



## **Bahamas on Road to World Cup**

FOR the Bahamas, the road towards qualification for the 2014 FIFA World Cup will begin in the region against familiar competition to the south. In the first game of a home-and-away series in the opening round of the CONCACAF qualifying bracket, the Bahamas is scheduled to travel to face the Turks and Caicos Islands on July 2.

The second game is slated to take place in the Bahamas on July 9 with the winner (based on aggregate scores) advancing to the main draw in Brazil at the end of July. The Bahamas is ranked 31st in the region, while Turks and Caicos is ranked 30th. Teams ranked 26-35, which also includes Belize, Dominican Republic, British Virgin Islands, St Lucia, Aruba, US Virgin Islands and Montserrat will all compete in the first round. Teams ranked 7-25 receive a bye to the second round while the top six teams in CONCACAF - the United States, Mexico, Honduras, Jamaica, Costa Rica and Cuba - will receive a bye to round three.

Anton Sealey, president of the Bahamas Football Association, said with a majority of the players based outside of the Bahamas, the team will once again face issues in terms of preparation. "We are now beginning preparations for that. It came as a bit of a surprise for us. We did not anticipate that we were going to be engaged this early. We were somewhat caught off guard and found it difficult for the team to assemble as early as possible. The match was originally scheduled for the 3rd of June but we appealed to CONCACAF and they ceded to our request to have the match postponed to give us a little more time," he said. "We are always the victim of preparation and an inability to prepare properly and adequately because most of our players are abroad and it's very costly and almost impossible for us to assemble them for an extended period of time to train. So we end up just having them for brief periods of time together before an actual competition. We are in a very difficult position when it comes to that and most of our competitors are made of home-based players where we are the opposite, the majority of our players are based abroad."

The team will benefit a great deal from the services of US-based collegiate and professional players, a cross-section of talent which Sealey believes is good enough for the Bahamas to advance. "Fortunately, we are coming to the end of the school year so most of the US-based players will become available to us. Some of them are here now and others are scheduled to arrive later on this month. One or two of them who are playing professionally, Cameron Hepple and Happy Hall for example, they are in season now with their teams so they will only be available to us the weekend of the matches so we do not have any opportunity for the other guys to prepare with them but we do expect them to be a part of the team and be available to us for both games," he said. "I fully expect that we will get beyond the Turks and Caicos. Into the second round, it will depend on who we draw in that round. We have improved our standing in terms of our ability in the region so I think we are in that second tier in the region. So it depends on who we draw but I expect this team will do well."

In regards to the coaching staff which should be named this week, Sealey said it will be made up of local coaches which are products of local certification and training courses offered by the BFA. "In previous campaigns, we brought in a foreign coach but this time we intend to bring in our local coaches who have been over the course for years taking advantage of courses the BFA has been offering and improving their skills as coaches," he said. "This gives them an opportunity to step up and lead the team into the World Cup. We are proud of the fact that we will be using coaches that have benefited from the training that the BFA has put on."

The CONCACAF qualification for the 2014 FIFA World Cup will see teams competing for places at the finals in Brazil. As in recent tournaments, CONCACAF will have three direct qualifiers for the finals tournament. In March

2011, following news that CONCACAF would not receive four spots in the 2014 World Cup, officials within CONCACAF announced the qualifying format they would present to FIFA. The proposed format consists of four stages. The preliminary round will feature teams ranked 26-35 and would play-off to reduce the number of entrants to 30. The first round will feature six groups of four teams. This round would include the five qualifiers from the preliminary round plus teams ranked 7-25. The top team in each group would advance to the next stage. The semifinal round includes three groups of teams. Teams ranked 1-6 would face off against the six group winners from the previous round. The top two in each group would advance. The final round will have the top two teams in each group from the semifinal round compete in one group of six. The top three teams would advance to the World Cup, while the 4th place team would advance to an intercontinental playoff.

