

Dar Kulaib capture thrilling finals opener

Mohammed Yaqoob, Juan Barrera spearhead victors in game one victory over Al Najma in Isa bin Rashid Volleyball League championship series

● **Dar Kulaib will look to close out finals in game two Tuesday next week**

● **Al Ahli, Muharraq to face off this evening for league's bronze medals**

TDT | Manama

Dar Kulaib took a high-intensity game one last night in their championship series against Al Najma for the 2022/2023 title in the Isa bin Rashid Bahrain Volleyball League.

Dar Kulaib battled past their rivals 3-1 (25-21, 25-22, 25-27, 25-

20) to gain the early 1-0 advantage in the best-of-three finals.

The victors are playing to secure only their third title in the history of the league and will be hoping to close out this match-up in game two, scheduled for Tuesday next week. But Najma are a resilient team—one that has been top for a majority of the season—and will be looking to force a decisive third game, which would be held on April 12, if needed.

Najma are aiming for their sixth league championship. Three of their previous crowns came when they were known as Al Wehda Club.

Attending last night's finals opener were Bahrain Olympic Committee vice-president His Highness Shaikh Isa bin Ali bin Khalifa Al Khalifa and Bahrain



Dar Kulaib team members celebrate after their win

Volleyball Association (BVA) president Shaikh Ali bin Mohammed Al Khalifa.

Fans of both clubs packed Isa bin Rashid Arena at the BVA headquarters in Isa Sports City in Riffa, making for a rocking atmosphere all through the con-

test.

In the opening set, Dar Kulaib were first to 10 points and back-to-back Mohammed Yaqoob spikes gave them a 14-9 advantage. Najma were able to fight back to within 15-17, but then Argentinian professional Juan

Barrera scored to give Dar Kulaib back a three-point cushion. A brilliant dig from Ali Habib gave the victors a 21-17 advantage, and then another Barrera smash later closed out the first set.

In the second, Najma took a quick 4-1 edge but Dar Kulaib eventually tied it at 11-all. Things remained close and a Yaqoob spike gave Dar Kulaib a 21-19 advantage. A pair of errors from Najma proved costly, allowing Dar Kulaib to move to two points from securing the set, and they made the most of the opportunity with attacks from Habib and Abdulwahed.

In the third set, Najma were determined to get back into the match and three straight points helped them go up 19-13. But Dar Kulaib roared back and

successive points from Yaqoob, plus a double-block with returning Ayman Isa, helped them tie it at 23-all. But Najma would eventually prevail, aided by a Yaqoob service error and a fine spike from Estonian professional Kevin Saar to break the 25-25 deadlock and make it 1-2 in the match.

In set four, Dar Kulaib were in control from the start and went ahead 16-12. Najma tried valiantly to stay within striking distance behind strong play from Ali Ebrahim and Fadhel Abbas, but Dar Kulaib had all the answers, and a Barrera spike finally ended the match, which ran for over two hours.

Meanwhile, set to be held tonight will be the game for third place between losing semi-finalists Al Ahli and Muharraq.

Hamilton says no hope of challenging Red Bulls in Australia

AFP | Melbourne

Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton admitted yesterday that Mercedes had little hope of keeping pace with the Red Bulls in Australia, and matching his fifth place in Saudi Arabia was a more realistic target.

The Briton came a surprise second in the opening practice at Albert Park behind Red Bull's Max Verstappen, before slumping to 13th in a rain-affected second session.

He blamed changes made to the car between the two hour-long runs for the gaping difference.

The car "felt a little bit better this morning, we made some changes, they didn't work, so we'll revise those tonight," he said.

"Then it rained obviously so it wasn't the best of sessions. You don't really learn a huge amount when it's between (conditions),



Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton leaves pitlane during the first practice session

so just keep the car safe."

He learned enough to know that come race-day on Sunday, Mercedes will again be playing catch-up to Verstappen and his Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez.

On the high-speed, power-friendly Jeddah track a fortnight ago, Mercedes showed signs of life, with Hamilton fifth



YOU KNOW WHAT
Lewis Hamilton was a surprise second in the opening practice but could only manage a disappointing 13th in FP2

and his teammate George Russell fourth.

It was a clear improvement from the season-opening race in Bahrain and they bettered the Ferraris, but were still behind Fernando Alonso's Aston Martin and the victorious Red Bull team.

Hamilton said another fifth-placed finish would be a good result for him in Australia.

Gender equality inevitable in F1, says Red Bull chief Horner

AFP | Melbourne

Red Bull chief Christian Horner said yesterday it was inevitable that gender equality would reach Formula One amid reports that a team employing an equal split between men and women was looking to enter the sport.

Former British American Racing (BAR) founder Craig Pollock told CNN last week he wanted to debut "Formula Equal" from the 2025 or 2026 season onwards.

The aim was to have a 50



Christian Horner

percent split between males and females across the whole organisation, from the cockpit to the engineers and the boardroom.

He has reportedly submitted an expression of interest to racing's governing body, the FIA, which opened up the process for finding a potential 11th team earlier this year.

Horner, when asked about Pollock's plan, said he believed gender equality in the traditionally male-dominated sport would happen "naturally" anyway.

I think it's fantastic to see the amount of girls, females, that are showing interest in Formula One now and we're seeing it at all levels

CHRISTIAN HORNER

Ricciardo says 'signs pointing' to 2024 grid return

AFP | Melbourne

Daniel Ricciardo says he still has the hunger to compete in Formula One and the "signs are pointing" to him being back on the grid in 2024, with Red Bull boss Christian Horner saying the Australian was race ready.

The 33-year-old left McLaren at the end of last season, a year before his contract ran out, to make way for fellow Australian Oscar Piastri.

Ricciardo, who has eight career wins, had largely played second fiddle to teammate Lando Norris and opted to take time away from the sport's demanding schedule before signing on



Red Bull Racing's reserve driver Daniel Ricciardo signs autographs to fans

as Red Bull's reserve driver.

As part of the deal, Ricciardo will only attend a handful of

the 23 races this season and is at his first in Melbourne this weekend, where he was mobbed

I feel like that's currently where I'm tracking, at least in my head... I've even put myself in scenarios now where I'm like, if I got back on the grid tomorrow, what would I do differently?

DANIEL RICCIARDO

by fans yesterday.

Red Bull chief Christian Horner said Ricciardo had sat in on all their briefings and would do testing for the team later in the year.

AQUA COOL
Ultra Pure Bottled Drinking Water

35 YEARS

Easy & Secure Online Ordering of your favourite Aqua Cool Products

Download the AQUA COOL App Now

Free Home Delivery
Call Us Now-1787 5098
www.aquacool.bh

Jalal Ionics Co. W.L.L.
P.O. Box 1770, Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain
C.R. No. 14986, Public Health Registration No. 18/0006