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Bahrain takes



● Thompson celebrates as he crosses the finish line

Bahrain took the world stage in motor racing, endurance horse riding, athletics, soccer and sailing this year – bringing joy and agony to the nation.

Millions worldwide watched Jenson Button roar to victory in the Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix, at the Bahrain International Circuit, in Sakhir, in April.

Around 94,000 fans flocked to the circuit for the F1 racing, which caps a packed annual schedule of international, regional and local events at the world-class track.

Bahrain hosts the first race of the 2010 F1 season on March 12, 13 and 14.

In soccer, Bahrain again came agonisingly close to realising the long-cherished dream of a place in the World Cup.

It may have ended in disappointment, but it was a fantastic ride on the way and put more experience under the national team's belt, ready for the next time.

Hopes for a place in the 2010 World Cup, being hosted by South Africa, came to grief 15,000km from home in a second-leg away match against New Zealand, at the Westpac Stadium, in Wellington.

Around 1,000 fans travelled to support the team and back home the streets were deserted as Bahrainis and expatriates alike tuned in for the live TV broadcast.



● F1 action at the BIC

Bahrain went down 1-0, bringing to an end a two-year journey through the World Cup qualifiers, which saw them travelling over the world for around 20 matches.

It was a soccer marathon which put the country's name on the world sporting map and the team bowed out with a clear message: "We'll be back".

In the equestrian field, the Royal Endurance Team took on the world's best and triumphed in a series of regional and international events.

The icing on the cake came late in September at the 2009 European Horse Ride Championship in Misura, a tiny village near Assisi in Italy.

Team captain and president of the Bahrain

Olympic Committee Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa spearheaded the Bahrain challenge.

The Royal team finished topped the non-European section and came second overall, while Shaikh Nasser finished first amongst the Bahrainis and seventh overall in the individual section.

Other members of the team were Abdulrahman Al Saad, Ghazi Al Doseri and Raed Mahmood.

It was a victory that sparked celebrations back home, with His Majesty King Hamad hailing the team for its historic achievement.

Bahrain's Youssef Saad Kamel and Maryam Yusuf Jamal were crowned world champions at

the World Athletics Championships in Berlin in August.

Kamel won the men's 1,500 metres world title after a late burst on the home straight, to finish in three minutes 35.93 seconds, while Maryam defended her 1,500 metres world title with a time of four minutes 03.74 seconds.

Maryam crossed the line second, but was later declared the winner after Natalia Rodriguez of Spain, who had finished first, was disqualified for tripping Ethiopian Gelete Burka in the last lap.

Kamel doubled the joy by securing a bronze in the men's 800 metres in one minute 45.35 seconds to make 2009 another fruitful year for athletics in the kingdom.



●The final whistle as Bahrain go down to New Zealand