this year's world championships in Budapest