



The Assistant Secretary General of Qatar Cycling Federation, Nasser Al Kaabi (centre) addressing a news conference on the eve of the Tour of Al Zubarah 2014 at the Marriott Marquis City Center in Doha yesterday. Also seen (from left) are, Andrej Filip, Phillip Tomplar, Mohamed Abdulrahman Al Jabir and Mohammed Salem Al Hemoud. RIGHT: A route map of Tour of Al Zubarah 2014.
PICTURE BY: SALIM MATRAMKOT



Tour of Zubarah kicks off today

Five cyclists to represent Qatar, 140 riders from 20 countries to take part in the event

DOHA: More than 140 riders representing 20 countries will feature in the opening leg of the Tour of Zubarah, organisers said yesterday.

Teams from Austria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Germany, Great Britain, the UAE and Uzbekistan will join a five-member Qatar squad at the prologue set to be held at Aspire Zone," Nasser Al Kabi, Assistant Secretary General of Qatar Cycling Federation (QCF) said.

"This will be the second edition of Tour of Zubarah and we have attracted more riders than we did last year," Al Kabi said.

"Qatar will be represented by five cyclists and we are hopeful of a good show," Al Kabi added.

The riders will complete a total distance of 363.4km over the four stages.

After today's Prologue, the

Tour of Zubarah	
Stages	
Prologue - 17 December:	Al Aspire, Time Trial, 4.20 km
Stage 1 - 18 December:	Madinat Al Kaabaan to Dukhan, 120.10 km
Stage 2 - 19 December:	Madinat Al Shamaal, 116.80 km
Stage 3 - 20 December:	Lekhwiya to Al Zubarah, 122.60 km

riders will compete in the first stage tomorrow. The first stage will start at Madinat Al Kaabaan and end at Dukhan.

The second stage will start from Al Shamaal Sports Club and end at Madinat Al Shamaal on Friday.

The third and the final stage will be held on Saturday, Al Kaabi added.

The riders will have to tackle

the short individual time trial which will be held at Aspire Zone, Al Kaabi said.

A challenging course will be contested in the dark for the first time in Qatar which will provide plenty of thrills for the riders and the fans. The stage from Madinat Al Kaabaan to Dukhan has some hills in the last 25km and could be deciding the general classification.

Windy conditions could test the riders who generally get to battle flat surfaces.

The main sponsors of the race are Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) and Qatar Museums.

The Tour of Zubarah is entered on the UCI Asia Tour calendar. The event is registered as a class 2.2 event.

Last year the race was won by UAE rider Yousef Mohamed Mirza. **THE PENINSULA**



Riders competing in stage four of the GCC Arab Cycling Championship in Oman in this March 6, 2014 file picture.

All Blacks coach Hansen re-signs until 2017

WELLINGTON: The New Zealand Rugby Union said yesterday that coach Steve Hansen had been reappointed to the end of 2017, with administrators vowing to stick with him regardless of results at next year's World Cup.

All Black coaches generally live or die on their World Cup results and NZRU chief executive Steve Tew said the contract extension was an unprecedented show of faith in Hansen, who has a forged an impressive win rate of 90 per cent since 2011.

"Steve is the first All Blacks coach to be given a contract extension beyond a Rugby World Cup, which demonstrates how much faith... (we) have in him," he said.

Tew said Hansen's record of 38 wins from 42 Tests made him the best coach in world rugby and the board unanimously backed his reappointment to 2017, when the British and Irish Lions will tour New Zealand.

He said retaining Hansen was important to provide continuity after next year's World Cup in England, when a number of veteran players are likely to leave and take up lucrative offers from clubs in Europe and Japan.

Hansen said he was thrilled to stay in the job. "I asked myself if I still had the hunger and desire to continue in the role, which I do, so the decision to continue became a no-brainer," he said.

The 55-year old was initially appointed for a two-year term in late 2011 after serving as assistant coach under Graham Henry for eight years, including the All Blacks World Cup victory on home soil in 2011. He was granted a two-year extension in April last year, giving him the chance to become the first All Blacks coach to lead the team to World Cup victory outside New Zealand in England next year. **AFP**



Liverpool's Kolo Toure (left) is challenged by Manchester United's Wayne Rooney during their English Premier League match at Old Trafford in Manchester, northern England on December 14.

Man United can win the league, says Rooney

LONDON: Manchester United can challenge for the league title after recovering from their worst start to a Premier League season and rediscovering the art of winning ugly, according to their captain Wayne Rooney.

The England striker scored as United beat bitter rivals Liverpool 3-0 at Old Trafford on Sunday to make it six consecutive league victories.

The 20-times English champions are third in the table with 31 points from 16 games, eight adrift of leaders Chelsea, after new manager Louis van Gaal led United to their worst start to a season in the Premier League era.

Rooney thinks the team's recent run, in which they have carved out victories at Arsenal and Southampton despite being outplayed for long periods, is

reminiscent of the squad that were crowned champions two years ago.

"We have to believe we can win the title," he said. "We are eight points behind and coming into a busy period. If we can win our games and the others have one bad result, then there is nothing there."

"We have to keep winning our games, hopefully get back to the top, and you never know. We won the league two years ago and we weren't great in a lot of those games but we got the results."

"We have shown a great resilience this season. Some of the games haven't gone the way we would like but we are winning them and that is a great quality to have."

"We have been here before but we have a lot of new players

and this is where the experience of myself, Michael Carrick and Darren Fletcher can rub off on the other players," he added.

Rooney pointed to the experience of Dutch manager Van Gaal in helping United reverse their fortunes and said the former Netherlands boss has "an aura" that gives confidence to the team. "When things weren't going great for us earlier on in the season, he knew what he was doing, he knew the form would come back and that we would win games," Rooney said.

"There was no panic. He stayed calm because he has been through it all before."

United visit Aston Villa on Saturday with a chance to close the gap on leaders Chelsea, who play on Monday.

REUTERS

Southeast Asian Olympics possible after IOC reforms

SINGAPORE: Indonesia are optimistic about bringing the Olympics to Southeast Asia in collaboration with one of their neighbours after the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) revamp of the bidding and hosting processes.

Earlier this month, IOC members voted to allow multiple cities and countries to host events at future Games, one of a number of sweeping reforms to the Olympic movement brought by President Thomas Bach (pictured).

Changes were also approved to reduce costs for potential bidders, with prospective candidates allowed to discuss plans with the IOC before formally launching a bid after a troublesome 2022 Olympic race led to six runners withdrawing citing finances.

"We strongly support these proposals and are very optimistic about hosting the Olympics in ASEAN in the future," Indonesia's Olympic Committee president Rita Subowo told Singapore's *Straits Times* newspaper yesterday.

"All the potential is there if we can overcome certain limitations."

"The IOC has very high standards and it's hard to build 20 plus world-class facilities from scratch. Hence, having it spread across two countries makes it more realistic in terms of costs." Japan, South Korea and China are the only Asian nations to host the Summer or Winter Olympics, but the Qatari capital of Doha

has bid for the last two Summer Games and declared its intention to try again for 2024.

"That is the next opportunity for a Southeast Asian bid although whether the IOC would be willing to go back to Asia again after South Korea's Pyeongchang host the 2018 Winter Games and Tokyo the 2020 Summer Olympics seems unlikely."

Thai IOC member Nat Indrapana saw other issues.

"Co-hosting in principle is a good idea but the practical implementation of this proposal also creates a lot of other problems," he told the paper.

"With two countries involved, who gets what can become an issue."

Whether the IOC would trust any of the 11 Southeast Asian nations to work together or individually is an issue.

Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia came together to host the 2007 Asian Cup soccer tournament in Southeast Asia, but then Asian Football Confederation President Mohammed bin Hammam said after it was a mistake to do so.

Vietnam are unlikely to be involved in an Olympic bid after they pulled out of hosting the 2019 Asian Games earlier this year citing costs, with Indonesia stepping in to take over.

Singapore hosted the inaugural Youth Olympics in 2010 and has just opened a \$1bn Sports Hub but would rely on the much larger Indonesia, Thailand or Malaysia to host the bulk of the sports.

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