

## Bahrain Club outplay Ahli in BBA Cup



Action from Bahrain Club's win over Al Ahli last night  
TDT | Manama

Bahrain Club defeated league champions Al Ahli 104-86 last night in the 2020/2021 Bahrain Basketball Association (BBA) Cup.

The victors used a dominant third quarter where they outscored Ahli 38-20 to turn a 45-all deadlock at the half to a commanding 88-65 lead heading into the final period. Ahli could not recover from there, and Bahrain Club cruised in the final canto.

The contest was part of the fifth round of action in the tournament's opening phase. Both Bahrain Club and Ahli are in Group A, along with Mu-

harraq, Nuwaidrat, Al Ettihad, and Isa Town.

In other results in the competition, Isa Town beat Ettihad 109-94 while Sitra edged past Samaheej 87-82 in Group B, which also includes Manama, Al Hala, Riffa and Al Najma.

This stage of the BBA Cup is being played in a single round-robin within each group, with the top two teams qualifying for the semi-finals.

Each club is allowed one foreign player in the tournament, while none of Bahrain's national team players are competing. Teams are encouraged to give their younger players experience in the competition.

# Ahli draw first blood against Dar Kulaib

Resounding three-set sweep gives victors early advantage in best-of-three semi-final series of Isa bin Rashid Volleyball League

● Ahli hope to close out final four series when they meet Dar Kulaib next in game two, scheduled for Wednesday

● First game in other semi-final between defending champions Muharraq and Al Najma postponed following positive COVID-19 tests

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Ahli players with a triple block in their match against Dar Kulaib last night

Al Ahli asserted their dominance over Dar Kulaib last night in a resounding 3-0 (25-16, 25-22, 25-22) victory to draw first blood in their semi-final series of the 2020/2021 Isa bin Rashid Bahrain First Division Volleyball League.

The match was played at the Bahrain Volleyball Association (BVA) arena at Isa Sports City in Riffa.

Ahli were in control from the opening serve. They comfortably took the first set and appeared to be cruising in the second, but Dar Kulaib were able to make them work for the closing points until Slovakian profes-

sional Martin Pavleka handed Ahli the 2-0 match advantage with a service error.

In the third set, Ahli were down early but were able to fight back. They then came away with the big plays in the end, and finally closed out the result with a triple block at the net.

Ahli were spearheaded in the contest by Brazilian import, outside hitter Luis Fernando Venceslau, and Bahraini talents Emad Salman, Nasser Anan, and Mahmood Hasan, among others.

Dar Kulaib were led in the match by Pavleka, who is also an outside hitter. Their top lo-

cal players include Ali Ebrahim and Mahmood Abdulwahid, to name a few.

With yesterday's result, Ahli will be looking to close out their semi-final series when they meet Dar Kulaib next in game two, which is scheduled to be held on Wednesday. A Dar Kulaib victory would force a decisive third game, currently slated for February 15.

Meanwhile, the other final four series between top seeds Muharraq and fourth seeds Al Najma was also supposed to get underway yesterday, but their opening clash was postponed.

According to a BVA official, the postponement was required



The winners of the semi-finals will move on to the championship round, which will also be held in a best-of-three format

due to positive COVID-19 tests amongst the Muharraq players.

Muharraq has a twice-to-beat advantage in their series. The BVA has yet to schedule the new date of the opening contest.

The winners of the semi-finals will move on to the championship round, which will also be held in a best-of-three format. Game one is scheduled for February 21, with game two on February 25. The winner-take-all match for the title, if required, will be held on March 1.

A one-off game for third place is also scheduled. It will take place on February 22.

This year's first division league, organised and run by the BVA, is being held in honour of former Bahrain Olympic Committee president Shaikh Isa bin Rashid Al Khalifa.

## Hong Kong, Guam added to Bahrain qualifiers' roster

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The roster of national teams that will be playing in Bahrain later this month for the third window of the FIBA Asia Cup 2021 Qualifiers has been extended to 10, following the additions of Hong Kong and Guam.

This was announced by FIBA Asia.

The Kingdom was originally set to host Groups D and F, featuring Bahrain, Lebanon, Iraq and India along with Jordan, Palestine, Kazakhstan and Sri Lanka, respectively.

But now Group C teams Hong Kong and Guam will also be playing on the island. The move was made following the relocation of games from the Philippines because of an extension of a travel ban imposed by the Filipino government.

There will now be a total of 14 games over five days in Bahrain.



Bahrain's CJ Giles in action during the previous window of qualifiers last November

Hong Kong and Guam will play twice against one another here, first on February 19 and then again on February 21.

The other two Group C teams, Australia and New Zealand, will play their games in Australia, FIBA Asia added.

### Hosts

The upcoming games in the Kingdom will be the second

time Bahrain is hosting a qualifying window for the FIBA Asia Cup 2021. Last November and December, qualifiers for both Groups D and A (Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand) were held.

Bahrain registered back-to-back wins during that period, first against Iraq in overtime and then over India.

The Bahrainis play twice in this upcoming window, first against Lebanon on February 20 and then against Iraq on the 22nd, which are their final two games of the qualifiers.

Bahrain have already booked their tickets to the FIBA Asia Cup 2021. They head into this month's contests with a 3-1 win-loss record, and are ranked in Group D behind unbeaten Lebanon (4-0), and ahead of India (1-3) and Iraq (0-4).

## Medvedev, Rublev lead Russia into ATP Cup final

AFP | Melbourne

Daniil Medvedev battled back from a set down to topple Alexander Zverev and power Russia into the ATP Cup final yesterday where they will meet the Matteo Berrettini-led Italy.

The world number four needed to dig deep against the German world number seven, finally coming through 3-6, 6-3, 7-5 on his fourth match point after a marathon battle on Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne.

He sealed the tie after Andrey Rublev, who won five ATP titles last year as he raced up the rankings, also pulled off a come-from-behind win, grinding down Jan-Lennard 3-6, 6-1, 6-2.

Italy beat last year's finalists Spain with Berrettini and Fabio Fognini winning their singles ties.

"It was a crazy match. I was happy to win even though there were a lot of things I didn't like in the match," said Medvedev, who has enjoyed a perfect preparation for next week's Australian Open.

"But most important was getting the win for our country. There were big downs and big ups, just normal tennis."

Zverev, who needed a medical timeout for a tight lower back towards the end of the sec-



Daniil Medvedev hits a return

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DANIIL MEDVEDEV

ond set, heads into the Australian Open having beaten world number 12 Denis Shapovalov and pushed top-ranked Novak Djokovic deep into a third set, before his defeat to Medvedev.

Rublev had dropped just seven games before meeting Struff, defeating Guido Pella and Yoshihito Nishioka along the way.

He was handed a wake-up call by the aggressive German, who took the first set before the world number eight clicked into gear.

"The first set I was really nervous, plus he was attacking a lot," said Rublev, 23.

"So I needed to change and go for my shots and I raised my level, I started to play more aggressive."

Russia will face Italy on Sunday after they came out on top of the other semi-final against Spain, who were again without the injured Rafael Nadal.

Berrettini sealed his country's spot with a 6-3, 7-5 victory against Roberto Bautista Agut, after Fognini clawed past Pablo Carreno Busta 6-2, 1-6, 6-4.

### Updated schedule of games in Bahrain

Feb 18: 4pm Sri Lanka vs Kazakhstan, 7pm Palestine vs Jordan

Feb 19: 1pm Guam vs Hong Kong, 4pm Palestine vs Kazakhstan, 7pm Sri Lanka vs Jordan

Feb 20: 4pm India vs Iraq, 7pm Bahrain vs Lebanon

Feb 21: 1pm Hong Kong vs Guam, 4pm Sri Lanka vs Palestine, 7pm Jordan vs Kazakhstan

Feb 22: 11am Kazakhstan vs Sri Lanka, 2pm Jordan vs Palestine, 5pm Lebanon vs India, 8pm Bahrain vs Iraq