Kuwait’s women in blue

KFA to announce national women’s football team

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The women’s committee of Kuwait Football Association (KFA) will announce tomorrow the official women’s national team, which is expected to start playing from late November or mid-January. During a forum titled “It’s Time for Football” on Tuesday at KFA’s headquarters, chairperson and board member of the women’s committee Fatima Hayat said this is the first step to achieve the dream of Kuwaiti girls to wear the blue jersey.

With the support of the board of directors, Hayat is working to develop a clear and realistic plan that can be applied to develop women’s football and choose a technical committee with a clear goal of forming a football team. She announced that tomorrow will see the selection of the best players to join the Kuwaiti women’s national team.

Noura Al-Sabah, vice-chairperson of the women’s committee of KFA, expressed her happiness to see the national women’s team becoming a reality. “We started to implement the plan to succeed and prove ourselves as players, and we will be able to represent Kuwait internationally,” she said. She noted that the committee contracted Futsal coach Shehrazad Muzaffar a few days ago to lead the women’s football team, along with football coach Ali Al-Dhahi and athletic trainer Dalal Al-Rawashdeh, pointing out that the committee will organize an awareness and media campaign to educate the public on the importance of women’s participation in sports and football.

“The football program will include a youth training center for national teams, hiring coaches and administrative personnel and organizing grassroots festivals. Also, we will organize boot camps for both the U-15 and U-17 ladies teams and hold regional friendly matches. We aim to host and participate in the AFC Futsal 2020 championship,” Noura added. “Our next steps are visiting the Bahrain FA and participate in a Futsal coaching course (AFC, Level I). Our supporting partners are FFA, AFC and the Public Authority for Sport,” she revealed.

The forum discussed the future of women’s football in Kuwait in the next four years and how to participate in the first official women’s football league. The event was attended by all members of the women’s committee and a number of football players and coaches.

After Li Na, star Wang leads rise of China’s women

WUHAN: China’s tennis women are starting to get results to match their potential and are ready to follow in the footsteps of former great Li Na, according to rising star Wang Qiang. Wang has been in hot form in recent months, winning her first WTA Tour 250 title at the Jiangxi Open in Nanchang in July. She won her second at the Guangzhou Open last week and on Wednesday, roared on by adoring crowds, became the first homegrown player to reach the quarter-finals of the Wuhan Open as she extended her win-loss streak on Chinese soil this year to 13-1.

“I’m really happy to be competing in China, getting a lot of support from fans,” she said after beating Australia’s Daria Gavrilova in straight sets to reach the last eight. The 26-year-old’s run of success also included winning an Asian Games gold medal in Indonesia in August. And this week Wang upset world number seven Karolina Pliskova in the second round.

Wang, who recently became China’s number one, promised there was more to come from her country’s women, who bear the burden of following Li, Asia’s first Grand Slam winner and a trailblazer for tennis in the world’s most populous nation.

“After the emergence of Li Na, I think we are on the rise,” said the world number 34. “You see young players. At a tournament (of this level), you see great performances. I think in the near future, in international tournaments, we’ll see more Chinese players.”

Li, who triumphed at Roland Garros in 2011 and won the Australian Open in 2014 before retiring later that year, is one of Wang’s idols. “She is a goal. She’s a role model for many athletes, especially Chinese players,” said Wang, who trained in Wuhan when she was a child, and planned to become a teacher if a career in tennis did not work out.

“If I can play as well as she did, I will have a very perfect life.” Several promising talents have emerged in China, but none has come even close to matching the success of Li. But Wang, who grabbed headlines at the French Open this year with her straight-sets demolition of Venus Williams, says she is growing in confidence after a successful 2018, and playing in front of home crowds in recent months has helped boost her game.

“In terms of technique, in the past year I think I’ve been doing quite similar (things) but I’m really more confident,” said Wang, whose family paid for her to train in Japan during her formative years, instead of sticking with China’s state-run sports system. “I believe in myself. That’s the most important element.” — AFP

Madrid to host new-format Davis Cup in 2019-2020

MADRID: Madrid has been chosen to host the first two new-format Davis Cup finals in 2019 and 2020, the organisers of the venerable men’s team tennis event said yesterday. Under a format proposed by the Kosmos group, headed by Barcelona footballer Gerard Pique, and adopted by the International Tennis Federation (ITF) in August, the competition will bring together 18 nations in one place for a week at the end of the tennis season.

“We are delighted to be bringing the 2019 Davis Cup... finals to Madrid,” ITF president David Haggerty said in a statement. “The city is a fitting location to stage the highest quality tennis and great entertainment for thousands of fans from all over the world,” he added. The revamped finals are scheduled to take place at La Caja Magica, the current venue for the Madrid Open, in 2019.

For 2020 organisations still must decide between holding the event either at the same location or at the Wizink Center. Kosmos, an investment group led by Pique with Japanese and Chinese support, will spend $3 billion over 25 years on the revamped ITF. The current Davis Cup format is a knock-out event played February, July, September and November at venues around the globe, with best-of-five match ties following Grand Slam events until the final round.

Many top players have skipped the event in recent years to ease their schedule. The four 2018 semi-finalists–France, Croatia, Spain and the United States–qualify directly. Twelve more places will be decided in qualifiers on Feb 1-2 next year.

That left two spots for wildcards selected by the organisers and they have chosen Argentina and Britain. Under the reform the finals will take place in November featuring 18 teams: 12 winners from 24-team home and away qualifying ties in February, the previous year’s four semi-finalists and two wildcard nations. Argentina and Britain have been picked as the wildcards for the 2019 edition, organisers announced Wednesday.

Round-robin groups of three will send six group winners and two runners-up into knockout round playoffs. The final will feature two singles matches and one doubles match each day, cut to best-of-three sets. — AFP