

Muharraq retain Crown Prince Cup title

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Holders Muharraq successfully defended their crown last night, defeating rivals Dar Kulaib 3-1 (22-25, 25-18, 25-13, 25-18) in the final of the 2025-26 His Royal Highness the Crown Prince's Cup at Isa Bin Rashid Volleyball Arena.

The win secured Muharraq a record-extending 15th title in the competition and denied Dar Kulaib a domestic double after their league triumph earlier this season. It also brought a bitter-sweet ending for Dar Kulaib head coach Ivan Joksimovic, who will now depart to take charge of the Bahrain national team. His final act at club level ended in heartbreak, as Dar Kulaib's search for a sixth Crown Prince Cup title goes on.

Muharraq, led by Yaseen Al Meel, recovered strongly after losing the opening set, gradually taking control through improved blocking, aggressive serving, and greater composure in key moments.

Dar Kulaib made the brighter start, edging the opening set 25-22 behind strong attacking play from Kenyan import Enock Mogeni and solid net presence. But Muharraq responded quickly, with Swedish star Jakob Link leading the charge as they levelled the match 25-18 in



Trophy presentation following Muharraq's victory over Dar Kulaib in the final



Muharraq players and officials celebrate the title with supporters

the second set.

The turning point came in the third. Despite Dar Kulaib building a five-point lead midway through the set, Muharraq tightened their defence and punished errors with clinical attacking to surge back and take it 25-13.

From there, the champions took full control. Carrying mo-

mentum into the fourth set, Muharraq established an early lead and never relinquished it. Link and Nasser Anan continued to deliver in key moments, while Dar Kulaib struggled to regain rhythm despite brief resistance from Ali Marhoon.

Link again played a key role as Muharraq moved to match

point, before Majeed Mohamed sealed the victory with a powerful spike to complete a 25-18 win in the final set. It was another statement performance from the "Red Wolves", who retained the cup they also claimed against Dar Kulaib last season, further reinforcing their dominance in Bahraini volleyball.

Bahrain Drawn Into Tough Asian Cup Group



Core members of Bahrain's national football team for the tournament.png

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The draw for the AFC Asian Cup 2027 was conducted last night, placing Bahrain in Group B alongside Uzbekistan, Jordan, and North Korea.

Originally scheduled for April but delayed due to regional circumstances, the ceremony finalized the group stage lineup for Asia's premier international tournament. The competition will run from January 7 to February 5, 2027, and will be hosted across Riyadh, Jeddah, and Al Khobar in Saudi Arabia.

Bahrain were represented at the draw by Football Association board member Shaikh Ahmed bin Isa Al Khalifa and national team head coach Dragan Talajic.

The 24-team tournament will feature six groups of four,

with 23 nations already securing qualification ahead of the draw. The final berth will be decided on June 4 in a playoff between Lebanon and Yemen.

For Bahrain, the draw confirms yet another chapter in their steady presence on the continental stage. This will be their eighth AFC Asian Cup appearance and seventh consecutive qualification, reflecting their consistency among Asia's regular competitors in recent years.

Elsewhere in the competition's history, Japan remain the most successful nation with four titles, while Iran and hosts Saudi Arabia have each won it three times.

Defending champions Qatar will return aiming to continue their recent dominance, having lifted the trophy in both 2019 and 2023, and are once again expected to be among the leading contenders.

Leipzig seal Champions League berth in Bundesliga

AFP | Berlin, Germany

RB Leipzig sealed Champions League qualification with a comfortable 2-1 win over St. Pauli on Saturday on a dramatic day in the Bundesliga's race for Europe.

Goals from Xaver Schlager and Willi Orban saw Leipzig secure third place with a game to spare and plunge St. Pauli deeper into the relegation mire.

"We were under a lot of pressure this season, but we are a great group and we rose to it," Leipzig's captain David Raum said in a speech in front of the fans.

"We have achieved our goal now, so let's all have a drink and party all night long," he added.

The Hamburg side had scored just four goals in their previous eight games, and they were left to rue missed chances yet again in Leipzig.

The visitors squandered several chances on the counter-attack before Schlager hooked the ball in at a corner to give Leipzig the lead just before half time.

Orban doubled the lead with a brilliant header after the break, before Abdoulie Ceesay grabbed a late consolation for the visitors.

Rashid Khan bowls Gujarat to 77-run win over Rajasthan

AFP | Jaipur, India

Rashid Khan starred with 4-33 as Gujarat Titans crushed Rajasthan Royals by 77 runs in the IPL on Saturday. Kagiso Rabada claimed two wickets, while Jason Holder took three late wickets as Rajasthan were bowled out for 152 in reply to Gujarat's imposing 229-4. Skipper Shubman Gill led the charge with 84 off 50 balls, while Sai Sudharsan struck 55 in a 118-run opening stand.



Rashid Khan (C) and Jason Holder (L) celebrate after the dismissal of Jofra Archer

Washington Sundar added an unbeaten 37 off 20 deliveries to push Gujarat past 200.

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi smashed 36 off 16 balls with three fours and three sixes. But after his dismissal, the innings unravelled against Rashid's spin. Dhruv Jurel hit a rapid 24 off 10 balls before Rashid triggered a collapse, removing Jurel and Donovan Ferreira in the same over. Gujarat secured their sixth win in 11 matches and climbed to second spot.

Bahrain Premier League enters matchweek 21

● Al Khaldiya sit top of the table on 51 points, 2 points ahead of Muharraq

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Matchweek 21 — the penultimate round of the Nasser bin Hamad Premier League — gets underway tonight, with all three fixtures kicking off simultaneously at 7pm as the season enters



Action from Al Khaldiya's win over Muharraq in the reverse fixture

a decisive stage across Bahrain's top flight.

At Khalifa Sports City, Al Shabab host Sitra in a crucial encounter at both ends of the table. Al Shabab sit 11th on 14 points, five points adrift of safety and in the automatic relegation zone, meaning only a near-perfect finish could save their season.

Sitra, mean-

while, are 8th on 21 points but remain just above the relegation play-off places, ensuring there is still plenty at stake for Ali Abdulmajeed's side.

At Ahli Stadium, Bahrain Club face Al Najma under contrasting circumstances. Bahrain Club have endured a difficult campaign, collecting just seven points and already confirmed to finish bottom and be relegated. Al Najma, however, remain in 10th on 19 points and are still inside the relegation play-off zone, meaning they must still fight to secure their top-flight status with results elsewhere also shaping their fate.

The third fixture sees A'ali

take on Budaiya at Bahrain National Stadium. A'ali sit 5th on 28 points, while Budaiya are 9th on 21 points and remain in the relegation play-off places, meaning they are not yet safe despite being outside the automatic drop zone.

Attention then turns to tomorrow night, where three more fixtures also kick off at 7pm, headlined by a title-defining clash between Al Khaldiya and Muharraq at Bahrain National Stadium.

Al Khaldiya, coached by Tunisian Lassad Al Chabbi, sit top of the table on 51 points, just two ahead of Muharraq, led by Portuguese coach Fernando Santos. The stakes are enor-

mous: a win for Al Khaldiya would secure their third league title since their 2020 foundation, while a Muharraq victory would send them top heading into the final day. A draw would also ensure the championship goes down to the wire.

Elsewhere, Al Ahli host Al Hidd at Khalifa Sports City, with the two sides separated by just two points in mid-table, while Al Malkiya meet Riffa at Al Ahli Stadium. Riffa, coached by Kuwaiti Mohamed Al Mashaan, are third on 43 points and will be without Sayed Redha Isa through suspension, while Al Malkiya sit fourth on 33 points.