

## Koeman hopeful on Messi fitness for Super Cup final



Lionel Messi shakes hands with Ronald Koeman

Reuters | London

Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman says he is optimistic Lionel Messi will be fit for Sunday's Spanish Super Cup final against Athletic Bilbao after injury forced him to miss the semi-final.

The Argentina forward was left out of the squad for Wednesday's penalty shootout victory over Real Sociedad after complaining of discomfort during last week's 4-0 La Liga win over Granada.

"He trained on his own yesterday (Friday). We have a session this evening, he wants to train, so we'll see how he feels afterwards and if he wants to play or not," Koeman told a news conference yesterday in Seville.

"Tomorrow morning we'll see how his body reacts to the session, but we have high hopes that he'll be there for the match."

# Riffa beat Najma to stay atop table

Mahdi Humaidan, Ali Madan supply goals as leaders extend unbeaten run in 2020/2021 Nasser bin Hamad Bahrain Premier Football League

● Polish professional **Lukasz Gikiewicz** strikes in East Riffa's 1-0 win over Muharraq

● **Ahmed Bughammar** scores in third minute of stoppage time to salvage 2-2 draw for Hidd against Manama

TDI | Manama

Riffa maintained their lead atop the table of the 2020/2021 Nasser bin Hamad Bahrain Premier Football League last night following a hard-earned 2-1 victory over Al Najma on the final day of the sixth week of play.

Bahrain national team stars Mahdi Humaidan and Ali Madan scored on either side of half-time for the victors, while Brazilian professional Luis Junior was on target for Najma with their lone consolation.

In other matches yesterday, East Riffa overcame a tough challenge against Muharraq 1-0, while defending champions Hidd escaped with a last-minute 2-2 draw against Manama.

In Riffa's victory, Humaidan opened the scoring in the 42nd minute when he struck from



Riffa's Mahdi Humaidan, right, looks to challenge Al Najma's Vincent Emmanuel during their match

close range. He fired in a low, left-footed strike after Najma failed to clear the danger, which was enough to give his team the advantage heading into the break.

Madan then made it 2-0 20 minutes after the re-start following a brilliant one-two with influential playmaker Mohammed Marhoon. Madan capitalised on a clear path to goal amidst the porous Najma defence, and made no mistake with his attempt.

Junior pulled one back for Najma with just 13 minutes remaining in regular time with a difficult header off a cross from the left flank. It cut their deficit

but Najma were unable to find the equaliser, despite their best efforts.

With the result, Riffa claimed their fifth win in six matches and remained the only undefeated team in the league. They improved to 16 points in first place on the 10-team standings. Najma were handed their third loss as they stayed on five points in the bottom half of the table.

In East Riffa's win, Polish professional Lukasz Gikiewicz supplied the match's lone goal early on in the contest. Gikiewicz scored in only the third minute following a defensive lapse from their rivals, helping them claim their fourth victory as they

### Standings

	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
Riffa	6	5	1	0	5	16
East Riffa	6	4	1	1	7	13
Manama	6	3	2	1	2	11
Muharraq	6	2	3	1	2	8
Hidd	6	2	2	2	0	8
Budaiya	6	2	2	2	0	8
Busaiteen	6	1	2	3	0	5
Al Najma	6	1	3	2	-2	5
Al Ahli	6	1	2	3	-5	5
Budaiya	6	0	2	4	-9	2



**Riffa claimed their fifth win in six matches and remain the only undefeated team in the league**

stayed in second place with 13 points. Muharraq suffered their third defeat and remained on eight points.

Meanwhile, Ahmed Bughammar scored in the third minute of stoppage time to help Hidd escape with a 2-2 draw against Manama. Bughammar headed in from close range off a Moham-

med Abdulwahab corner kick. Abdulwahab had earlier given Hidd the lead in the 23rd minute with a rocket free-kick that curled into the top-left corner of the net.

But Manama came alive in the final period and Syrian Isra Amer levelled the scores in the 57th minute with a header in the face of goal. Then, six minutes later, Manama was awarded a penalty after Mahdi Abduljabbar was taken down in the box by Abdulwahab with a poor tackle. Abduljabbar picked himself up and took the spot kick himself, and he sent the ball into the top-right corner of goal. That set the stage for Bughammar's heroics.

Hidd claimed their second draw as they rose to eight points, while Manama were also to a second stalemate and went to 11 points.

## Fernandes hits back at Klopp over penalty claims

AFP | London

Manchester United midfielder Bruno Fernandes has told Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp to stop moaning about the number of penalties given to Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side.

United have been awarded 20 penalties in the Premier League since the start of last season, while title rivals Liverpool have had just 10.

Klopp highlighted the large amount of United spot-kicks after his side had two penalty appeals turned down in their recent 1-0 defeat at Southampton.

United manager Solskjaer responded by saying Klopp and other Premier League bosses were trying to influence referees not to give his team penalties.

Now Fernandes has joined the United backlash ahead of Sunday's crucial clash between the bitter rivals as the Portugal star said Klopp should quit complaining.

"You always see what people say, but I really don't care. I'm not focused on what they're saying. We have really quick players up front," said Fernandes, who has scored 14 penalties for United.

"Anthony Martial is one of the best players one against one in the box, Marcus Rashford is another one who is quick and has quick feet, who can take the ball away from the defender at any moment.

"It's normal that sometimes, because of that, they will be



Bruno Fernandes elbow bumps Ole Gunnar Solskjaer

# 20

penalties have been awarded to Manchester United in the Premier League since the start of last season, while title rivals Liverpool have had just 10

tripped and will fall and they gain penalties.

"People can talk and say what they want. But for me and the team, the main point is continuing to do the right things and when we get a penalty, just scoring.

"I played in Portugal and when you play for Sporting Lisbon, Benfica and Porto are always talking about that kind of stuff - sometimes to put pressure on the referee."

United are top of the table -- three points clear of Liverpool

-- at this stage of the season for the first time since their last title-winning campaign in 2013.

That was the last year of Alex Ferguson's trophy-filled reign, but it is champions Liverpool who are the dominant force now.

Fernandes is key to United's hopes of ending Liverpool's spell as English football's top dogs.

The 26-year-old has flourished since joining from Sporting Lisbon last January.

Fernandes has scored 19 goals and provided 14 assists in the Premier League alone, with his outstanding displays leading the midfielder to win a record four Player of the Month awards in a calendar year.

That is already as many as Cristiano Ronaldo managed during his entire Old Trafford stay, but Fernandes wants the kind of team glory enjoyed by his Portugal team-mate.

## Manama extend winning streak in basketball league

TDI | Manama

Manama crushed Samahej 101-64 last night to maintain their winning ways in the 2020/2021 Zain Bahrain Basketball League.

The victors enjoyed a dominant second half, where they outscored their rivals 60-25 to pull away for the big win.

They led by as many as 38 in the contest en route to their sixth win in as many games, as they stayed as the only undefeated team remaining.

Mohammed Ameer led all scorers with 23 points while Hasan Nowrooz added 18. Lebanese professional Karim Ezzeddine chipped in with 16 points and 16 rebounds, while Ali Hussain also finished with 16 off the bench. Captain Mohammed Hussain was their fifth man in double figures with 11.

Ahmed Fateel paced Samahej in the loss with 19. He also had five steals. Senegalese professional Mansour Kasse added 17 to go with 14 boards. Samahej dropped to a 3-6 win-loss record.

Meanwhile, Nuwaidrat routed Al Hala 100-79 in yesterday's other game.

Nuwaidrat took control early but only built their lead in the final period, when they more than doubled Hala's output 33-16. The victors were red hot



Manama's Ali Hussain goes for a lay-up in their win against Samahej

from beyond the three-point line in the contest, firing in 19 baskets from behind the arc.

American AJ John had 36 points and 11 rebounds to lead Nuwaidrat, including four triples. Omran Yousif and Hussain Hasan each buried six three-pointers, as Yousif finished with 24 points and Hasan 19.

Sayed Kadhmed Majed had

20 for Hala, while Canadian Keanau Post chipped in with 17 and 13 boards.

Nuwaidrat won for the fifth time in nine games, while Hala lost for only the second time in seven.

League action continues tonight with Bahrain Club facing Al Ettihad at 5.30pm followed by Riffa taking on Sitra at 7.45pm.