

## Female referees set for WCup history

### Qatar's glitzy World Cup - ready and expensive

PARIS: The approaching men's World Cup will be the first to feature female referees, with three women set to make history in Qatar while hoping that the focus remains on their job rather than their gender. France's Stephanie Frappart, Rwanda's Salima Mukansanga and Japan's Yoshimi Yamashita were included in the list of 36 referees selected by FIFA, while three more women will head to Qatar as assistant referees.

The trio of referees, as well as assistants Neuza Back of Brazil, Mexico's Karen Diaz Medina and Kathryn Nesbitt of the United States, will go to Qatar having already established themselves as officials in the men's game. On announcing the appointments, Pierluigi Collina, the head of FIFA's Referees Committee, insisted that "we clearly emphasize that it is quality that counts for us and not gender". For the 38-year-old Frappart, being selected for the World Cup seemed like a logical next step after a rapid rise to refereeing at the top level in Europe.

She was the first woman to referee in France's Ligue 1 in 2019, the same year she took charge of the women's World Cup final in her home country. Frappart also refereed the

#### 'Strong message'

Indeed she only became a referee after being persuaded by a university friend, who she said "half dragged me" to take charge of a game for the first time. Meanwhile Mukansanga, 34, was called up for the World Cup having become the first woman to take charge of a match at the men's Africa Cup of Nations in January this year.

The Rwandan once dreamt of becoming a professional basketball player but was already refereeing in the women's domestic league in her home country by the age of 20. Nevertheless, none of these six pioneers want their gender to be a talking point, and nor do they seek the limelight. "I am going to do everything I can to make sure that what is emphasized is the beauty of the football. I am not interested in power or control," Yamashita said in a recent interview with FIFA.com.

Meanwhile Frappart, who is appreciated in France for her diplomatic style as well as her firmness, insisted: "It is no longer about what gender you are. It is about your ability." Despite that, the fact these women are breaking new ground in the men's game at a World Cup taking place in



Stephanie Frappart

The palm tree-styled street lamps and neon office blocks that line the highway from the expanded international airport to central Doha will be an instant sign to the million-plus incoming fans that the first World Cup in an Arab nation is going to be a glitzy affair. But with Qatar's organizers desperate to convince the world of the event's lasting legacy - clouded by investigation and criticisms.

Qatar, with a population of just 2.8 million, is one of the world's wealthiest countries. And comparisons are unfair, according to Danyel Reiche, a visiting associate professor at Georgetown University Qatar who is leading a research project on the World Cup. "So much of the infrastructure spending was already part of Qatar's 2030 development plan and has just been brought forward for the World Cup," he said.

FIFA has lauded Qatar's preparations and the eight stadiums designed to highlight Arabic tradition and culture. "Together we will deliver the best World Cup ever, on and off the field," its president Gianni Infantino reaffirmed this week. Sitting in a cafe in the Souq Waqif tourist district, Yasmian Ghanem, a member of Qatar's golf team, said "supporters are going to have a lot of fun" in the state. Qatar's football fans are meanwhile nervously watching the national team's form. After so much spending many are desperate to see the host nation at least get past the group stage.

But the Asian champions are the lowest ranked side in their group - 50th in the world - against Netherlands, Senegal and Ecuador. The gala opening match against Ecuador (44th) is seen as an early must-win game as Qataris dream of repeating South Korea's feat of reaching the semi-finals when they co-hosted the tournament in 2002. Former Qatar coach Philippe Troussier said the team has only a "50-50" chance. — AFP



MEXICO CITY: FIFA trophy souvenirs are being sold in a street near the exhibition of the FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour, in Iztapalapa neighborhood in Mexico City. The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 will be held from November 20 to December 18, 2022, in Doha. — AFP

2019 UEFA Super Cup final between Liverpool and Chelsea, before officiating in the Champions League in 2020 and then the French Cup final last season. All that experience means Qatar will not faze her. "I am really moved because I didn't necessarily expect this. It doesn't get bigger than the World Cup," Frappart said.

Yamashita, who is two years younger than Frappart, has had a similar rise to the top of the men's game in Japan and became the first woman to referee an Asian Champions League match in 2019. She turned professional earlier this year, giving up her work as a fitness coach which she had previously continued on a part-time basis. Yamashita told AFP that refereeing at the World Cup "is a big responsibility but I am happy to have it", adding that she "never imagined" being handed such an opportunity.

Qatar—a country often criticised for its record on women's rights—is hardly insignificant. "FIFA and the governing bodies are putting out a strong message by having women referees in these countries," added Frappart, who hopes to be a role model for the next generation of female officials. "I am not a feminist spokesperson but maybe this can help move things forward."

#### Glitzy World Cup

The bill being paid by Qatar for the most expensive World Cup ever held is set to rise to fantasy levels in the one month left to the November 20 kickoff. Gleaming new stadiums that cost more than \$6.5 billion are ready, a driver-less metro system with a price tag of \$36 billion serves five of the eight venues.

seats to be donated to developing countries.

## Qatar's World Cup stadiums

DOHA: With one month to go until the opening game, AFP Sport runs the rule over the eight stadiums which will host matches at this year's World Cup in Qatar:

#### Lusail, Lusail Iconic Stadium (80,000 capacity)

Qatar's biggest stadium will host the final on December 18 as well as, amongst other matches, the first semi-final. Built in Lusail, a planned city for a population of 200,000 people situated 15 kilometers north of central Doha, there are plans for the stadium to be transformed into a community hub after the World Cup, with most of its seats being removed and donated elsewhere.

#### Al-Khor, Al-Bayt Stadium (60,000)

The venue for the opening game between Qatar and Ecuador on November 20, as well as the group-stage showdown between Spain and Germany and the second semi-final. It is constructed in the form of a Bedouin tent although there are plans for the upper tier to be removed after the competition. Situated on Qatar's north-east coast, around 35 kilometers from Doha, it is therefore beyond the reach of the capital's metro system, making it one of the harder venues to access for supporters.

#### Al-Rayyan, Education City Stadium (40,000)

Situated among university campuses in Al-Rayyan, just to the west of Doha itself, and reachable by metro, the stadium will notably host one of the quarter-finals. Its capacity will be reduced by half after the tournament with plans for the

#### Al-Rayyan, Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium (40,000)

The home of one of Qatar's most successful clubs, Al-Rayyan, the stadium has been built on the site of the old venue of the same name and is one metro stop beyond the nearby Education City. Located where the city meets the desert, its capacity will also be reduced by half after the tournament.

#### Doha, Khalifa International Stadium (40,000)

Built in 1976, it is the only venue which already existed before Qatar was awarded the World Cup, although it has since been transformed. Hosted the 2011 Asian Cup final and also the final of the 2019 Club World Cup between Liverpool and Flamengo. Will host England's opening clash with Iran.

#### Doha, Al-Thumama Stadium (40,000)

Situated to the south of central Doha, close to the city's Hamad International Airport, the stadium is built in the form of a gahfiya, the traditional cap worn by men across the Middle East. It will host one of the quarter-finals, while its capacity will be reduced to 20,000 after the World Cup.

#### Doha, Stadium 974 (40,000)

Built out of shipping containers on Doha's waterfront, the pop-up stadium will be completely dismantled after the World Cup. The number 974 is the international dialling code for Qatar but also represents the number of containers used for the stadium's construction.

#### Al-Wakrah, Al-Janoub Stadium (40,000)

Located south of Doha in the city of Al-Wakrah, the stadium's design was inspired by the traditional boats used for pearl diving and fishing. — AFP

