

Al Khaldiya, Muharraq chase Super Cup crown

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TDT | Manama

Al Khaldiya and Al Muharraq will face off in the 2025-26 Bahrain Super Cup at Khalifa Sports City tonight, with kick-off at 9:30pm. The fixture pits last season's King's Cup winners, Al Khaldiya, against reigning Nasser Bin Hamad Premier League champions Muharraq, making it one of Bahrain's most eagerly anticipated matches of the season.

Al Khaldiya enter the match on the back of a 4-1 league win over Bahrain Club, a result that lifted them to the top of the table. Having also beaten Muharraq in January, the league leaders head into the Super Cup with added confidence. Tunisian coach Lassad Al Chabbi has further strengthened that momentum by guiding the team to this year's King's Cup semi-finals.

Meanwhile, Muharraq, coached by Portuguese Fernando Manuel de Jesus Santos, have been one of the standout sides this season, despite sitting two points off the top. They lead the league in goals scored, have conceded the fewest, and have suffered the least losses, while also boasting top scorer Edimar Ribeiro da Costa with 12 goals. They too reached the King's Cup semi-finals and will be looking to respond after last month's Khalid bin Hamad Cup final defeat to Riffa on penalties.

While both sides arrive in strong form, cup finals often defy the league table, and in one-off matches like the Super Cup, momentum and composure can prove more decisive than season-long statistics.



Action from Al Khaldiya's league win over Muharraq in early January

With that in mind, sources indicate that both teams may include under-21 players in their lineups. Amid a congested schedule and the demands of the Ramadan period, coaches

are balancing squad rotation with the need to remain competitive. This would give young talent a chance in a major final while resting key senior players. The Super Cup also carries

added significance for both teams. Al Khaldiya are chasing a fourth consecutive title, while Muharraq are aiming to return to the winner's circle for the first time since 2018.

Hard-hitting Conway steers New Zealand to victory over South Africa

AFP | Hamilton, New Zealand

Devon Conway blasted a half-century before New Zealand skittled South Africa cheaply to win the second Twenty20 international by 68 runs yesterday and level the five-match series 1-1.

Conway's 60 off 49 balls set the home side up for a competitive 175-6 after being sent in to bat at Hamilton's Seddon Park.

The Proteas lost wickets regularly to be dismissed for 107 off 15.3 overs, with pace bowlers Ben Sears and Lockie Ferguson snaring three wickets each.

South Africa won game one in Mount Maunganui on Sunday by seven wickets.

Both sides are fielding largely second-tier lineups, choosing to rest their first-choice players in the wake of the T20 World Cup.

New Zealand lost the final of the global tournament to hosts India earlier this month, having beaten South Africa in the semi-finals.

Conway produced easily the most important innings of the game, the 34-year-old posting five fours and two sixes.



New Zealand's Devon Conway (L) plays a shot as South Africa's Connor Esterhuizen reacts

The South African-born left-hander played with controlled aggression as wickets fell around him to reach his 13th half-century in the format.

Conway was delighted to contribute after being an unused squad member throughout the World Cup.

"It has been a very quiet couple of months for me, going over

Scorecard

New Zealand 175 for 6 (Conway 60, Clarkson 26*, Mulder 2-14) beat South Africa 107 (Linde 33, Sears 3-14, Ferguson 3-16) by 68 runs

to India and not featuring at the World Cup," he said.

"It's been nice to come back

and play and be able to contribute for the boys and the group."

Josh Clarkson raced to 26 not out at the death while allrounder Wiaan Mulder took 2-14.

Mulder's addition was the only change to South Africa's team from game one, replacing Jordan Hermann, who was ruled out of the remainder of the series with a hamstring injury.

Doncic leads Lakers to sixth straight win, Spurs sink Clippers



Luka Doncic soars over Reed Sheppard to make a layup

AFP | Los Angeles

Luka Doncic scored 36 points as the in-form Los Angeles Lakers powered to their sixth straight victory with a 100-92 defeat of the Houston Rockets on Monday.

A crucial showdown between the third and fourth-ranked Western Conference teams ended with the Lakers pulling away in the final minute of the fourth quarter to claim an impressive win on the road.

The victory gives the Lakers (43-25) a valuable cushion over the Rockets (41-26) as they jostle for postseason positions in the West.

Doncic was once again instrumental in dragging the Lakers over the line while a hard-nosed defensive effort kept the Rockets' scoring in check.

LeBron James finished with 18 points and Austin Reaves 15 while Jabari Smith Jr. led Houston's scoring with 22 points.

"We held them to 92 points, which for this team is pretty

awesome. We did a great job defensively," Doncic said.

"We could have done better, but all that matters is that we got the win. We've got to keep this going."

The San Antonio Spurs relied on another balanced offensive display to edge the Los Angeles Clippers 119-115 and cement their grip on second place in the West.

Stephon Castle led the Spurs scorers with 23 points while Victor Wembanyama had 21 points, 13 rebounds and four blocks in another dominant all-round display.

San Antonio have now won 18 of their last 20 games and clawed their way out of a 14-point deficit in the first quarter to take the win.

"They pushed us in the first quarter and sometimes the basketball is not working," Wembanyama said.

"So we had to get nasty a little bit."

San Antonio improved to 50-18 and are firmly in sight of the Oklahoma City Thunder (53-15) at the top of the standings.

Malaysia hit with 3-0 forfeits to send Vietnam to Asian Cup



Vietnam's Chau Ngoc Quang (L) fights for the ball with Malaysia's players

AFP | Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's 2027 Asian Cup hopes were ended yesterday after the country was hit with 3-0 forfeits in two qualifiers for fielding ineligible players, sending Vietnam through instead.

It was the latest and possibly final chapter in a scandal over seven foreign-born players who were later banned for using forged documents to play for Malaysia's national team.

"The defendant fielded ineligible players in the relevant AFC Asian Cup 2027, (Qualifiers Final Round) matches," the Asian Football Confederation said.

The Kuala Lumpur-based AFC also slapped an additional \$50,000 fine on the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM).

The ruling leaves Vietnam with an unassailable six-point lead in qualifying Group F for Saudi Arabia in 2027, leapfrogging the Malaysians at the top.

There is one more round of matches, pitting Vietnam home to Malaysia on March 31 in what is now a dead-rubber.

"Although the match no longer holds decisive significance for the final group standings, it is still expected to be a noteworthy contest," Vietnam's football federation said in a statement.

FIFA launched an investigation into claims that ineligible players featured in a 4-0 Malaysia win over Vietnam in a qualifier in June.

Two of the seven players at the centre of the scandal scored.