

Al Rayyan Club, Al Ahli Club to clash in the final of the prestigious Emir Cup today

Slovenian star Tine Urnaut of Al Ahli Club termed the prestigious Emir Cup Volleyball Championship final against defending champions Al Rayyan Club as a 'strange situation' for him.

It is worth mentioning here that both Urnaut and Al Rayyan Club's French Earvin N'Gapeth play for Modena Volley in Italy. They will be trying their best to boost their respective teams when they take to the Qatar Volleyball Association Indoor Hall court on Saturday at 7 pm.

Though there is always one champion in the final, volleyball is expected to be another winner on the morrow, considering the status and abilities of both famed outside hitters in the world.

Both have been part of their national teams and have won major titles, besides being adjudged the best outside spikers and MVPs. So certainly a big volleyball feast is very much on the cards for fans in Qatar.

Urnaut and N'Gapeth have played many times against each other on the European circuit. They also figured in the 2015 European Championship final between France and Slovenia in Sofia in 2015 with the former taking the top honours. But this is the first time that the Modena Volley teammates are pitted against each other.

Urnaut said of the upcoming final: "It's the first time that we are playing against each other as Modena teammates. It is a really strange situation. The rules are changed in Qatar, allowing only one pro in a team.

"I'm happy to be playing for Al Ahli Club and the progress till now has been fantastic. I know that Al Rayyan are the best team in the season, having won everything. We're confident that we'll fight for each ball and point. Also we'll try to do everything that we can and make attempt to win the cup."

Two seasons before, Urnaut had played for Al Rayyan Club but they lost the semi-finals to El Jaish. "I already knew about some players from Al Ahli like Alaoui and Ali Asadi. They have many young and talented players. Also they have good coach Igor. He is one of the best coaches that I know.

"The coach has done an amazing job to build a strong team in Al Ahli. Also I know that all our players are ready and committed to make the match memorable," Urnaut added.

N'Gapeth, playing in Qatar for the first time, said, "I'm happy to be part of the Al Rayyan team and the event. I hope we win the final which will be not only a big achievement of Al Rayyan Club but also for the Qatar volleyball."

He had said after the semi-finals, "The presence of Urnaut and me in the final is also a victory of Modena. I feel that it is going to be a tough final as both teams are playing well."

Truly, both teams took the game to new levels when they qualified for the final with 2-0 wins over Al Arabi Club and Qatar Sports Club. Featuring in the 26th final, the 12-time winners Al Rayyan Club are hot choice for the title.

Al Rayyan Club have ruled the season with an iron fist. They just dropped one match against Qatar Sports Club and have won everything their eyes fell on. Starting from the Super Cup victory against Police, they progressed to claim the QVA League, with the prestigious Arab Clubs Championship, the Qatar National Tournament and the Qatar Cup.

Al Rayyan coach Carlos Schwanke is proud of his team and keen to finish the season with an unprecedented sweep. In 2003, Al Aabi Club were the first Qatari team to win the Arab Clubs Championship but they could not win the Heir Apparent Cup and the Emir Cup.

“In every tournament, I set a target for the team. I’m very proud that my team is able to match my expectations. The Emir Cup is also a very special event for us and we’ll try to write a new history on Saturday, he added.

Captain and coach of Al Ahli Club were also present and Assam Ahmed Mahmoud said for his teammates: “This is the first Emir Cup final for us in 22 years. All the players have contributed immensely and helped us reach the final. Also coach Igor has prepared all of us for each match well. Congratulations to all for making it to the final.

“We’ve a difficult final against a champion team like Al Rayyan. We want to tell our fans that we’re ready and we need their support in the final,” Mahmoud added.

Coach Arbutina, who has been the coach of Al Rayyan as well, said, “I’m proud of my team and their efforts in the Emir Cup. We’ll like to take our every possible chance to make the final difficult for Al Rayyan and maybe we can spring a surprise on Saturday.”

This is the third final between Al Rayyan Club and Al Ahli Club. Their first one in the Emir Cup ended in a defeat for Al Ahli in the 1988-89 when Al Ahli failed to defend the title. Their second clash took place in the Heir Apparent Cup in the 1994-95 season with Al Rayyan Club winning the title.

After the 2012-13 season, this is the first time that Al Ahli have made it to any final. On that occasion, Al Arabi Club beat them to claim one of their 13 Heir Apparent Cups. Later that competition was replaced with the Qatar Cup.