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# Dar Kulaib on brink of first WAVA crown

Kingdom’s representatives battle Qatar’s volleyball elite

Hussain Almaskati  
TDT | Manama

Bahrain’s Dar Kulaib will bid for regional glory today when they take on Qatar’s Al Rayyan in the final of the fourth West Asia Men’s Clubs Volleyball Championship in Kuwait City.

The gold-medal match is scheduled for 5pm Bahrain time at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex Hall. Earlier in the day, Al Ahli will face Kuwait Sports Club in the bronze-medal play-off at 3pm, before the tournament concludes with the closing ceremony.

Dar Kulaib’s journey to the final has been built on consistency and resilience. They began their Group C campaign with a four-set win over Oman’s Seeb Club, followed by a straight-sets victory against Kuwait’s Burgan club. A tight 3-2 loss to Saudi Arabia’s Al Ittihad did little damage, as the Bahrainis still topped the group with seven points to advance.

Their form strengthened in the knockout stages. A dominant



Dar Kulaib celebrate historic passage to WAVA final with traveling fans

3-0 victory over Iraq’s Ghaz Al Junoob in the quarter-finals was followed by an emphatic 3-0 (25-17, 25-21, 25-13) sweep of Al Ahli in Thursday’s semi-final.

In that all-Bahraini encounter, Dar Kulaib’s tactical superiority proved decisive. Strong serving unsettled Ahli’s reception, while middle blockers Hasan Alwarqaa and Hassan Abbas dominated at the net.

Kenyan professional Enock Mogeni, Pakistan’s Murad Jehan and captain Mahmood Abdulwahed delivered the offensive punch under Montenegrin head coach Ivan Joksimovic.

Dar Kulaib previously competed in the tournament’s inaugural edition in 2023 in Jordan, where they secured a bronze medal after finishing

third. Guided again by Joksimovic, they are now aiming to surpass that achievement and claim their first West Asian title.

Awaiting them is a formidable Al Rayyan side chasing a fourth consecutive West Asia crown. The Qatari champions topped Group A with wins over Ghaz Al Junoob and Oman’s Majees, before eliminating hosts Kuwait

Club 3-1 in the semi-finals. Led by Estonian star Oliver Venno and supported by Marcos Viničius and Papemaguette Diagne, Al Rayyan bring pedigree and championship experience to the final.

For Dar Kulaib, the opportunity is clear: build on their proud history in the competition and attempt to dethrone the region’s dominant force.

# Riffa hold nerve against Muharraq to lift KHK Cup

Mashaan’s side turn last season’s heartbreak into redemption

Hussain Almaskati  
TDT | Manama

Riffa claimed the 2025–2026 HH Khalid bin Hamad Cup yesterday at Bahrain National Stadium, edging league champions Muharraq 8-7 on penalties after a 1-1 draw following extra time. HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa was in attendance to crown the champions, marking the second edition of the tournament and giving Riffa a moment of sweet redemption after last year’s defeat to Al Khaldiya in the inaugural final.

The match burst into life from the opening whistle, with early tension between the Brazilian players on both sides. Muharraq’s Edimar Ribeiro da Costa and Arthur Rezende clashed with Riffa’s Rodrigo Yuri and Wellington Moreira, setting the tone for a fiercely competitive encounter. In the fifth minute, Sofyan Mahrouk’s point-blank header was superbly saved off the line by Riffa goalkeeper Dziugas Bartkus, keeping the score level in a high-energy start.

Riffa gradually asserted themselves and took the lead just before halftime. Wellington Moreira’s darting run down the left wing allowed him to skip past Muharraq’s Abdulwahab AlMalood and Bruno Santos, delivering a low ball into the six-yard box where Ali Madan was on hand to tap in.

Muharraq responded early in the second half, with Arthur Rezende equalizing in the 62nd minute. Soufiane Mahrouk delivered a low cross from the right that Riffa failed to clear, and Rezende’s half-volley struck the ground before creeping past Bartkus. The



Riffa’s skipper Hamad Al Shamsan lifts the Khalid bin Hamad Cup alongside HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa

goal sparked jubilant celebrations among the Red Wolves and their supporters, setting up a tense remainder of regular time.

Despite chances at both ends, the match remained deadlocked after 90 minutes, pushing the contest into extra time. Muharraq thought they had claimed the winner in the 111th minute when Edimar da Costa scored from Hasan AlKarani’s header, but VAR ruled the effort out for marginal offside, extending the drama into a penalty shootout.

The shootout proved a test of nerves, going into sudden death after flawless conversions. Riffa’s goalkeeper Bartkus emerged as the hero, sav-

ing Waleed AlHayyam’s effort before Mohamed Hamdaoui, the team’s new signing, calmly slotted home to secure a 8-7 victory.

The win delivers Riffa their first Khalid bin Hamad Cup title and a confidence boost as they stay close to Muharraq atop the Nasser Bin Hamad Premier League. Under Kuwaiti manager Mohamed Mashaan, their composure under pressure proved decisive, while Portuguese head coach Fernando Manuel de Jesus Santos’ Muharraq were left to rue missed chances. The KHK Cup win could prove pivotal, giving Riffa momentum and belief in their title ambitions.

# Zimbabwe pull off shock win over Australia at T20 World Cup



Australia’s Glenn Maxwell (R) walks back to the pavilion after his dismissal by Zimbabwe’s Ryan Burl (L)

AFF | Colombo

Zimbabwe beat a depleted Australia by 23 runs yesterday in Colombo to pull off the biggest shock of the T20 World Cup so far.

After posting 169-2 in their 20 overs, thanks mainly to Brian Bennett’s classy 64 not out, Zimbabwe had Australia 29-4 before dismissing them for 146 in 19.3 overs.

The Zimbabweans, ranked 11th were always in control against their second-ranked opponents in the Group B game at R. Premadasa Stadium after opening bowlers Bless-

ing Muzarabani and Brad Evans ripped out Australia’s top order.

There were sensational scenes at the venue as a group of Zimbabwe fans dressed in their team jerseys celebrated the win with a traditional dance.

“It is a huge win for us,” said Bennett.

“There are fans who have come all the way from Zimbabwe and they have enjoyed the game and it is a special feeling today to get a win here.”

Muzarabani was the pick of the bowlers finishing with 4-17.

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