

Riffa await Gulf Champions League draw



Mohamed Al Mashaan addresses his players during Riffa's Dubai training camp

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Riffa will learn their opponents in the third edition of the Gulf Club Champions League later this month after the Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation (AGCFF) confirmed that the tournament draw for the 2026-27 season will be held on August 24.

The draw ceremony will take place virtually at 12pm, with the competition scheduled to run from October 13 until April 30, 2027.

The upcoming edition will mark the biggest tournament in the competition's history, with participation expanded from eight clubs to 12 teams representing eight Gulf football associations.

Riffa will carry Bahrain's hopes in the regional competition, joining a field that includes Saudi Arabian clubs Al Ettifaq and Neom, UAE sides Al Nasr and Ajman, Qatar's Al Duhail and Qatar SC, Iraqi duo Erbil and Al Zawraa, Kuwait's Kazma, Yemen's Shaab Hadhramaut and Oman's Al Shabab.

The participating clubs will be divided into three groups of four, with the top two teams from each group advancing to the quarter-finals alongside the two best third-placed sides. The knockout rounds

will then be played over two legs.

The expanded format highlights the continued growth of the tournament, which has seen increasing interest from clubs across the region since its return under the AGCFF. Last season, Bahrain were represented by Sitra, who were eliminated in the group stage, while Qatar's Al Rayyan went on to claim the 2025-26 title and enter the new campaign as defending champions.

Bahrain have previously enjoyed success in the competition, with Muharraq becoming the kingdom's first club to lift the regional crown in 2012. The Red Wolves also finished as runners-up in the 1989 edition.

Riffa will now look to build on a successful domestic campaign as they prepare for their return to the Gulf stage under Kuwaiti head coach Mohamed Mashaan.

The Blues finished third in the Nasser bin Hamad Premier League last season with 49 points from 22 matches, while ending the campaign with silverware after defeating Muharraq on penalties to lift the Khalid bin Hamad Cup. They also reached the King's Cup final, where they suffered defeat against the same opponents.

Alsameea targets BRAVE CF title push after latest victory



Alsameea stands victorious following his BRAVE CF 107 bout

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Bahraini mixed martial artist Mohamed Alsameea believes he is ready for bigger challenges after improving his professional record to 6-1 with a unanimous decision win at BRAVE CF 107 in Bulgaria last Saturday.

Alsameea defeated Switzerland's Miran Ramani in a 59-kilogram catchweight bout at Burgas Arena, delivering another impressive performance on BRAVE Combat Federation's global stage.

The Bahraini was originally scheduled to face Bulgaria's Aleksandar Hristov, but a late injury forced a change of opponent, with Ramani stepping in on short notice.

Speaking exclusively to The Daily Tribune, Alsameea admitted the adjustment was challenging but credited his team for helping him adapt quickly.

"A late opponent change is always a challenge, but as a professional fighter, you have to be ready for anything," Alsameea said.

"We studied my original opponent for weeks, so changing the game plan on short notice wasn't easy. Miran brought a

different style, which meant I had to make quick adjustments and trust my experience.

"My team did an incredible job preparing me in a very short time, and once I stepped into the cage, I focused on my own strengths rather than overthinking my opponent."

Alsameea controlled the contest from the opening bell, using his wrestling and grappling to dictate the pace throughout the three-round bout.

He repeatedly worked his way into dominant positions and kept Ramani under pressure, with his composure and control earning him the judges' approval.

All three judges scored the bout in Alsameea's favour, with scorecards of 30-27, 30-27 and 30-26.

While wrestling played an important role in his success, the 22-year-old stressed the importance of discipline and adapting during the fight.

"Wrestling was definitely an important part of our game plan, but we came in prepared for every aspect of the fight," he said.



Mohamed Alsameea takes on Miran Ramani

"Once the fight started, I felt comfortable with my timing and control, so I kept using what was working. In MMA, the smartest approach is to take what your opponent gives you, and I was able to dictate the pace

with my wrestling and grappling.

"The important thing was following my coaches' instructions and executing the plan from beginning to end."

The result represented another important milestone for Alsameea as he continues to represent Bahrain in one of MMA's fastest-growing promotions.

"Representing Bahrain on a stage like BRAVE CF is something I take great pride in," he said.

"Every time I step into the cage, I'm not just fighting for myself. I'm fighting for my country, my team, and everyone who has supported me throughout this journey."

"Bahrain has invested so much in developing MMA, and I'm grateful to be part of that growth. To earn a win at one of BRAVE CF's biggest events is a huge honour, and I hope it continues to show the world the level of talent we have in

the country."

The 6-1 fighter believes his recent progress has come through improvements both technically and mentally, allowing him to remain composed under pressure.

"Over the past year, I believe I've grown in every area of my game, not just technically, but mentally as well," Mohamed said.

"My wrestling, striking, and overall fight IQ have all improved, but the biggest difference is my confidence and composure under pressure."

"I feel more patient, more disciplined, and better at making the right decisions during the fight."

With momentum behind him, Alsameea is now targeting tougher opponents and a push towards the top of the BRAVE CF rankings.

"I'm ready for bigger challenges," he said.

"I want to keep facing tougher opponents, continue climbing the rankings, and prove that I belong among the best in BRAVE CF."

"My goal is simple: keep improving, keep winning, and one day compete for the BRAVE CF world title while proudly representing Bahrain."

Al Ahli appoint Spanish coach Marcelo Zubiran

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Al Ahli have appointed Spanish coach Marcelo Zubiran as head coach of their senior men's basketball team ahead of the 2026-27 season.

The move marks the beginning of a new chapter for the club following the departure of Bahraini coach Ahmed Jan, who returned to the Eagles ahead of last season after previously leading the team between September 2020 and October 2021.

During his first spell, Jan guided Al Ahli to back-to-back league titles before later taking charge of other teams, including rivals Muharraq.

Zubiran arrives with an impressive coaching résumé, having led Gibraltar's women's national team to the FIBA European Championship for Small Countries title. He has also coached Tunisian side US Monastir and gained experience across the German, Italian and Colombian leagues.

Among his notable achievements, the Spaniard was named Colombian League Coach of the Year in 2023. He also guided Nuovo Basket Aquilano to pro-



Marcelo Zubiran directs his players during a previous tenure

motion to Italy's Serie B and led Germany's Girolive Panthers Osnabrück to both league and cup finals.

Known for favouring a fast-paced style of play, Zubiran places a strong emphasis on defensive discipline while developing individual and team performances. He has also earned a reputation for promoting young players, qualities Al Ahli hope will help strengthen their squad and boost their competitiveness ahead of the new campaign.

Al Ahli enjoyed a competitive 2025-26 season, finishing fourth in the Zain Bahrain Bas-

ketball League regular season before reaching the play-off semi-finals. However, their title hopes ended with a 3-0 sweep against eventual champions Muharraq in the best-of-five series.

They also reached the Khalifa bin Salman Cup semi-finals, where they were again eliminated by Muharraq after a 2-0 sweep in the best-of-three series, with the Red Wolves going on to lift the trophy.

Those results highlighted Muharraq's recent dominance of Bahraini basketball, as they completed a domestic treble by winning the Zain Bahrain Basketball League, the Super Cup and the Khalifa bin Salman Cup.

Zubiran will now be tasked with helping Al Ahli close that gap as the club aim to challenge for major honours once again. With 20 league titles to their name, the Eagles remain one of Bahrain's most successful basketball clubs, sitting five championships behind record holders Manama.

Meanwhile, Muharraq's latest triumph secured their second consecutive league title, underlining their status as the current benchmark in Bahraini basketball.

Bahrain team inspects Sepang ahead of Grand Prix

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On-site visits have begun at Malaysia's Sepang International Circuit as Bahrain steps up checks on safety, race control and track operations before the Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix in Malaysia from October 2 to 4.

The race was moved to Sepang after the Bahrain Grand Prix's April date was called off because of the regional conflict. It will mark Formula One's first return to the Malaysian circuit since 2017.

Working with Bahrain International Circuit, the Bahrain Motor Federation delegation toured the venue to inspect marshal facilities, emergency and rescue services, medical cover, race control systems and other arrangements needed for the event.

The team also met representatives of the Motorsports Association of Malaysia and Sepang circuit management to review race plans, technical needs and links between the teams staging



the Grand Prix under FIA rules.

The visit was carried out under the direction of Shaikh Abdullah bin Isa Al Khalifa, president of the Bahrain Motor Federation and FIA vice-president for sport for the Middle East and North Africa.

The delegation included federation director-general Abdulaziz Al Thawadi, emergency

and safety team chief Ayoub Al Salman, circuit evacuation team chief Ahmed Al Aali, race co-ordinator and secretary Mohammed Al Jowder, and medical team chief Dr Amjad Obaid.

The federation said the visit formed part of its work to ensure the circuit and its support teams are ready before Formula One returns to Sepang.