

Al Najma set for Asian clubs handball

23rd ASIAN MEN'S CLUB LEAGUE HANDBALL CHAMPIONSHIP 2021	
GROUP «A»	GROUP «B»
AL ARABI - QAT	AL WEHDA - KSA
SHAHID KAZEROON - IRI	UZBEK - UZB
AL SALMIYA - KUW	AL QATEN - YEM
MUDHAR - KSA	MES KERMAN - IRI
AL NAJMAH - BRN	AL DUHAIL - QAT
	AL KUWAIT - KUW

TDT | Manama

Back-to-back Bahrain league champions Al Najma have been drawn in a tough Group A for the 23rd Asian Men's Club League Handball Championship 2021.

The other teams in their division are defending champions Al Arabi of Qatar, Shahid Kazeroon Club of Iran, Al Salmiya of Kuwait and Mudhar of Saudi Arabia.

Group B consists of Al Wehda of Saudi, Uzbek Club of Uzbekistan, Al Qaten of Yemen, Mes Kerman of Iran, Al Duhail of Qatar and Al Kuwait Club of Kuwait.

The draw was held at King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah, setting the stage for the

preliminary round of the competition, which is scheduled to take place from June 12 to 21.

Najma head into the tournament as the only Bahraini side. They are the only club from the Kingdom to have won the championship in the past, having taken the 2017 title when the event was played in Hyderabad, India. Najma have also won the silver and bronze medals once each.

Other Bahraini teams to taste success in the competition are Al Hilal Club, who have won bronze twice before; and Al Ahli and Barbar, who have each one third place once.

The clubs championship was supposed to be played last year, but was postponed by the Asian Handball Federation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

IPL suspended over Covid-19

IPL 2021 postponed after several players tested positive for COVID-19

● Members of three franchises have been confirmed to have tested positive

AFP | New Delhi

The Indian Premier League, the world's richest Twenty20 cricket tournament, was suspended yesterday and its players sent home as India battles a massive surge in coronavirus cases.

The move, which follows growing controversy over the competition, comes a day after two players -- Varun Chakravarthy and Sandeep Warrier -- tested positive, forcing a match to be postponed.

The Chennai Super Kings added in a statement yesterday that its bowling coach L. Balaji and a member of the side's travel support staff tested positive after undergoing tests in India's capital New Delhi on Sunday.

"The Indian Premier League Governing Council and Board of Control for Cricket in India in an emergency meeting has unanimously decided to post-



The Indian Premier League trophy is seen at a stadium

pone (the) IPL 2021 season, with immediate effect," a statement from organisers said.

"The BCCI does not want to compromise on the safety of the players, support staff and the other participants involved in organising the IPL," it added.

The high-paying IPL, which was taking place in biosecure "bubble" conditions, attracts many of the world's top cricketers, including players from Australia, England and South Africa.

'Difficult times'

BCCI Vice-President Rajiv Shukla told AFP that the gov-

erning body would "make the arrangements" for the IPL's international players to leave India.

"About the foreign players, as we have said, we will try and ensure all of them get to their homes," he said.

Cricket Australia said in a statement that it was in touch with the BCCI to "ensure the safe accommodation and repatriation of Australian players, coaches, match officials and commentators back home".

The governing body added that it was not seeking exemptions from the Australian government's move to ban travel-



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KEVIN PIETERSEN

lers from India from entering the country until at least May 15.

Cricket South Africa said it was in touch with franchises for the "expedited travel of all South African players and support staff" back home, where they will undergo home quarantine.

The IPL has been running since early April, even as India's health care system has been overwhelmed by a vicious second wave of virus cases.

This prompted criticism from some who said it was inappropriate, given the suffering in the country, while others defended it as a welcome distraction.

Eight teams have been playing behind closed doors in six cities including Delhi and Mumbai, both badly hit by the pandemic.

UEFA allows 26-player squads for Euro 2020

AFP | London

UEFA said yesterday it would allow expanded 26-man squads at Euro 2020, meeting a demand from coaches who feared they could lose players due to coronavirus.

European football's governing body said it had agreed the increase from 23 players "to mitigate the risks of teams facing a shortage of available players for certain matches due to possible positive Covid-19 test results and subsequent quarantine measures".

France coach Didier Deschamps and Belgium boss Roberto Martinez were among those who had called for the change while England manager Gareth Southgate had been opposed.

Matchday squads will still be limited to 23 players.

UEFA clarified that the current regulations that allow coaches to change their squads after the cut-off point of June



The trophy of the UEFA Euro 2020 is pictured on Sant'Angelo bridge in Rome

1 up until their first match in the case of "serious injury or illness" will include players who test positive for Covid-19 or who are declared as "close contacts" of a positive Covid-19 tested person.

The new regulations will also allow goalkeepers to be replaced before each match during the tournament in case of physical incapacity even if one or two goalkeepers from the player list are still available.

A player that has been replaced on the player list will not later be allowed to return to the competition.

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substitutions will be allowed in games at the delayed Euro 2020 instead of the usual three, in line with current rules across many club competitions

UEFA had already decided that teams would be allowed to make up to five substitutions in games at the delayed Euro 2020 instead of the usual three, in line with current rules across many club competitions.

National teams have named squads of 23 players at the World Cup and European Championship ever since the 2002 World Cup in Japan and South Korea.

Euro 2020 was postponed last year because of the pandemic but is due to take place at venues across the continent, from June 11 to July 11.

Halep knocked out of Madrid Open by Mertens

AFP | Madrid

World number three Simona Halep was dumped out of the Madrid Open yesterday, losing 4-6, 7-5, 7-5 in the round of 16 to the Belgian Elise Mertens.

Halep had sailed through the first two rounds on the Spanish clay without dropping a set but she ended up second best in a match which yielded 15 breaks of serve.

Halep produced 10 double faults in the match, Mertens nine.



Simona Halep

Halep, a two-time Grand Slam champion and former world number one, was twice a break up in the final set at 3-1

and 4-3 but finally succumbed after just over two and a half hours of play.

In the quarter-finals 13th seed Mertens will meet the Belarusian seventh seed Aryna Sabalenka, who dispatched American Jessica Pegula 6-1, 6-2 in just 52 minutes.

Two other quarter-final line-ups are also settled with world number one Ashleigh Barty set to meet ninth seed Petra Kvitová while eighth seed Belinda Bencic is up against unseeded Spaniard Paula Badosa, ranked 62 in the world.

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