



ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

Thursday, June 14, 2018 – Ramadan 29, 1439 – www.arabnews.com

Good luck, Green Falcons

The whole nation is behind you as
the World Cup kicks off in Russia

Inside: Your souvenir wall chart



The Green Falcons aim to fly high in Russia

Saudi Arabia will play at the World Cup finals for the first time in 12 years and hopes are high they can reach the knockout phase for only the second time.

GROUP A



RUSSIA
Rank **66**
Captain: **Igor Akinfeev**
Best finish: **Fourth place, 1966**
Record: **W17-D8-L15**
● As hosts the pressure will be on them to do well, but patchy pre-tournament form suggests they may struggle.



EGYPT
Rank **45**
Captain: **Essam El-Hadary**
Best finish: **Group stage 1934, 1990**
Record: **W0-D2-L2**
● Two words sum up their qualification campaign: Mohamed Salah (pictured left). The man of the moment had a hand in all seven goals that took the Pharaohs to Russia, scoring five and assisting two, as Egypt returned to the showpiece for the first time since 1990. At the time of writing the Liverpool star is set to be fit for the tournament, but all the focus on the 25-year-old disguises the fact that Hector Cuper sets his side up very defensively. They will play with two defensive midfielders – Mohamed Elneny and Tarek Hamied – and hope to score on the break. Qualification for the second round is expected.



SAUDIA ARABIA
Rank **67**
Captain: **Osama Hawsawi**
Best finish: **Round of 16, 1994**
Record: **W2-D2-L9**
● First appearance at the World Cup since 2006. Having been placed in one of the easier groups there is hope the Green Falcons can spring a surprise and fly into the knockout stages.



URUGUAY
Rank **14**
Captain: **Diego Godin**
Best finish: **Winner, 1930, 1950**
Record: **W20-D12-L19**
● With Luis Suarez in their lineup, they will always have the potential to go far.

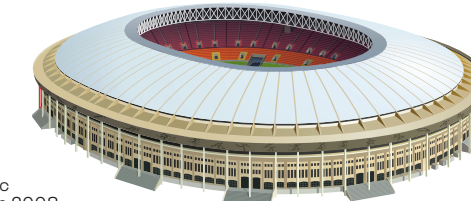
Saudi match venues

Saudi Arabia will play their group matches in some of the most iconic stadiums in Russia, starting with the opening game in Moscow.

Russia v Saudi Arabia – June 14

Luzhniki Stadium

Opened: **1956, Renovated 2017**
Home team: **National team**
Capacity: **80,000**




Uruguay v Saudi Arabia – June 20

Rostov Arena

Opened: **2018**
Home team: **FC Rostov**
Capacity: **45,000**

Designed to blend harmoniously into landscape, with undulating roof imitating meanderings of Don River. Stadium features 51-meter translucent media facade made of metal and glass.

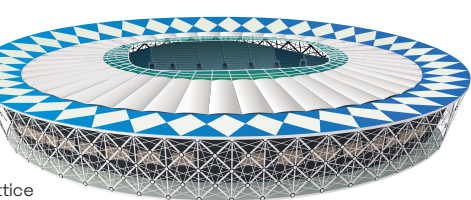


Saudi Arabia v Egypt – June 25

Volgograd Arena

Opened: **2018**
Home team: **FC Rotor**
Capacity: **45,000**

Located near Mamayev Kurgan war memorial. Facade takes form of inverted, truncated cone with open lattice structure – its supports and windbreaks are reminiscent of Victory Day fireworks display.



Source: Arab News Research; FIFA

THE ROAD TO RUSSIA

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Began qualification against Thailand in Riyadh. A frustrating game until a soft penalty six minutes from time allowed Nawaf Al-Abed to grab the points.
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1-0 down at home to favorites Australia. All looked lost until Nasser Al-Shamrani got the goal that earned a vital point.
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Top of the group Saudi Arabia traveled to Japan in a bid to extend their lead but lost 2-1.
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Only a victory in the final game against Japan would guarantee qualification. During a tense clash in
- Jeddah, Fahad Al-Muwallad struck in the 63rd minute. Finishing level on points with Australia, but a better
- goal difference got Saudi Arabia to Russia. It is the Green Falcons' first trip to the finals in 12 years.
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Graphic produced by Arab News


Match winners




SALMAN AL-FARAJ
DOB: **August 1, 1989**
Position: **Midfielder**
Club: **Al-Hilal**
Caps: **43**
Goals: **3**
● Al-Faraj has missed much of the season through injury but is now back and should be fresh and sharp in time for the Russian showpiece. A smart left-footed player who is happy to sit in the center-circle and spray passes around both long and short. He is not likely to venture off on dazzling runs, but uses the ball in an intelligent fashion. However, can struggle a little when pressed.
Did you know: His first goal for the Green Falcons was against Timor-Leste during a 7-0 thrashing in 2015.



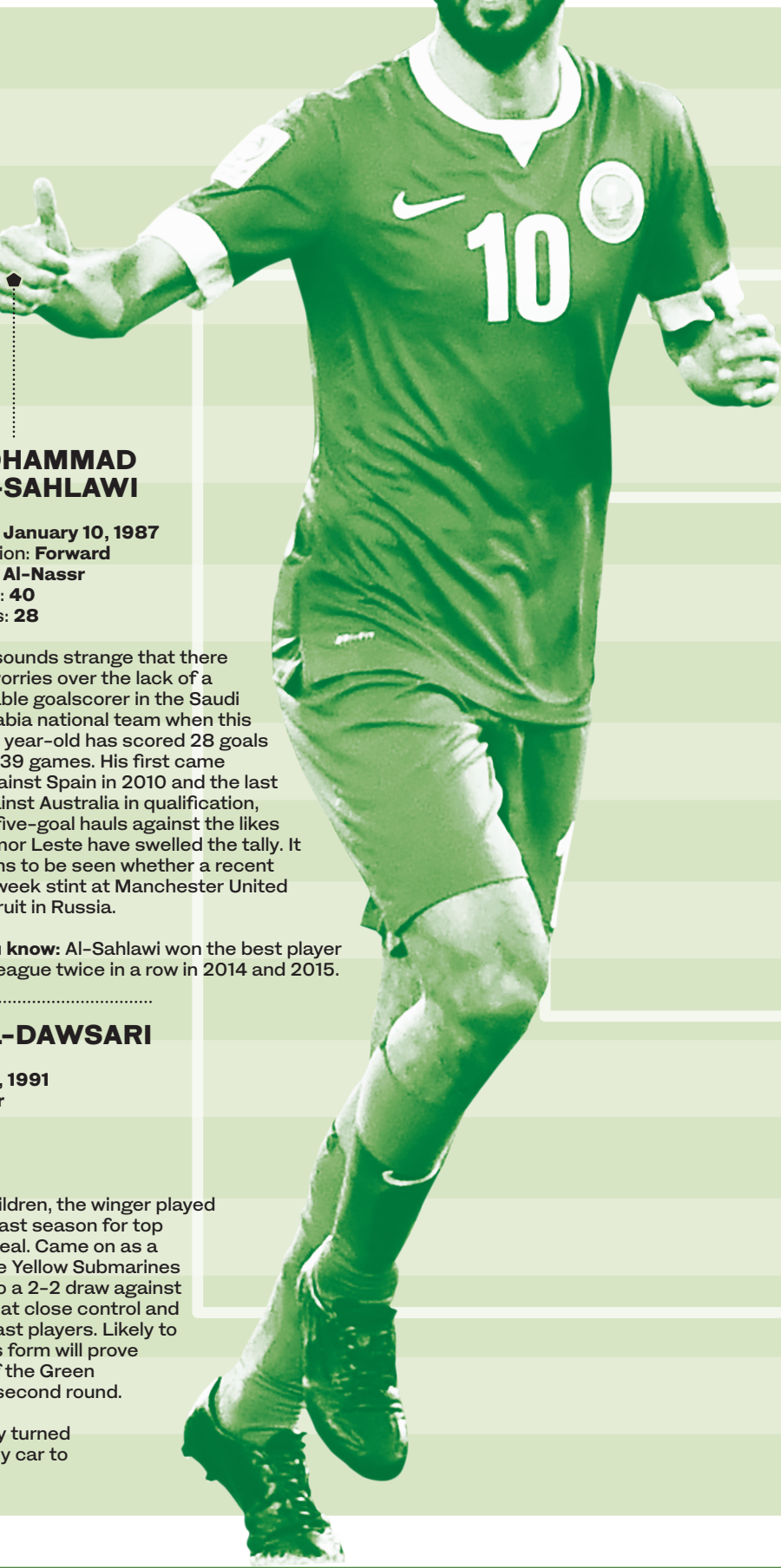
FAHAD AL-MUWALLAD
DOB: **September 14, 1994**
Position: **Midfielder**
Club: **Al-Ittihad**
Caps: **45**
Goals: **10**
● The team's attacking fulcrum. An exciting winger who loves to dribble and take players on. He can be inconsistent but when on song is dangerous. Like Al-Dawsari, he spent four months in the Spanish top flight, turning out for Levante. Became the first Saudi to play in La Liga and will be keen to prove his worth in Russia. "He is our Messi," the Saudi Arabia great Sami Al-Jaber told Arab News. "Our hopes rest with him."
Did you know: Scored the goal that helped beat Japan 1-0 and sent the Green Falcons to Russia.



JUAN ANTONIO PIZZI
● Pizzi took over as Saudi Arabia coach in November last year and is still waiting for his first competitive game in charge of the Green Falcons – that comes against Russia in the World Cup's opening match. During his seven-month tenure the Argentine has packed in as many friendlies as possible to gauge where the side are and what needs to be done before the eyes of the world will be on them on June 14. Pizzi, a former Chile manager, looks likely to play a compact 4-2-3-1, with the attacking three midfielders ready to drop deep to ensure that there are plenty of bodies in midfield.



MOHAMMAD AL-SAHLAWI
DOB: **January 10, 1987**
Position: **Forward**
Club: **Al-Nasser**
Caps: **40**
Goals: **28**
● It sounds strange that there are worries over the lack of a reliable goalscorer in the Saudi Arabia national team when this 31-year-old has scored 28 goals in 39 games. His first came against Spain in 2010 and the last against Australia in qualification, but five-goal hauls against the likes of Timor-Leste have swelled the tally. It remains to be seen whether a recent three-week stint at Manchester United bears fruit in Russia.
Did you know: Al-Sahlawi won the best player of the league twice in a row in 2014 and 2015.



SALEM AL-DAWSARI
DOB: **August 19, 1991**
Position: **Winger**
Club: **Al-Hilal**
Caps: **33**
Goals: **4**
● One of eight children, the winger played the second half of last season for top Spanish outfit Villarreal. Came on as a substitute to help the Yellow Submarines turn a 2-0 deficit into a 2-2 draw against Real Madrid. Has great close control and the ability to ghost past players. Likely to start in Russia and his form will prove vital to the chances of the Green Falcons flying into the second round.
Did you know: Reportedly turned down the offer of a Bentley car to sign for a rival Saudi club.

THE FULL SQUAD

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| YASSER AL-MOSAILEM Al-Ahli | ABDULLA AL-MUAIOUF Al-Hilal | MOHAMMED AL-OWAIS Al-Ahli | MOTAZ HAWSAWI Al-Hilal | OSAMA HAWSAWI Al-Hilal | OMAR HAWSAWI Al-Nassr | YASIR AL-SHAHRANI Al-Hilal | MANSOOR AL-HARBI Al-Ahli | MOHAMMED AL-BURAYK Al-Hilal | ALI AL-BULAIHI Al-Hilal | ABDULLAH OTAYF Al-Hilal | TAISIR AL-JASSIM Al-Ahli | HOUSAIN AL-MOGAHWI Al-Ahli | YAHYA AL-SHEHRI Al-Nassr | ABDULMALIK AL-KHAIBARI Al-Hilal | MOHAMED KANNO Al-Hilal | ABDULLAH AL-SHABAB Al-Shabab | HATTAN BAHEBRI Al-Shabab | MOHAMMAD ASERI Al-Ahli |
| Caps 32 | Caps 11 | Caps 6 | Caps 17 | Caps 135 | Caps 42 | Caps 37 | Caps 40 | Caps 11 | Caps 3 | Caps 16 | Caps 132 | Caps 18 | Caps 57 | Caps 37 | Caps 6 | Caps 4 | Caps 5 | Caps 18 |
| Goals 0 | Goals 0 | Goals 0 | Goals 0 | Goals 7 | Goals 3 | Goals 0 | Goals 1 | Goals 1 | Goals 0 | Goals 1 | Goals 19 | Goals 1 | Goals 8 | Goals 0 | Goals 1 | Goals 0 | Goals 0 | Goals 4 |
| GOALKEEPERS | | | DEFENDERS | | |  | | | MIDFIELDERS | | | FORWARDS | | | | | | |

Knockout stage

