

# Bahrain set for GCC volleyball test

Hussain Almaskati  
TDT | Manama

The 4th GCC Games will take place from May 11 to 22, bringing together the six Gulf nations across 19 sports. Among the competitions, the men's volleyball tournament stands out as one of the most competitive, featuring a round-robin format where every match could shape the medal standings.

Bahrain enters the tournament once again as one of the leading contenders. They finished runners-up in the previous edition in Kuwait City in 2022, behind Qatar, with Oman taking bronze.

Their record across the history of the Games further underlines their pedigree: Bahrain won gold in the inaugural 2011 edition on home soil, and repeated the feat in 2015 in Dammam. That consistency keeps them firmly in the title conversation heading into this year.

However, this campaign marks a period of transition. Montenegrin coach Ivan Joksimovic



Bahrain's volleyball squad celebrate a strong showing in a recent tournament

takes charge for his first major tournament, replacing French coach Arnaud Jossierand, who

guided Bahrain through one of its most successful modern eras. Under Jossierand, Bahrain's rise

included continental and regional success, such as gold at the 2025 AVC Men's Volleyball Na-

tions Cup, bronze at the Islamic Solidarity Games, and the 2024 Arab Men's Championship title. The key question is whether Joksimovic can maintain that momentum and make his mark, having recently led Dar Kulaib to an unbeaten title in the Isa bin Rashid Bahrain Volleyball League.

He has selected a 17-player roster drawn from six of Bahrain's leading clubs. The setters are Ali Habib and Mahmood Abdulwahid, while the outside hitters and opposites include Ali Ibrahim, Mohammed Al Khabbaz, Hussain Mansoor, Hassan Al Shakhouri, and Sayed Hashim Isa.

In the middle, Bahrain rely on Hassan Ali Al Warqaa, Abbas Abdullah Sultan, Mahmood Al Affia, and Ahmed Sadiq, with Ayman Haroona named as libero. The remaining squad members — Hussain Abdullah Sultan, Hani Al Alawi, Mahmood Abdulhussain, Mohammed Jassim, and Abdullah Mohammed Jaafar — provide additional depth and rotation options.

Bahrain begin their campaign on 16 May against Oman, fol-

lowed immediately by a clash with the United Arab Emirates on 17 May. They then face Kuwait on 19 May, hosts Qatar on May 20, and Saudi Arabia on May 22.

Beyond the GCC Games, expectations remain high. As reigning champions of the 2025 AVC Men's Volleyball Nations Cup, Bahrain will soon shift their attention to the 2026 edition of the tournament in Ahmedabad, India, which begins on 20 June.

For now, however, the focus is firmly on the immediate challenges: adapting quickly to a new coaching philosophy, managing a demanding schedule, and reaffirming their status as one of the Gulf's most consistent volleyball powers.

Elsewhere at the Games, Bahrain's representation extends beyond volleyball, with the Kingdom also competing in handball and 3x3 basketball.

The wider programme features 19 sports in total at the 2026 GCC Games, spanning disciplines such as athletics, swimming, karate, archery, and others.

# Crown Prince's Cup semis set for tonight

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Volleyball action returns tonight at Isa bin Rashid Arena in Riffa with two semi-final encounters in the 2025-26 HRH the Crown Prince's Cup, as the competition edges closer to Saturday's final.

The evening begins at 7pm when league champions Dar Kulaib take on Bani Jamra, before defending cup holders Muharraq face Al Ahli at 8:30pm in a heavyweight showdown.

Dar Kulaib arrive in strong form after cruising into the semi-finals with a dominant 3-0 (25-12, 25-16, 25-17) win over A'ali in the quarter-finals.

The league winners showcased their attacking depth through standout contributions from Enock Mogeni, Ali Habib, Hasan Al Warqaa, Abbas Abdullah, and Ali Mohammed Abdulnabi.

Their powerful start to the tournament has reinforced their status as strong contenders for a title double this season.

Their opponents, Bani Jamra, earned their place in the last four after a hard-fought five-set victory over Nabih Saleh.

In the second semi-final, Mu-



Holders Muharraq celebrate momentum in their quarter-final win over Tadhamun

harraq continue their title defence after a 3-0 win over Al Tadhamun in the last round. The

reigning champions, who lifted last season's trophy after defeating Dar Kulaib, are once again



Dar Kulaib players celebrate a set win during their quarter-final victory over A'ali

eyeing a repeat triumph.

Al Ahli, however, arrive with momentum after edging past Al Najma in a tense quarter-final, winning 3-0 (25-22, 26-24, 30-28). Led by key Bahraini

players including Ali Ebrahim, Mahmood Abdulhussain, Has-

san Al Haddad, and Mohammed Habib, alongside Brazilian professional Lucas Madaloz, Ahli showed composure in critical moments to secure their semi-final place.

The winners of tonight's matches will meet in Saturday's

final at Isa bin Rashid Arena. With Dar Kulaib seeking to complete a historic league-and-cup double and Muharraq aiming to retain their crown, the stage is set for a decisive night that could shape Bahrain's volleyball season.

# Arsenal Into Champions League Final

● **Gunners to face either PSG or Bayern**

Hussain Almaskati  
TDT | Manama

Arsenal have secured their place in the UEFA Champions League final after a 2-1 aggregate win over Atlético Madrid, following a 1-0 victory at the Emirates Stadium last

night.

Bukayo Saka proved to be the difference-maker, scoring the only goal of the match in the 44th minute. The winger reacted quickest inside the box after Jan Oblak parried Leandro Trossard's effort, firing emphatically into the roof of the net to send the home crowd into celebration.

Mikel Arteta's side showed control and discipline throughout, managing the tie well after



Saka celebrates Arsenal's winning goal against Atlético Madrid

the first leg ended level. Atlético Madrid, coached by Diego Simeone, applied pressure in spells and created several dangerous moments but ultimately could not break through Arsenal's defence.

The result sends Arsenal into their first Champions League final since the 2005-06 season, when they were beaten by Barcelona. They are still chasing their maiden title in Europe's premier competition.