

George Baker sets his sights on more Bahrain Turf Series glory

● **Bahrain Turf Series continues with Al Adiyat Cup and Al Wasmiya Cup**

TDT | Manama

George Baker has enjoyed a fantastic start to the season in Bahrain.

In the shape of Lucander (5 1/2-length winner of Al Muharraq Cup), Watchya (2nd in Al Riffa Cup) and Get It (5th in Al Manama Cup), he has already pocketed over £50,000 in prize money. He is hoping to continue that form with a runner in each of today's two £60,000 Bahrain Turf Series races.

Lucander, who stormed to victory in the opening Bahrain Turf Series race on 9th December, was raised 10lbs to 107, putting him into firm contention for the prestigious Crown Prince's (Sponsored by Howden) Cup at the start of February.

From a field of 12, Lucander is one of six European-trained contenders in the Al Adiyat Cup, a conditions race run over 1m 1f (1800m), and Baker feels that the horse is "thriving".

He said: "Lucander is in great order. It was a thrill for all concerned to see him win so well on his Bahraini debut. I thought he would come on for that run,



Action from a previous race at REHC

so to see him go and do it like that and put the race to bed very impressively was fantastic.

"In fact, he probably won a little bit too far. As we know the handicapper didn't miss him and he's now up to a mark of 107. He's taken to this place really well and he loves the ground. He's just a really happy horse and that's clearly the key here. We've got a horse who's in good order, enjoying the change of scenery and he is thriving

with a bit of sun on his back and quite frankly, who can blame him?"

Lucander will be taking on some of the best horses in Bahrain, including last year's impressive King's Cup winner Zagato and The Covex Kid, who has won his last five races, including the most recent Bahrain Turf Series race, the Al Dana Cup.

When asked about the quality of the field, Baker said: "It looks really tough, but we thought the last race was uber

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"I'd love to see him go and be competitive and back it up. He's going to be a fun horse for his owners when we get back to the UK. I guess he's done a job here already. It's a bit of a cliché, but after the last race, anything else is a bonus."

Newmarket-based trainer Alice Haynes has travelled out to Bahrain to saddle Mr Professor in today's Al Adiyat Cup for owners Amo Racing. Mr Professor could only finish eighth on his one start to date in Bahrain but Haynes believes that he was too keen to do himself justice.

Haynes said: "It was his first run for a while and he was a bit fresh. He did a little bit too much, and his run just pe-

tered out in the last furlong. He seems in great order. He's fresh and he did a nice canter this morning.

"Tomorrow's race does look competitive but I think the drop back to 1m 1f (1800m) will definitely suit him as the 1m 2f (2000m) seemed to stretch him last time. I'd be hopeful of a good run."

Over 5f (1000m), 15 horses are set to go to post for the Al Wasmiya Cup which is also worth £60,000 and forms part of the Bahrain Turf Series. There are four European-trained contenders including Nomadic Empire who won the Al Manama Cup for David O'Meara and Neil Callan in December.

Behind Nomadic Empire that day was Get It for George Baker. Baker is hoping that Get It can build on his promising run in that race and he said: "Get It missed the kick last time and we were also drawn away from the action. The first four were down the far side and we won our race down the stands side but there are no prizes for that. We're drawn on the far side tomorrow, where I think a few of the fancied ones are drawn."

"He seems to have come on for that run so we've got to go there full of hope. These sprinters have got a bit of a habit of throwing in bad runs and good runs. I couldn't be happier with the way he is, if he could run the same race and be amongst the same horses then hopefully he'll be involved."

Bahrain ready for 'difficult match' against Kuwait

Defending champions focused on challenge at hand to advance to semi-finals of 25th Arab Gulf Cup in Basra, Iraq

● **Bahrain to face Kuwait, Qatar to take on UAE, both starting at 6pm, Bahrain time**

● **Bahrainis need only a draw in their match to ensure their place in the final four**

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Bahrain faces a tough task against Kuwait tonight but are prepared to make the most of the moment to secure their berth in the semi-finals of the 25th Arab Gulf Cup, national team head coach Helio Sousa says.

The Portuguese tactician said yesterday in his pre-game Press conference that the Bahrainis are totally focused on the task at hand as they embark on their third Group B game to conclude this stage of the tournament.

Bahrain, who are the defending champions, need only a draw to make it through to the final four. A win would also ensure their spot, but if they lose, the two advancing semi-finalists will be determined on the table.

"We did what we must do until this stage of the competition—to play two games and win both of them—but still we did not qual-



Helio Sousa, centre, with defender Waleed Al Hayam, right, and national team media coordinator Mohammed Abdulghaffar during yesterday's Press conference

ify yet for semi-finals, the next stage of the competition," Sousa said. "In short competitions like this, there are many conditions until the end.

"Now we just count on ourselves on what we can manage, without knowing what the other teams are doing. We must count on what we can do to pass, not what the others need to do."

The nationals are currently in first place with six points, while Kuwait and Qatar are on three points each and are still also in contention. The Qataris take on the UAE in tonight's other di-

Standings

	P	W	D	L	+/-	Pts
Bahrain	2	2	0	0	2	6
Qatar	2	1	0	1	1	3
Kuwait	2	1	0	1	-1	3
UAE	2	0	0	2	-2	0

visional fixture. The Emiratis also still have a mathematical chance to advance, depending on tonight's results.

Both games are scheduled for simultaneous 6pm kick-offs, Bahrain time, with the Bahrainis and Kuwaitis facing off at Basra International Stadium and the

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HELIO SOUSA

Qataris and Emiratis playing at Al Minaa Olympic Stadium.

"It will be very difficult; the last two games were very difficult, and the Kuwaiti team are now a more consistent team," Sousa said. "It will be a very difficult game again, but we will do like we try to do every game—to be in the best conditions to try and get the three points again."

Sousa highlighted that Bahrain will be counting on their entire squad in their game tonight, and it will not matter who starts.

"Our main players are the 23 that we brought here; not only the ones who started our first or second game, but all 23 players we have—those are the main players for the competition and we count on all of them," Sousa stressed.



Bahrain national team players during their training last night

"We hope to do all to stay in the competition the longest we can. For that we must be able to maintain our performance and the quality of our football depending on who is starting each game.

"We were able to do that so far and we hope to keep doing it again."

Sousa added that the Bahrainis are not thinking about about who they will face in the semi-finals, should they go through. They are only focused on the task at hand, nothing more.

"Our target is to win the next game, to be possible to fight for more things," Sousa said. "If we

can pass to the next stage, then we will think to be in final, but for that we must win the next game.

"We can achieve only what is in front of us. We are prepared for what is coming. We must work for the moment and for what we have tomorrow, and tomorrow is a game against Kuwait."

Sousa thanked the Bahraini fans who have travelled to Kuwait to support the team, and also all the fans in Basra for what he described as a fantastic atmosphere that has helped boost the players in their performance.