

Bahrain earn play-off berth in FIBA Esports Open



Bahrain's players line-up on screen after their win against Lebanon

● **Bahrainis among 60 national teams from around the world taking part in online tournament, featuring NBA 2K21 platform**

● **Bahrain win both preliminary round games, first against Lebanon and then against the UAE**

TDT | Manama

Bahrain powered through to the first round of the play-offs in the FIBA Esports Open III, which got underway online yesterday with the participation of 60 national teams from around the world. The Bahrainis, who are competing in Group Two of the competition's Middle East Conference, won both their games in the preliminary round. They first defeated their counterparts from Lebanon 84-80, and then beat the UAE 20-0. The nationals are thus through to the play-offs, where they are set to take on Kuwait, who finished with a 1-1 win-loss record in Group One.

The other play-off match-up will be between Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. The play-offs are scheduled to continue today and tomorrow. Bahrain's squad features six members, including guards Jassim Ali, Hussain Albanna, Salman Sharaf and Ali Showaikh, power forward Ahmed Shareeda and centre Yaqoob Seyadi. In their win over Lebanon yesterday, the team's character named "kamppoop" led the team with 24 points, 12 rebounds and four assists. Teammate "Black-Cobra_Z" contributed 23 points and 11 assists, while "Clutch-69Gamer" had 16 points and "||-Rodman-||" chipped in with 15. Bahrain overcame the 44-point effort of Lebanon's "||Yenchy||", while "CantBeat-TheGrind" added 36 points and 15 assists. The online tournament, which features the NBA 2K21 video game, features six regional conferences. Six teams are battling it out in the South East Asia, Africa and Middle East Conferences; while North and Central America have eight sides apiece. South America have seven teams while 28 are playing in the Europe Conference.

Mercedes dominate practice in Imola

Max Verstappen crawls to a halt in second practice session

● **Mercedes' Valtteri Bottas was quickest in the first practice session at Imola Emilia Romagna Grand Prix**

AFP | Imola

Mercedes drivers Valtteri Bottas and Lewis Hamilton produced the quickest times in practice on Friday for the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix but Max Verstappen and Charles Leclerc both ran into trouble in the second session. Bottas was quickest round the legendary Imola circuit in both sessions but only just, 0.01 seconds faster than his teammate Hamilton. The pair were followed by AlphaTauri's Pierre Gasly and the Ferraris of Carlos Sainz and Leclerc who crashed into a wall at the end of the second session, prompting a red flag and the decision not to restart. There was bad news for Red Bull too as Verstappen pulled up with a mechanical problem. "Something snapped on the rear," Verstappen told his team. The Dutchman, who finished second behind Hamilton in the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix, had earlier clocked the third-fastest time in the opening session behind the two



Mercedes' Valtteri Bottas Mercedes.

The first session was also marked by two red flags. A collision between Red Bull's Sergio Perez and the Alpine of Esteban Ocon, which escaped the cameras, resulted in both cars off the track. Perez, who was on a "flying" lap, according to his team boss Christian Horner, had a damaged rear-left tyre while Ocon, on a "slow" lap, had a broken front right. The drivers were called to the stewards to explain the incident but no further action was taken. "The two cars reached the apex at the same time, and just barely touched wheels," said the stewards' report. "Both drivers agreed in the

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hearing that it was an unfortunate miscommunication of timing between them, not helped by the fact that both drivers had

limited or no communications with their teams at the time. "Both drivers agreed that neither was at fault." They were both back in business for the second session with Perez clocking the sixth fastest time. The second red flag of the morning came just before the end of the session after Haas rookie Nikita Mazepin went too wide into a corner and spun. It was another unfortunate incident for the 22-year-old Russian. He failed to complete the opening lap in Bahrain and has been tagged with the nickname 'Mazespin'. The third practice session starts at 0900 GMT on Saturday with qualification taking place from 1200 GMT.

Roma line up Europa League semi with United, Arsenal cruise into last four

AFP | London

Roma lined up a blockbuster Europa League semi-final clash with Manchester United on Thursday after holding Ajax to a 1-1 draw to go through to the last four 3-2 on aggregate. Edin Dzeko's strike 18 minutes from time ensured the draw and passage for Paulo Fonseca's side, who were on the back foot for most of the match, and a showdown with United who strolled into the semis 4-0 after a 2-0 win over La Liga outfit Granada at Old Trafford. The other semi-final will see Arsenal face Villarreal, coached by former Gunners boss Unai Emery. "I've never got to a semi-final before, so I'm very proud, especially as we are representing Italy right now," said Fonseca, who has been under pressure following a disappointing Serie A campaign. "It's a source of pride for Roma and we are all very happy." Italy's only remaining representative in Europe came into the clash at the Stadio Olimpico with a slender lead but two away goals from last week's first leg in Amsterdam.



Roma's Bosnian forward Edin Dzeko (R) scores an equalizer past Ajax Dutch goalkeeper Maarten Stekelenburg

"If you look at the overall tie we were the better side, but that doesn't mean anything"
AJAX'S DAVY KLAASEN

Their European campaign looked in danger when Ajax teen Brian Brobbey was introduced for Antony at the break and the striker made an instant impact, racing onto Perr Schuurs pass three minutes after the restart and nipped the ball past an onrushing Pau

Lopez. However after Dusan Tadic's strike for the away side six minutes later was ruled out for a foul on Henrikh Mkhitaryan in the build up, Dzeko tipped the tie in Roma's favour. The Bosnian was on hand to tap home the leveller which put Roma a goal ahead on aggregate after Riccardo Calafiori's low cross was deflected into his path. With Ajax needing to score again to take the tie into extra-time the hosts were galvanised and managed to fend off Erik ten Hag's outfit, who will have to wait until next season for a shot at European glory.

Riffa title celebrations put on hold

● **League leaders Riffa held to 1-1 deadlock by bottom-of-the-table club Busaiteen**
● **Manama defeat Malkiya 1-0 to move second; Najma and Budaiya play to 1-1 draw**

TDT | Manama

Riffa will have to wait a little while longer before kicking off their title celebrations in the 2020/2021 Nasser bin Hamad Bahrain Premier Football League, after being held to a 1-1 draw by bottom-of-the-table club Busaiteen last night in their Week 15 fixture.



Riffa's Mahdi Humaidan, right, battles for possession of the ball with Busaiteen captain Mohamed Saleh Sanad

A win would have put Riffa in position to seal the season's crown by tonight, if chief rivals East Riffa drop any points against Al Ahli. But a share of yesterday's points with Busaiteen means East Riffa and Manama are still with a mathematical chance to steal away the title from Riffa, who have been the runaway leaders all season long.

Standings						
	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
Riffa	15	12	2	1	15	38
Manama	15	9	2	4	10	29
East Riffa	14	9	1	4	10	28
Muharraq	14	5	5	4	6	20
Hidd	14	5	3	6	0	18
Al Ahli	14	4	5	5	-6	17
Al Najma	15	3	5	7	-9	14
Malkiya	15	2	6	7	-11	12
Budaiya	15	2	6	7	-11	12
Busaiteen	15	1	7	7	-4	10
Al Malkiya	3	0	1	2	-6	1

Manama were 1-0 winners over Malkiya last night as they moved to second place on the table, nine points behind Riffa with three matches remaining for each team. Al Najma and Budaiya played to a 1-1 stalemate in yesterday's third game. In Riffa's draw, skipper Koma Al Aswad opened the scoring in the match in the 37th minute. His goal came following a corner kick from teammate Mohammed Marhoon, which was poorly cleared by the Busaiteen defence. The ball went straight into the path of Alaswad, and he sent home a left-footed strike from just inside the penalty box past opposing goalkeeper Ahmed Abdulrasool. Al Aswad's goal was fitting for the occasion, as he had earlier this week signed a contract extension with Riffa. The terms of his deal were not disclosed, but it is reported to be the richest in the history of the Bahrain premier league. Busaiteen, however, were able to level the proceedings in the second half with a header from substitute Sultan Mansoor Sultan off a corner kick. The result was only the second draw for Riffa in 15 matches, while Busaiteen earned their seventh deadlock but remained in last place.