

Al Fardan heroics send Riffa into semis

Goalkeeper blanks Muharraq in penalty shootout with three successive saves to help send Riffa through to the final four of this year's His Majesty the King's Cup

● Riffa scrape past Muharraq with 3-0 win on penalties as Abdulkarim Al Fardan makes impressive stops

● Al Ahli edge past Al Najma 4-2 in penalty shootout after both teams still tied at 1-1 after 120 minutes

TDT | Manama

Riffa punched their tickets to the semi-finals of this year's His Majesty the King's Cup football tournament after a heroic performance from goalkeeper Abdulkarim Al Fardan in a 3-0 penalty shootout victory over arch-rivals Muharraq last night.

Despite both teams having numerous chances, the game remained goalless at the end of regular and extra time, sending the contest to the spot kicks.

Al Fardan then shone brightest for Riffa, saving all three of Muharraq's attempts while his teammates did their job by con-



Muharraq's Waleed Al Hayam looks to shoot against Riffa during regular time in their match last night

verting theirs.

Komail Al Aswad, Ali Haram and Lazar Dordevic all hit the target for the victors, while Al Fardan stopped the efforts of Hassan Uqabi, Amine Hasan and Waleed Al Hayam. Al Fardan's save on Al Hayam's penalty cut the shootout short and sent Riffa through to the final four.

Riffa are next set to take on Al Ahli in the semis. Ahli also advanced yesterday with a 4-2 penalty shootout win against Al Najma after 120 minutes could not separate the two sides, who were deadlocked at 1-1.

Najma were first to find the net in regular time when Edimar Ribeiro Da Costa Junior scored



Al Ahli's Abdulla Al Hashash looks to make a play as Al Najma's Mohammed Eid slides in for a tackle

in the 59th minute on a brilliant counter-attack. Junior received a long pass from his own box and raced down the pitch to slot the ball past Ahli's Ebrahim Luthfallah.

Ahli were then able to equalise in the 71st minute when Zakaria Al Ismaili scored from close range off a cross supplied by Vin-

icius Vargas Dos Santos.

That set the stage for the shootout, where Lutfhallah had some heroics, making two crucial stops to send his side through. Nawaf Abdulla converted the final penalty for Ahli.

This year's His Majesty the King's Cup's other semi-final fixture will be between Manama

and Al Hala.

Manama edged past Sitra 5-4 in a thrilling penalty shootout on Thursday night, while Hala beat Hidd 4-2, also on penalties. Both contests remained deadlocked at 1-1 at the end of extra time.

The final four has yet to be scheduled by the Bahrain Football Association.

'I don't understand how it is possible' - Klopp baffled by Chelsea spending



Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp (2R) reacts with Chelsea players after a match (file photo)

Reuters | London

Liverpool coach Juergen Klopp said he cannot understand how Chelsea were able to spend what they did in the January transfer window, insisting it is best left for others explain the rules.

The British record capture of Enzo Fernandez this week, Chelsea's eighth signing of the window, took the Blues' spending close to 300 million pounds (\$367.32 million) in January alone, and over 500 million pounds for the season.

They were able to get around Financial Fair Play regulations by spreading the cost of their deals over long contracts offered to the new signings, among other bending of the rules, something Klopp cannot get his head around.

"I say nothing without my lawyer," Klopp said jokingly to a news conference yesterday to look ahead to his side's weekend clash with Wolverhampton Wanderers.

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JUERGEN KLOPP

number. They are all really good players so congratulations. I don't understand how it's possible, but it's not for me to explain how it works."

January has not been a good month for Liverpool on the pitch, given they have won just one of their six matches in all competitions in the month to sit ninth in the Premier League standings.

Almost the same squad went so close to an unprecedented quadruple of trophies last term, but Klopp insisted players cannot always be at the top of their game every season.

Tennis star Kyrgios admits assaulting girlfriend, avoids conviction

AFP | Canberra

Tennis star Nick Kyrgios yesterday pleaded guilty to assaulting a former girlfriend, but avoided a conviction for what the magistrate called a "single act of stupidity".

The Canberra magistrate dismissed the assault charge against the 27-year-old Australian player.

Appearing in a Canberra court, the Wimbledon finalist admitted assaulting then-girlfriend Chiara Passari on January 10, 2021, by pushing her to the ground after a heated argument.

Passari lodged a complaint

with police 10 months later, after they had broken up, lawyers told the court.

In a statement read to the court, Passari said she had been severely traumatised by the incident, experiencing severe weight loss, staying in bed day and night -- unable to sleep or form new romantic relationships.

Lawyers for Kyrgios had appealed to have the charge, one count of common assault, dismissed on mental health grounds, arguing it was an isolated incident and out of character.

Psychologist Sam Borenstein



Tennis star Nick Kyrgios arrives at the ACT Magistrates Court in Canberra

The judge said Kyrgios acted poorly but the offence was not planned or pre-meditated and was a "single act of stupidity" by a young man attempting to extricate himself from a tense situation

told the court Kyrgios suffered from recurring major depression, which included black periods, thoughts of self harm, insomnia, agitation and feelings of guilt.

Lionel Messi open to playing in 2026 World Cup

AFP | Paris

After hoisting his first World Cup trophy with Argentina in December, Lionel Messi said that tournament would be his last, but now it appears he's open to the possibility of playing

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After scoring seven goals in the 2022 World Cup, Messi could become the World Cup's all-time leading scorer if he suits up in 2026. He has 13 goals, three behind record-holder Miroslav Klose of Germany



Argentina's Lionel Messi scores a penalty during a World Cup match (file photo)

in the 2026 event.

"Because of age it'll be difficult to make 2026," Messi, 35, told Diario Ole, a sports newspaper in Argentina. "I love playing football and while I feel like I'm in good shape and enjoying this, I'm going to keep at it. It seems like a long time until the next World Cup, but it depends on

how my career is going."

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni would love to see the superstar -- who is one of only six players to compete in five World Cups -- suit up for the next World Cup, which will be held in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

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LIONEL MESSI

the next World Cup," Scaloni told Spanish radio Calvia FM last month. "It will depend a lot on what he wants and what happens over time, that he feels good. The doors will always be open. He is happy on the pitch, and for us (it) would be good."

After scoring seven goals in the 2022 World Cup, Messi could become the World Cup's all-time leading scorer if he suits up in 2026. He has 13 goals, three behind record-holder Miroslav Klose of Germany.