

# Khalifa bin Salman Cup final locked in

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TDT | Manama

Defending champions Muharraq and Manama will meet in the final of the 2025-26 Khalifa Bin Salman Cup after both teams completed clean sweeps in their best-of-three semi-final series on Saturday night.

Manama were first to advance, defeating Al Najma 77-75 in Game 2 to take the series 2-0, having won Game 1 by 78-66 under head coach Salman Ramadan.

Muharraq followed suit with a 96-80 victory over Al Ahli, completing their 2-0 sweep after a 93-87 win in Game 1. The championship match is now scheduled for March 23 at Khalifa Sports City Arena, the BBA announced yesterday.

Manama's win over Najma featured a remarkable turnaround. Najma dominated early, leading 26-19 after the first quarter and 42-29 at halftime, extending their advantage to 50-33 in the third quarter.

Manama chipped away steadily, and a late third-quarter surge set the stage for the final period, when Hasan Nowrooz hit a decisive three-pointer to give his team a 65-61 lead. Najma briefly tied the game, but Manama pulled away in the closing minutes.

Nowrooz finished with 18 points, including four three-pointers off the bench, while captain Ahmed Salman added 16, and MVP Ali Jaber contributed 15 points, nine rebounds, and five assists.

Najma's Mohammed Hussain scored 20 points with nine rebounds, supported by Donovan Smith's 16.



Passionate Manama celebrations at final buzzer

Manama will also be hoping for the recovery of Subah Hussain, who left the court with a snapped left knee after a natural collision in Game 2. "We know the final will be very challenging," said Salman. "Muharraq are the defending champions and a strong team, so it won't be easy. But we will prepare well and give everything we have."

Later, Muharraq reinforced

their status as title favourites with a Game 2 win over Al Ahli. They led 22-13 after the first quarter and 46-34 by halftime, stretching the lead beyond 20 points in the third quarter.

Bader Abdulla led the winners with 19 points, Mohamed Ameer added 15, Nick West 13, and Wayne Chism dominated the boards with 11 rebounds.

Al Ahli's Anthony Fairley

scored 19 with 10 rebounds, Maitham Jameel 14, and Kenneth Kadji 12.

The Red Wolves had led the series for 74 minutes and 30 seconds before closing out in Game 2, demonstrating control throughout both semi-final matches.

Under the guidance of German coach Peter Schomers, Muharraq reached the final with



Muharraq's Nick West lands a dunk in semi-final

authority. "We're proud to reach the final again," said Muharraq captain Bader Malabes.

"Manama are a strong opponent, but we promise to give everything we have to retain the title."

With both teams advancing in style, Manama, three-time winners, will face defending champions Muharraq, who hold two titles, for the season's top prize.

A win for Manama would give them the outright record for the most Khalifa Bin Salman Cup titles, while a Muharraq victory would allow the defending champions to retain the crown.

The March 23 clash at Khalifa Sports City Arena will decide which of Bahrain's most successful basketball clubs claims the prestigious trophy this year.

# Man Utd sink Villa to boost top-four bid

AFP | London

Manchester United bolstered their bid to qualify for the Champions League with a vital 3-1 win against top-four rivals Aston Villa on yesterday.

Michael Carrick's side took the lead through Casemiro's second-half opener at Old Trafford before Ross Barkley hauled Villa level.

United finished strongly, with Matheus Cunha and Benjamin Sesko scoring in the closing stages to seal Carrick's seventh win in nine games since taking over as interim boss.

Sitting third in the Premier League, United are three points clear of fourth-placed Villa in the race to reach the Champions League via a top-four finish.

United co-owner Jim Ratcliffe this week praised Carrick's "excellent" work, but stopped short of committing to the former Old Trafford star on a long-term basis.

But Carrick making a strong case to earn the job on a permanent basis after stabilising United following Ruben Amorim's sacking.

United's latest victory came after an 11-day break since the first defeat of his reign at Newcastle and Carrick celebrated with a jig of delight on the touchline after Sesko wrapped up the points.

Spluttering Villa have lost their last three league games



Manchester United's Brazilian striker #10 Matheus Cunha (R) shoots to score the team's second goal

and have just one win in seven top-flight matches, leaving them three points above fifth-placed Chelsea with eight games left in the battle for European places.

After a lethargic first-half, United finally prised open the Villa defence in the 53rd minute.

Bryan Mbeumo's stinging strike was palmed away by Emiliano Martinez, earning a corner that brought the opener.

Bruno Fernandes curled a corner to the near post and Casemiro made a perfectly timed run

to glance a header past Martinez for his league goal this season.

With Casemiro likely to leave when his contract expires at the end of the season, United fans serenaded the Brazilian midfielder with chants of "one more year".

United lost focus and surrendered the lead in the 64th minute.

In his first Premier League start for 14 months, Barkley slammed a superb strike past Senne Lammens from 12 yards

after United failed to clear the danger.

## Assist king Fernandes

But Cunha netted in the 71st minute to ensure Carrick's men didn't pay for their stumble.

Bursting onto Fernandes' sublime pass into the Villa area, the Brazilian forward slotted a fine finish into the far corner.

It was Fernandes' 16th Premier League assist this term, moving the United captain past David Beckham's previous club



**Bruno Fernandes' 16th Premier League assist of the season broke David Beckham's 26-year-old club record of 15, set in 1999-2000, while reaching 100 assists for United since 2020**

record of 15 in 1999-2000.

He has 100 assists for United in all competitions since signing from Sporting Lisbon in 2020.

Sesko came off the bench to prove a point to Carrick after being dropped, the Slovenian striker firing home with a deflected effort in the 81st minute.

Nottingham Forest climbed out of the relegation zone after a 0-0 draw against Fulham at the City Ground.

Still waiting for their first win under Vitor Pereira, fourth-bottom Forest, who have had four managers this term, are above third-bottom West Ham on goal difference.

Ten-man Leeds held on for a 0-0 draw at Crystal Palace de-

spite Dominic Calvert-Lewin's missed penalty and a bizarre red card for Gabriel Gudmundsson.

Calvert-Lewin shot wide from the spot after Will Hughes' handball, before Gudmundsson was sent off on the stroke of half-time.

Gudmundsson had already been shown a yellow card when he committed another foul on Ismaila Sarr that referee Thomas Bramall deemed worthy of a booking.

Bramall had forgotten the first booking before he was told through his earpiece to show the red card.

Later yesterday, troubled Tottenham headed to Liverpool with only goal difference keeping them outside the relegation zone.

Tottenham interim boss Igor Tudor had lost all four of his matches since replacing the sacked Thomas Frank.

In grave danger of playing into the second tier for the first time since 1977-78, Tottenham are without a win in their last 11 league matches, losing five in a row.

They suffered an embarrassing 5-2 defeat at Atletico Madrid in the Champions League last-16 first leg in midweek.

Sixth-placed Liverpool would go fourth with a victory that would push Tottenham deeper into the relegation mire.