

# Fireworks expected in King's Cup Semi-Finals

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TDT | Manama

**A**l Khaldiya and Riffa meet tonight at Khalifa Sports City in a King's Cup semi-final that carries far more than a place in the final. Last weekend's controversial clash still looms large. Riffa finished with eight men after three dismissals, prompting a strong protest from the club. Tonight offers a chance to reset and focus purely on silverware.

Kick-off at 5.20 PM brings together two of the top sides in the Nasser bin Hamad Premier League. Al Khaldiya arrive with a clear advantage, eight points ahead of Riffa and two above second place, but Riffa's pedigree ensures nothing will be straightforward.

Al Khaldiya, guided by Tunisian coach Lassaad Al Chabbi, are chasing a remarkable season. Winners of the Super Cup in March and defending King's Cup champions, they now aim to add further honours. With



Al Khaldiya players step up preparations ahead of the semi-final



Coach Mohamed Mashaan oversees Riffa training session

two King's Cup titles already, they are reinforcing a growing reputation for dominance at the top. Riffa, under Kuwaiti coach

Mohamed Mashaan, have ambitions of their own. Winners of the Khalid bin Hamad Cup in February and seven-time King's

Cup champions, they remain contenders on all fronts. Their route to the semi-finals, a 4-1 win over Bahrain Club, under-

lined their attacking firepower. Al Khaldiya's path was a composed 2-0 victory against A'ali, reflecting consistency across

competitions. Both sides are chasing what could become a treble, with league and cup ambitions very much alive as the season enters its decisive stretch.

Attention will then turn to the second semi-final on Saturday, also at Khalifa Sports City, where Muharraq, record 33-time King's Cup winners, face Al Ahli. Kick-off for that match is also at 5.20pm, promising another compelling contest.

Muharraq, led by Portuguese coach Fernando Manuel de Jesus Santos, cruised past Al Shabab 3-0 in the quarter-finals but arrive seeking redemption after defeats in the Khalifa bin Salman Cup and Super Cup. Al Ahli, nine-time winners, had a tougher path, needing penalties to overcome Al Ettifaq after a 2-2 draw.

For now, the spotlight is on Al Khaldiya and Riffa. In a season defined by fine margins and rising tension, this semi-final could well define how the campaign is remembered.

## FIFA unveils 52 referees for World Cup, including six women

AFP | Paris, France

**F**IFA on Thursday unveiled its list of match officials for the June 11-July 19 World Cup, including 52 referees, six of whom are women.

Football's governing body will

also take 88 assistant referees and 30 video match officials, who hail from all six confederations and 50 member associations.

"The selected match officials are the very best in the world,"

said Pierluigi Collina, FIFA's chief refereeing officer.

"They were part of a wider pool of officials that was identified and monitored over the past three years. They have attended seminars and officiated at FIFA

tournaments.

"In addition, their performances in domestic and international matches were regularly assessed."

The World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico will

be the biggest in history, with a 48-team line-up and 104 matches to be played.

There are 41 more match officials than at Qatar four years ago, where 32 teams played 64 matches. "The fact that six wom-

en match officials have been selected continues a trend that was started four years ago in Qatar as we aim to further develop women's refereeing," Collina said with six women having already refereed in 2022.

## Verstappen Red Bull future in doubt as engineer to join McLaren

AFP | London, United Kingdom

**F**our-time world champion Max Verstappen's future in Formula One was again cast in doubt on Thursday after it was confirmed that his long-time race engineer will leave Red Bull for McLaren.

After details of Gianpiero Lambiase's switch emerged earlier on Thursday, Red Bull and McLaren both confirmed the news in separate statements.

Red Bull said Lambiase will leave "in 2028, when his current contract expires" with McLaren confirming he will take on the role of chief racing officer with their team when he starts "no later than 2028".

The British-Italian engineer, known as 'GP', has worked with Verstappen since the Dutchman joined Red Bull a decade ago.

"The team look forward to welcoming Gianpiero Lambiase when his existing contract ends, no later than 2028," McLaren said in a statement.

"The role of the chief racing



term commitment to confirming its position as a Championship-winning team."

A Red Bull statement read: "Oracle Red Bull Racing confirms that Gianpiero Lambiase will leave the team in 2028, when his current contract expires. 'GP' is a valued member of the team, which he joined in 2015.

"Until his planned departure, 'GP' continues in his roles as Head of Racing and as Race Engineer to Max Verstappen. The team and he are fully committed to add more

Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen (L) and Red Bull Racing's French driver Isack Hadjar wave during the drivers' parade

success to our strong track record together."

Lambiase's exit will mark the departure of yet another senior figure from Red Bull, with Christian Horner sacked as team principal last year.

Design guru Adrian Newey and sporting director Jonathan Wheatley both left their posts before Horner's exit.

It also raises more questions about Verstappen, who last won the world title in 2024, and hinted during last month's race in Japan he is

ready to quit Formula One.

Verstappen, whose current Red Bull deal runs until 2028, is a lowly ninth in the championship -- with just 12 points from the opening three races.



**Max Verstappen** became the youngest driver ever to start a Formula One race when he debuted at just 17 years and 166 days with Scuderia Toro Rosso at the 015 Australian Grand Prix—before he was even old enough to legally drive on public roads in many countries.

