

# Ahli all set for Gulf basketball campaign

Bahrain champions receive national basketball federation president Waleed Al Alawi prior to flying out to Dubai for competition

● Ahli representing Bahrain in tournament as one of five teams competing for the title, as well as a place in FIBA Asia Champions Cup

● Bahrainis scheduled to open campaign on Friday against Al Shamal of Qatar, in the first of three games over three straight days

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BBA president Waleed Al Alawi, left, speaks to the Ahli players during his visit to training alongside officials

Bahrain champions Al Ahli are finalising their preparations for the 40th Gulf Basketball Association Championship, which tips off in Dubai on Friday.

The competition also acts as a qualifying tournament for this year's FIBA Asia Champions Cup.

Ahli are taking part as the winners of the national league as well as the prestigious Khalifa bin Salman Cup.

In support of Ahli's representation of the Kingdom in the event, Bahrain Basketball Association president Waleed Al Alawi visited the team during their practice session at Zain Basketball Arena in Um Al Hasam.

Also present were BBA and Ahli officials, as well as the team members including head coach

Ahmed Jan.

Al Alawi wished Ahli the best in the championship and urged the players to give their best.

There are five clubs set to take to the hardwood for the competition. Along with Bahrain's Ahli, the others are hosts Shabab Al Ahli Club of Dubai, Al Nasser of Saudi Arabia, Al Shamal of Qatar and Al Kuwait of Kuwait.

Play will consist of a single round-robin, after which the semi-finals will take place followed by the final. The winners will move on to compete in the FIBA Asia Champions Cup, which is scheduled to be held later this year.

The Bahraini outfit will be relying on their top local players such as Mohammed Qurban, Maitham Jameel, Hesham Sar-



**To bolster their squad for the GBA championship, Ahli have signed the talented American pairing of Mike Harris and Manny Harris**

han, Ahmed Aldurazi and Subah Hussain, to name a few.

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Ahli's players during their practice session

Harris.

Mike Harris already has experience with Ahli, having helped them secure this past season's titles in both the national league as well as the prestigious Khalifa bin Salman Cup.

Manny Harris is joining the team for the first time. He had also suited up in his playing career with clubs in Israel, Greece, Lithuania, Turkey, Ukraine and the Philippines, among others.

Ahli open their tournament campaign with a tough three-game schedule over three straight days. They first go

against Shamal on Friday, and then take on Kuwait on Saturday before playing Shabab Al Ahli the very next evening.

Following a rest day on Monday, play resumes on Tuesday when Ahli face Nasser.

The semi-finals are then scheduled to be held on June 25, followed by the final the next evening on the 26th.

The FIBA Asia Champions Cup, previously known as the Asian Basketball Confederation (ABC) Champions Cup until 2002, is the Asian club championship for professional basket-

ball. It is organised by FIBA Asia, and takes place once a year.

Last year's competition was postponed due to the pandemic. In 2019, Muharraq represented Bahrain and were able to make it through to the final four where they lost to Al Riyadi of Beirut. They then bowed to Palayesh Naft Abadan of Iran in the bronze medal game, and had to settle for third place.

Only one Bahraini club has ever medalled in the FIBA Asia Champions Cup. It was Manama in 2000, when they won the bronze medals.

## BRAVE CF leading the way for European MMA development

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BRAVE Combat Federation has been making major moves in the mixed martial arts scene globally but most recently has been sending shock waves throughout the European continent by highlighting the best fighters, empowering mixed martial arts federations, and helping local promotions gain worldwide recognition.

As of lately, the promotion reached a new milestone and was crowned the biggest global promotion in Europe due to having the largest active market share in the continent and the most extensive European scouting network.

The fruition of the vision of the founder His Highness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa to reform the MMA industry from an event business to a sports business and give opportunity to fighters and the whole industry around the world, regardless of marketability, language, nationality, or region echoed heavily throughout the continent in 2020.

Last year BRAVE CF broke records and made history as the only promotion to host 7 events in Europe in one year, and the promotion's return to the continent in January of 2021 further amplified the noise. Questions started rising about the endless possibilities ahead of BRAVE CF in Europe as it is a territory where many global promotions attempted succeeding at and



Valeria Lang and Valentina Shevchenko

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VALERIA LANG

failed.

In an exclusive interview, KHK Sports and BRAVE CF Chief Operating Officer Valeria Lang opened up about the promotions endeavours in the European scene and touched

on plans for the future of European MMA.

"We are very excited at BRAVE CF to be leading the European MMA scene today," says Lang. "Europe is a key market for global sports regulation and development and we intend to develop MMA in this market and give the biggest opportunity to the top European fighters and make them global stars."

Lang also added, "I believe that BRAVE CF will be the MMA story of Europe. We have a model for Europe that is guaranteed success."

With 6 months left in the year and another European BRAVE CF event scheduled for Milan, Italy on August 1st, the development of MMA in Europe has huge potential, and BRAVE CF may be the right catalyst for the vision.

## BRAVE CF president celebrates promotion's footprint in Europe: 'breaking records and making history'

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Founded in the Kingdom of Bahrain by His Highness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa with a global orientation, BRAVE Combat Federation quickly became one of the biggest international MMA promotions in the world, a position that only became more and more solidified throughout the years.

As the overseas expansion reached new regions, such as South America and Africa, apart from Asia, one continent in particular started getting more and more traction within BRAVE CF and became a hub for the international events promoted by the organization: Europe.

Now, only three years after its maiden European event in Northern Ireland, BRAVE CF has officially established itself as the biggest MMA promotion in Europe, with the largest active MMA market share in the continent, hosting events in three different regions and 8 European countries.

Apart from it, BRAVE Combat Federation has established the most comprehensive scouting network in Europe, leading up to more than 80 European fighters, from 30 different nations, signed up to this point. To accommodate this amount of talent, BRAVE CF was the only global MMA promotion in history to host 7 events in Europe in



BRAVE CF president Mohammed Shahid

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MOHAMMED SHAHID

a single year.

BRAVE CF president Mohammed Shahid celebrated the achievements, while commenting on how they play a key role in the bigger picture plan for the fastest-growing MMA pro-

motion in the world.

"The vision of His Highness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa was clear to us from the first day: to reform the MMA industry from an event business to a sports business. To give opportunity to fighters and the whole industry around the world, regardless of marketability, language, nationality, or region. Talent would be the only variable", Shahid stated.

"This vision has today seen the development of MMA and opportunities spread all over Asia, Africa, South America and now it's showing in Europe", he continued.

"Breaking records and making history towards the new age of MMA. An absolute honour to be a small part of this global vision".

The BRAVE CF European series of events will continue on August 1st, when the truly global MMA promotion lands for the first time in Italy, hosting its 52nd edition in the world's fashion capital Milan.