

Muharraq eye historic **fifth** basketball crown

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

The 2025-26 Zain Bahrain Basketball League finals reach a decisive moment tonight at 7pm as Game 3 tips off at Khalifa Sports City Arena. Holders Muharraq stand one win away from the title while Manama face a must-win situation to keep their championship hopes alive.

Muharraq, leading the best-of-five series 2-0, are now just a victory away from claiming their fifth league crown and completing a historic treble, having already secured the Bahrain Super Cup and Khalifa bin Salman Cup this season. They are guided by German head coach Peter Schomers while Manama are led by experienced Bahraini tactician Salman Ramadhan.

So far, the Red Wolves have controlled the series through composure in critical moments. Game 1 was decided in dramatic fashion when Michael Warren drained a step-back three-pointer with just 5.5 seconds remaining to seal a 74-73 win, instantly

setting the tone for a finals defined by clutch execution.

Game 2 followed a similar script, this time with captain Bader Abdulla Malabes stepping up. He finished with 18 points, including 14 in the second half and eight in the fourth quarter, taking command when the pressure peaked. His early burst in the third quarter shifted momentum firmly in Muharraq's favor before he closed the game calmly at the free-throw line.

Muharraq's supporting cast has also delivered. Mahmood Abbas Isa added 16 points while Michael Warren and Mohammed Juma'a contributed 14 and 13 respectively. Defensively, Wayne Chism anchored the effort with 10 rebounds and four steals, providing stability on both ends of the floor.

For Manama, the series has shown both promise and frustration. Donovan Smith has been a major boost since arriving, posting 25 points and 12 rebounds in Game 2 while Ahmed Salman and Emran Ashkanani combined for 38 points to keep their side competi-

itive throughout stretches of the game.

Yet despite staying within reach, Manama have been undone by late-game inefficiency. Across the final five minutes of the first two games, they have managed just nine points in total. Seven came from Salman while the team shot 4 of 17 from the field and 1 of 9 from beyond the arc during that span, turning close contests into missed opportunities.

Still, belief remains intact within the squad. Emran Ashkanani has insisted the series is far from over, emphasizing that the team continues to back itself despite the deficit.

Tonight's Game 3 will also carry a renewed atmosphere with fans returning to the stands after a suspension due to regional circumstances. The restored crowd energy is expected to amplify the intensity of Bahrain's biggest basketball rivalry at a pivotal turning point in the series.

Should the series continue, Game 4 will be played on Friday and Game 5 on Monday, with all games tipping off at 7pm at Khalifa Sports City Arena.



Action from Saturday's Game 2 clash

Shelton fights past Nava in Munich



Ben Shelton in action

AFP | Munich

American second seed Ben Shelton fought past his lucky loser compatriot Emilio Nava 7-6 (7/4), 3-6, 6-3 in the first round of the Munich Open yesterday.

After rallying from a break down in the deciding set, the world number six will next meet the winner of Alexander Blockx's meeting with Yannick Hanfmann.

"It's tough. Not just (playing against) another American, but probably my best friend out on tour, or one of a few," Shelton said.

"His trajectory has been steep lately, so I'm happy to see the way he has been climbing

(the rankings)," Shelton added of the 112th-ranked Nava.

"I know he wasn't feeling 100 percent today, so I feel bad about that. I hope he gets back to 100 percent quickly, because he's playing great on the clay."

The win improves Shelton's perfect record to six wins from six outings in 500-level events this year as the 23-year-old tries to go one better than last year on the Bavarian red dirt in pursuit of a career-first clay-court title.

Shelton lost the 2025 title-decider to Alexander Zverev, and the German is once again the top seed in this edition of the tournament. He will meet Miomir Kecmanovic in his opening match.

Asian champions Bahrain reset for GCC Games

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The Bahrain Handball Federation has named a 25-player squad for upcoming competitions, with attention now turning to the 4th GCC Games in Doha from May 11 to 22. The tournament is the team's immediate target as it steps into a new cycle defined by higher standards and heavier expectations.

That context follows the defining moment in Bahraini handball history, when the national team claimed its first Asian title at the Asian Handball Championship in January. Bahrain defeated Qatar 29-26 after extra time in a dramatic final in Kuwait City, a result that reshaped the regional hierarchy and confirmed its rise among Asia's leading sides.

The achievement came under Swedish head coach Robert Hedin, who now guides the transition from breakthrough success to sustained performance. A training camp beginning this week marks the start of that cycle, with preparation centered on maintaining intensity while absorbing increased external pressure.

The roster includes: Hussain Al Sayyad, Mohammed



Bahrain's handball squad celebrate their Asian title in January

Abdullhussain, Mohammed Habib Ahmed, Hassan Madan, Mohammed Habib Al Nasser, Mohammed Hameed, Jassim Khamis, Ahmed Redha, Ahmed Jalal, Ali Al Asheeri, Salman Al Showaikh, Ali Mahmood, Ali Redha, Jaafar Farsan, Sayed

Ali Basem, Hussein Mahfoodh, Hisham Ahmed, Qassim Qambar, Abdullah Abdulkarim, Ahmed Talib, Abudhir Jaafar, Mohammed Shamlooh, Mahmood Jalil, Ahmed Eid, and Mahdi Jaafar.

Once a squad defined by chas-

ing history, Bahrain now carries the burden of defending it. The team enters the GCC Games not as an underdog, but as a benchmark in regional handball, measured less by breakthrough moments and more by consistency at the top level.

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