

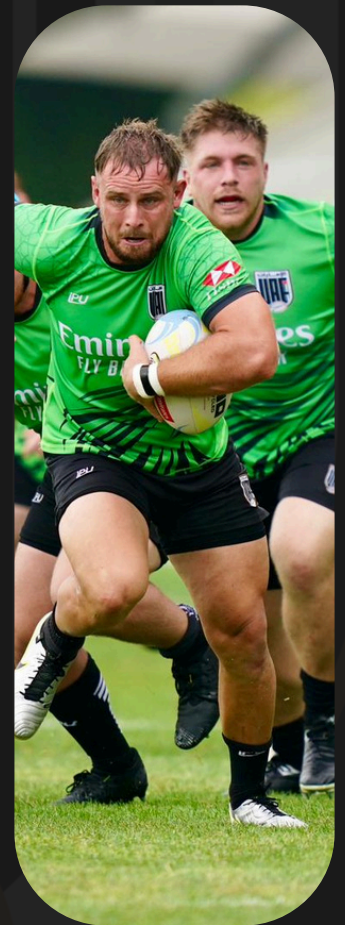


# UAE RUGBY FEDERATION

# Q1

## 2026

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



JANUARY – April 2026  
News • Updates • Results • Highlights

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# Qais Al Dhalai: UAE's Success in Hosting Global Events Reflects International Trust and Stability

President of Asia Rugby and Vice President of the UAE Rugby Federation, Qais Abdullah Al Dhalai, stated: "The UAE's success in organizing numerous global events during a period of regional challenges reflects the immense confidence it enjoys from sports federations and athletes worldwide. This is thanks to its high organizational capabilities, alongside the consistent scheduling of local activities which proceed without disruption. This further reinforces the security and stability that the country enjoys."



## Three-Year Partnership Between UAE Rugby Federation and UUDS AERO



The UAE Rugby Federation signed a three-year strategic partnership with UUDS AERO DWC LLC at the UAE National Olympic Committee headquarters. The deal invests in national talent development, high-performance training, and international exposure through the Shaheen and Maha programs. A key highlight is the launch of the UUDS 10s UAE Rugby Tournament, an annual competition to raise technical standards across the UAE rugby community.

14<sup>th</sup> January 2026

## UAERF Board of Directors Meeting | Q1 – 2026

The UAE Rugby Federation Board of Directors convened on 4 February 2026 to review key developments across the organisation and align on strategic priorities for the next phase of growth. The meeting focused on strengthening the continued development of rugby in the UAE, both locally and on the international stage, with discussions centred around performance pathways, grassroots expansion, and long-term sustainability of the game.

Board members reaffirmed their shared commitment to advancing rugby in the UAE through strong leadership, collaboration, and a unified vision for the future. Proud to be part of the UAERF family, driving the game forward with purpose and ambition.



5<sup>th</sup> February 2026

# HSBC Renews Partnership with UAE Rugby PPP, Expanding Support to Al-Maha Women's Team

The UAE Rugby Federation is pleased to announce the renewal of its partnership with HSBC for the Player Pathway Programme (PPP), with expanded support now including the Emirati Al-Maha women's team.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the PPP continues to be delivered across schools for both boys and girls, strengthening the foundation of rugby at grassroots level and creating clear development pathways into the national programme.

This renewed collaboration strengthens the pathway from grassroots to international rugby, providing more opportunities for players to develop and progress through the system.

With a continued focus on empowering women in sport, the initiative supports the next generation of Emirati athletes and reinforces the growth of women's rugby in the UAE.

From grassroots to the international stage, the commitment remains clear—backing players every step of the way.



9<sup>th</sup> February 2026

## UAE–Lebanon Cooperation



The UAE Rugby Federation signed a cooperation agreement with the Lebanese Rugby Federation in Beirut. The deal strengthens bilateral collaboration and supports rugby development across the Arab region. The signing was attended by key officials from both federations, along with Jihad Salameh, President of the Lebanese Olympic Committee.

11<sup>th</sup> February 2026

# Khalifa Al Falasi & Sultan Ahli's PPP Journey



Khalifa Al Falasi and Sultan Ahli are a strong example of the success of the UAE Rugby Player Pathway Programme (PPP), delivered in partnership with HSBC. Both players were first introduced to rugby at Maaref School (Cycle 3) through the PPP schools programme, where their interest quickly grew into a long-term passion. Through structured training, competitions, and continuous development opportunities, they have steadily progressed within the UAE Rugby system over the years.

Their dedication has now earned them places in the UAE national setup and the Shaheen team, marking an important step in their performance pathway. Their journey reflects the impact of early school engagement and a clear development pathway in building the future of UAE Rugby from the grassroots up.

12<sup>th</sup> March 2026

## Shaheen Team Set for Monaco Sevens Debut

The UAE Shaheen rugby team is preparing for its first appearance at the Monaco Sevens, taking place on 1 May, following recent international success in Malaysia and Portugal.

This marks Shaheen's first overseas tournament of 2026, as part of a busy international schedule that also includes the Asia Club Championship in Sri Lanka, the UAE-Egypt Super Cup, and the Emirates Dubai Rugby Sevens.

The team continues its training programme at The Sevens Stadium and desert fitness sessions in Dubai, focusing on physical and technical preparation ahead of upcoming competitions.

Shaheen will be without their captain Saki due to injury, while Sultan Ahli joins the squad to strengthen preparations. The team is led by coaches Khaldoun Mleh and Yusuf Shaker.

The UAE Rugby Federation highlighted Shaheen's growing role in developing national talent and its continued progress through strong international exposure and competition.

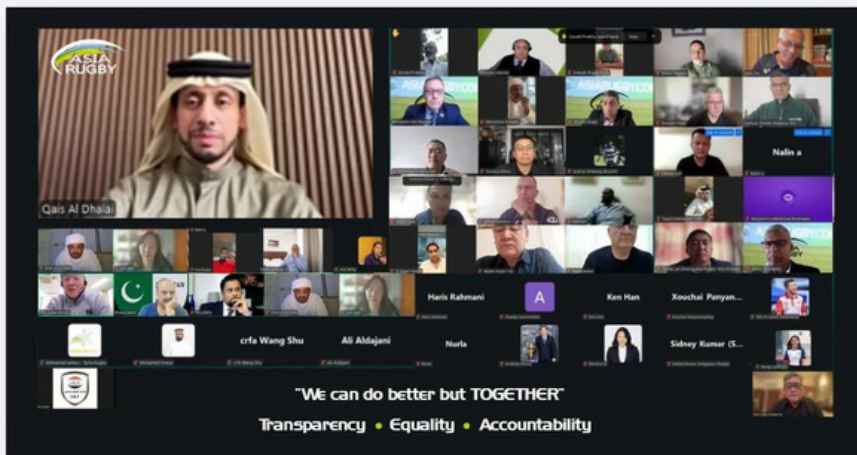


26<sup>th</sup> March 2026

# Asia Rugby Congress Approves UAE as New Operational HQs

The Asia Rugby Congress ratified the decision to establish a new operational headquarters in Dubai, with 27 of 28 member unions voting in favor. The move, culminating six years of discussions, is expected to improve administrative efficiency and service delivery across Asia while maintaining the legal HQ in Hong Kong.

Qais Al Dhalai thanked the UAE government, the National Olympic Committee, and the Ministry of Sports for their support. He described the decision as a historic milestone reflecting the trust of member unions in strengthening Asia Rugby's institutional capabilities.



"This approval reflects the trust of member unions and their commitment to strengthening institutional operations across the continent."

*Qais Al Dhalai, Asia Rugby President*

16<sup>th</sup> March 2026

## UAE Rugby Federation Sets Roadmap to 2028

The Federation held its first Board meeting for the LA 2028 Olympic cycle, approving the 2026 participation plan and a high-performance strategy through 2032. The long-term vision targets Olympic qualification and a gold medal at the Asian Games Doha 2030. The Board as well affirms the important role of our community initiatives RRR "Rugby Rise Road" and the role it played in developing and promoting the game across the region, a decision to transform the initiative into a fully working committee.

The Board also honored outgoing Head Coach Apollo Perelini, who elevated the UAE from outside the top 100 to 40th in world rankings, appointing him as federation ambassador.



"We have approved ambitious plans aimed at developing national teams and strengthening their continental and international presence."

*Mohammed Sultan Al Zaabi, Secretary General*



26<sup>th</sup> March 2026



## UAE Rugby Appoints Jacques Benade as High-Performance Director

Jack Benade has been appointed High-Performance Director, succeeding Apollo Perelini. A former South Africa captain with 20+ years of coaching experience, he previously served as assistant coach for the UAE 15s team and led Dubai Exiles to multiple titles. He will oversee all national team programs under a unified vision aligned with Asia Rugby and World Rugby standards.

"We have full confidence in Benade's capabilities, especially his deep understanding of our teams and players."

Mohammed Sultan Al Zaabi, Secretary General

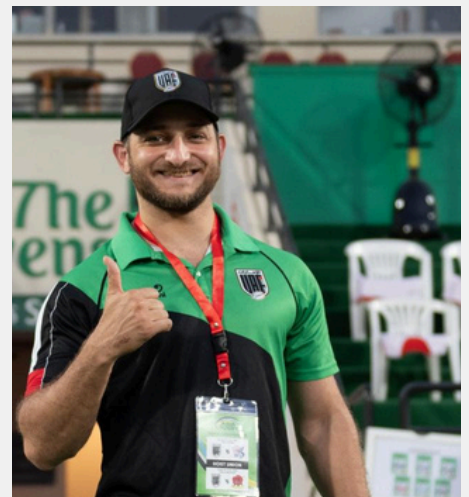
4<sup>th</sup> April 2026

## Hazem Hassan Appointed Acting CEO

Hazem Hassan has been named Acting CEO for six months from April 2026. With over a decade in sports Operations & Management, a degree in Sports Management & a World Rugby certification, with his prior experience as Acting CEO, he is a key figure in the federation's institutional growth.

"His comprehensive knowledge and diverse sports management experience, combined with his Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu achievements, reflects his well-rounded sporting character."

Mohammed Sultan Al Zaabi, Secretary General



8<sup>th</sup> April 2026

MONTH	TOURNAMENT	TEAMS	DATE	LOCATION
MAY	Monaco 7s	Shaheen	1st May	Monaco
JUL	The Emirates 7s Asia Rugby Clubs cup by UDS Aero	Shaheen	4th - 5th July	Colombo, Sri Lanka
AUG	Asia Rugby Emirates Sevens Series R1	UAE Men & Women national team	29th - 30th Aug	China
SEP	Asia Rugby Emirates U18s Sevens	UAE Boys & Girls national team	5th - 6th Sep	China
SEP	Aichi Nagoya Asian Games 2026	UAE Men national team	1st - 3rd Oct	Nagoya, Japan
TBC	Arab Rugby Sevens	UAE Men & Women national team	TBC	TBC
OCT	Asia Rugby Emirates Sevens Series R2	UAE Men & Women national team	17th - 18th Oct	Colombo, Sri Lanka
NOV	Emirates Dubai 7s	Shaheen & Almaha	28th - 29th Nov	Dubai, UAE

## UAERF Officially Unveils the 2026 Tournament Calendar



# THANK YOU

The first quarter of 2026 has been a defining chapter for UAE Rugby, welcoming new leadership, securing strategic partnerships, and hosting Asia Rugby's operational headquarters in Dubai — every milestone reflects our commitment to building a stronger future for the sport.

"Our ambitions go beyond participation. We aim to build teams capable of sustained competitiveness and a legacy that inspires the next generation."

Mohammed Sultan Al Zaabi, Secretary General

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