

Muharraq, Khaldiya set for ACL Two openers

Bahraini giants launch Asian campaigns tomorrow night



Muharraq players line up before a match



Khaldiya players line up before a match

- **Muharraq face Al Wehdat**
- **Al Khaldiya meet Qatar's Al Ahli**
- **ACL Two group stage runs till December**

TDT | Manama

Bahrain's Muharraq and Al Khaldiya are putting the finishing touches on preparations for their 2025-26 AFC Champions League (ACL)

Two campaigns, which kick off tomorrow. Both clubs will play their opening fixtures on Wednesday night.

The ACL Two is Asia's second-tier club competition, newly reformatted beneath the AFC Champions League Elite and above the AFC Challenge League. It features 32 teams from 22 associations in a home-and-away group stage.

Muharraq debut in new format

Muharraq return to continental action as Bahrain Premier League champions. The record Bahraini side, twice winners of the competition in its former

guise as the AFC Cup (2008 and 2021), now line up in Group A alongside Al Wehdat of Jordan, Al Wasl of the UAE, and Esteghlal of Iran.

They open against Wehdat at home on Wednesday at Shaikh Ali bin Mohammed bin Isa Al Khalifa Stadium in Arad, with kick-off at 9:15pm.

Khaldiya face stern test in Doha

King's Cup holders Khaldiya take part in ACL Two for a second straight season. They are drawn in Group B with Qatar's Al Ahli, Uzbekistan's PFC Andijon, and FC Arkadag of Turk-

menistan.

Their campaign begins against Al Ahli on Wednesday at Al Thumama Stadium in Doha, with play starting at 7pm Bahrain time.

Wide field of challengers

Both Bahraini clubs compete in the West Asia region, which also includes the likes of Sepahan (Iran), Mohun Bagan (India), and Saudi giants Al Nassr. Groups E to H cover East Asia, with teams from China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and beyond.

The group stage runs until December 24, followed by the

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Muharraq twice lifted the AFC Cup in 2008, 2021

knockouts in early 2026 and the final on May 16.

Abdulrahman: "Strong and balanced competition"
Former Muharraq star

Mahmood Abdulrahman, MVP of the 2008 edition, said the new ACL Two promises exciting football.

"The competition this season looks a strong and balanced one with teams now more tactically advanced," he told afc.com. "The new system has exceeded expectations, producing many strong and exciting matches."

He credited AFC president Shaikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa for Asian football's recent progress, noting that growing exposure on digital platforms is boosting the game's reach.

Al Hala AWCC Campaign unravels with 4th Straight Loss

- **Diop's double-double not enough**
- **Al Fetat dominate final quarter surge**

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Bahrain's Al Hala suffered their fourth consecutive defeat at the 26th Arab Women's Clubs Championship last night, losing 71-78 to Kuwait's Al Fatat in Medina, Saudi Arabia.

In a rollercoaster contest featuring seven lead changes and wild momentum swings, Al Hala appeared poised to snap their losing streak after building a 13-point advantage in the third quarter. But a disastrous fourth period, where they were outscored 6-26, allowed Al Fatat to storm back and steal the win.

Senegalese standout Yacine Diop continued her strong tournament, recording a 23 point, 13



Action from the match

rebound double-double alongside five assists, three steals and two blocks. But despite her impact, Al Hala couldn't contain Al Fatat's Raneem AlGedawy, who posted a dominant 27 point, 24 rebound performance with four assists, two steals and three blocks.

Hala led for over 21 minutes, but their offense sputtered late

and their defense had no answers as Al Fatat turned up the tempo. Kuwait's representatives out-rebounded Hala 56-42 and dished out nearly double the assists (31 to 17), exploiting Hala's tired legs and inconsistent rotations.

The loss adds to a brutal week for the Bahraini side, who previously fell in close defeats to

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Al Hala led in most games, but lost them all

Algeria's Cosider (74-76), UAE's Sharjah (87-88), and Saudi hosts Al Ula (92-100). Now 0-4, Hala face a steep climb to reach the medal rounds, needing wins in their final two games. Jordan's Fuheis and Kuwait's Al Qurain are up next, and they'll need help elsewhere in the standings.

Al Hala return to the court today at 5pm Bahrain time for a must-win matchup against Fuheis. They will then enjoy rest days on Tuesday and Wednesday, before taking on Al Qurain in their final match.

AC Milan keeper Maignan escapes calf tear against Bologna

AFP | London

France goalkeeper Mike Maignan has not had a repeat of the calf tear which kept him out of the last World Cup, AC Milan said today.

Maignan limped off the field injured seven minutes after half-time of AC Milan's 1-0 win over with Bologna in Serie A yesterday night, and was replaced by Pietro Terracciano.

However, Milan said in a statement said that tests carried out this morning excluded a serious injury similar to the one which kept him out of action for months between 2022 and 2023.



Mike Maignan in action

Milan added that defender Strahinja Pavlovic also escaped a serious injury to his left thigh, add that "both players will be assessed on a day-by-day basis".

Athletic 'not afraid' of Arsenal on Champions League return: Inaki Williams

AFP | Bilbao

Athletic Bilbao captain Inaki Williams said his team have no fear ahead of their Champions League opener against Premier League giants Arsenal.

The Basque side, who only employ players born in the region, are back in Europe's top

competition for the first time since 2014, having qualified for only the third occasion in their history.

Ghana international Williams said the squad were thrilled to be back among the elite.

"So many of us are looking forward to debuting in the Champions League. for years



Inaki Williams

we've fought for a day like to-

morrow and we want to grow our dream," Williams told reporters.

"We are not afraid of anyone, it will be a really nice game."

Inaki Williams' younger sibling Nico Williams is set to miss the clash against last season's semi-finalists at the San Mames stadium with a groin injury.

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