

# Ukraine look for 'decent fight' against Bahrain

Helio Sousa: Friendly match in Kharkiv will be a good 'test' against 'such a strong team'

● Bahrain's international friendly match with Ukraine kicks off at 9pm, Bahrain time, at Metalist Oblast Sports Complex

● Bahrainis preparing for joint-qualifiers for FIFA World Cup 2022 and AFC Asian Cup 2023, while Ukraine gearing up for Euro 2021

TDT | Manama



Bahrain's Helio Sousa, right, at the national team's training yesterday

Ukraine are looking to have a "decent fight" in their friendly match against Bahrain tonight in the city of Kharkiv, says Ukrainian national team coach and former star player Andriy Shevchenko.

The tune-up is part of both teams' preparations for upcoming international play next month, and each side will be looking to make the most of the contest.

The Bahrainis are gearing up for their remaining joint-qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup 2022 and AFC Asian Cup 2023, while Ukraine are prepping for their Euro 2021 campaign.

The match is scheduled for a 9pm kick-off, Bahrain time, and it will be played at Kharkiv's Metalist Oblast Sports Complex, with local fans in attendance.

Speaking in a Press conference

yesterday ahead of the friendly, Shevchenko admits to knowing little about Bahrain, but that has no effect on their objectives in the match.

"The coach of this team is Portuguese, he worked with clubs and the youth team in his homeland; so, he is an experienced, good specialist," Shevchenko said of Bahrain's Helio Sousa.

"In general, we have little information, but we need this meeting as preparation, so we are more focused on our own game."

He added: "We had a very difficult preparation period; the guys are under load.

"Tomorrow it will be possible to make six substitutions, I plan to give many the opportunity to play.

"We were looking for such

a rival on this date, so that we could adequately assess the situation after a week of hard training. We selected a sparring partner for the circumstances in which we are. We want to have a decent fight tomorrow.

Shevchenko, the former Milan, Chelsea and Dynamo Kyiv star revealed that the Ukrainians will be missing two key players in Dynamo's Vitaliy Buyalsky and Shakhtar's Viktor Kornienko.

"We have losses, two players dropped out," he explained. "Buyalsky has a serious injury, we hope for his speedy recovery, but he will not prepare for the Euro.

"Kornienko has a sore throat, he left the location of the team, I did not see the point that he was with us in this condition. The



Bahrain's star forward Ali Madan in action during training

rest of the players are preparing, they have no problems."

Shevchenko also called on Kharkiv's football fans to attend the match and support the na-

tional team.

"I am asking Kharkiv residents to come to the stadium tomorrow to support the team, it is important for us, 50 percent



Ukraine's Andriy Shevchenko speaks during his Press conference



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HELIO SOUSA

of the seats in the arena can be filled," he said. "This is a friendly but very important match for us, because it is part of the preparations for the European Championship."

Meanwhile, Sousa said in his Press conference yesterday: "It is very interesting for us to test ourselves in a match with such a strong team. The national team of Ukraine demonstrates a qualified and meaningful game. Our opponent's players have an athletic and technical game, plus Ukraine is very interesting to act tactically."

## SQUADS

### Bahrain

Ahmed Abdulla, Ali Haram, Ali Madan, Hamad Shamsan, Hashim Isa, Hazza Ali, Jassim Al Shaikh, Komail Alaswad, Mahdi Humaidan, Mohammed Marhoon, Redha Isa, Sayed Baqer, Sayed Shubbar Alawi, Ahmed Nabeel, Mahdi Abduljabbar, Mohammed Al Rumaihi, Abdulla Hazaa, Ebrahim Lutfallah, Sayed Qasem Alawi, Mohammed Marhoon, Jassim Khulaif, Abbas Fadhel, Sayed Dhiya Saeed.

### Ukraine

Heorhiy Bushchan, Andriy Pyatov, Anatoliy Trubin, Oleksandr Karavayev, Ilya Zabarny, Vitaliy Mykolenko, Oleksandr Tymchuk, Oleksandr Syrota, Denis Popov, Mykola Matvienko, Serhiy Kryvtsov, Taras Stepanenko, Marlos, Georgy Sudakov, Serhiy Sidorchuk, Mykola Shaparenko, Viktor Tsygankov, Bohdan Lednev, Artem Bondarenko, Yevhen Makarenko, Alexander Zubkov, Artem Dovbyk, Artem Besedin.

## Bahrain book Arab Futsal Cup semis berth

● Nationals register resounding 6-2 victory over Mauritania to stay unbeaten after two games

● Five Bahrainis score in the match, led by Jassam Saleh, who fired in a brace

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Action from Bahrain's win last night over Mauritania

Bahrain booked their tickets to the semi-finals of the fifth Arab Futsal Cup 2021 yesterday following a come-from-behind 6-2 victory over Mauritania in their second Group A game.

The nationals maintained their winning ways in the competition after also taking their first game against Kuwait held on Thursday.

Finding the net for Bahrain yesterday were Jassam Saleh, who scored twice, and Saleh Ahmed, Falah Abbas, Ammar Hassan and Ali Alwani, who each fired in a goal apiece.

The Bahrainis are now assured of a place in the last four. They top Group A with six points.

Tournament hosts Egypt drew with Kuwait in yesterday's other game. Egypt are



Bahrain are making their debut in the tournament this year and are hoping to secure a medal on their very first try

now second on the table with four points, Kuwait third with one and Mauritania at the bottom with zero points.

The Bahrainis and Egyptians face off in their final group en-

counter tomorrow. That game is scheduled for a 4pm kick-off, Bahrain time. The game will determine the winner of the group heading into the final four.

The semi-finals are scheduled to be held on Thursday, to be followed by the bronze and gold medal games on Saturday. Bahrain are making their debut in the tournament this year and are hoping to secure a medal on their very first try.

The Arab Futsal Cup last took place in 2008, also in Egypt, when Libya were crowned back-to-back champions, after having also won in 2007.

Egypt won the tournament's first two editions, held in 1998 and 2005. They also were the runners-up the two previous times.

## Al Najma win first-leg in play-off for premier league spot



Action from Al Najma's win last night over Al Ettifaq

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Al Najma defeated Al Ettifaq 1-0 last night to move one step closer to keeping their place in next season's Nasser bin Hamad Bahrain Premier Football League.

Yesterday's game was the first-leg of the two teams' play-off clash.

Najma are fighting to stay in the premier league after finishing the past season in eighth place while Ettifaq are looking to earn promotion after going third in the second division.

The second and final leg will

be played on Wednesday.

An own goal by Ettifaq's Momodou Jallow was enough to separate the two sides in yesterday's contest.

His 72nd minute gaffe came after Najma's Abdulrahman Yusuf sent in a cross from beyond the half-field line. Jallow attempted to head the ball away to safety, but instead he inadvertently headed it over his own goalkeeper and straight into the net.

Ettifaq were unable to make up for the mistake over the remainder of the contest while Najma could not add to their lead.

## Copa del Rey win was 'turning point' for Barcelona: Messi



Messi collects Copa del Rey cup Reuters | London

Barcelona forward Lionel Messi described the club's Copa del Rey win this season as a "turning point", but gave no indication of his own future in Catalonia in an interview published in the Argentine press yesterday.

Messi, who was allowed to skip Barcelona's final La Liga game yesterday in order to prepare for the Copa America, is out of contract at the end of June, although negotiations are reported to be ongoing.

The 33-year-old, however, praised the dressing room, which he described as "very young, with a lot of new players" and the excitement generated by the 4-0 win over Athletic Bilbao in the Copa del Rey final, Barca's first trophy in two years.