

## Villa End 44-Year Wait for European Trophy



Emiliano Buendía celebrates his goal in the Europa League final against Freiburg

**Hussain Almaskati**  
TDT | Manama

Aston Villa were crowned 2025-2026 Europa League champions after a 3-0 victory over Freiburg, sealing a landmark European triumph in Istanbul and adding another major continental trophy to the club's history.

At the Tüpra Stadyumu yesterday, the final began as a tight and cautious contest before Villa took control with two first-half goals that shifted the momentum in their favour.

The breakthrough arrived in the 41st minute. Youri Tielemans finished a flowing attacking move involving Morgan Rogers, meeting the final pass with a clean volley driven low into the corner to give Villa a 1-0 lead. The timing proved crucial as Freiburg struggled to recover before the interval.

Villa struck again in first-half stoppage time. John McGinn drove forward from midfield and helped create space for Emiliano Buendía, who curled his effort into the top corner in the 45+3rd minute. The goal gave Villa a comfortable 2-0 lead heading into half-time and placed the German side under significant pressure.

The third goal came in the 58th minute. Buendía turned provider this time, delivering a low cross across the face of goal that Morgan Rogers converted at the near post to make it 3-0. That finish effectively

ended Freiburg's hopes of a comeback.

From that point on, Emery's side controlled the game comfortably and limited their opponents' chances.

The victory carries major historical significance for the Birmingham-based side. Their previous major European title came in the 1981-82 season when they won the European Cup, now known as the UEFA Champions League, against Bayern Munich. This latest success marks their first major European trophy in over four decades and reinforces their return to the top level of European football.

It also strengthens the reputation of Unai Emery, who has further cemented his status as one of Europe's most successful managers in continental competition. Unai Emery has now won the UEFA Europa League five times: three with Sevilla (2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16), one with Villarreal in 2020-21, and one with Aston Villa in this scenario.

Villa entered the final having already secured qualification for the 2026-27 UEFA Champions League through their domestic league performance, reflecting their consistency across competitions.

For SC Freiburg, it was a difficult night against a side that executed their chances clinically. Villa's efficiency in key moments ultimately decided the match on the biggest stage.



His Highness Shaikh Nasser in action during his round at Royal Golf Dar Essalam

## HH Shaikh Nasser participates in Hassan II Golf Trophy

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His Highness Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Representative of His Majesty the King for Humanitarian Work and Youth Affairs, participated in the 50th edition of the Hassan II Golf Trophy, currently being held at the Royal Golf Dar Essalam in the Kingdom of Morocco.

The tournament is being staged under the high patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, with a strong field of elite international golfers taking part in one of the sport's most prestigious events.

HH Shaikh Nasser competed as part of a team featuring Hamad Al Almaraisi, Abdullah bin Zaidan, and Scottish professional golfer Colin Montgomerie.

On the occasion, HH Shaikh

Nasser bin Hamad described the Hassan II Golf Trophy as one of the leading tournaments in world golf, highlighting its high level of organisation and strong international standing. He praised Morocco's advanced sporting infrastructure, which he said has played a key role in strengthening the championship's global reputation.

He also noted that participation in such international tournaments provides an important opportunity to exchange expertise, strengthen sporting relations, and gain valuable experience in golf through global competition.

HH Shaikh Nasser further commended the excellent organisational standards of the event, wishing all participants success throughout the championship.

# Ronaldo closing in on long-awaited Saudi crown

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The Saudi Pro League title will be decided tonight on the final day of the season, with Al Nassr and Al Hilal playing simultaneous fixtures that will determine where the trophy lands.

Al Nassr host Damac at Al Awwal Park, while Al Hilal travel to Al Fayha. Both matches kick off at 9pm local time, ensuring neither side will have real-time awareness of the other's result as the title race unfolds.

Al Nassr start the night two points clear at the top, meaning the title could ultimately be decided by head-to-head record. Al Hilal, under Simone Inzaghi, hold the advantage in direct meetings this season after a 3-1 win and a 1-1 draw against their rivals. If the teams finish level on points, Al Hilal would be crowned champions.

The permutations are simple but tense. If Al Hilal win, Al Nassr must also win to secure the title. If Al Hilal drop points, Al Nassr would become champions with either a win or a draw.



Cristiano Ronaldo, still in search of a league title since his 2022 arrival at Al Nassr

But if Al Nassr fail to win and Al Hilal take three points, the title will swing back to Al Hilal.

Damac, meanwhile, arrive with their own stakes. Sitting 15th on 29 points, just two above the relegation zone and level with 16th-placed Al-Riyadh, they remain firmly in the survival battle and cannot afford a slip.

Al Nassr were minutes away from potentially sealing the title

in the previous round before a stoppage-time equaliser in the Riyadh derby kept the race alive. That moment, followed by a 1-0 home defeat to Gamba Osaka in the AFC Champions League Two final, has extended a difficult spell despite a squad featuring Cristiano Ronaldo, Sadio Mané and João Félix.

Tonight, however, offers a chance at redemption. Victory

Rank	Team	MP	Pts
1	Al Nassr	33	83
2	Al Hilal	33	81
3	Al Ahli	34	81
4	Al Qadsiah	33	74
5	Al Ittihad	33	55
6	Al Taawoun	33	53
7	Al Ettifaq	33	49
8	Neom	33	44
9	Al Hazem	33	39
10	Al Fayha	33	38
11	Al Khaleej	34	37
12	Al Fateh	33	36
13	Al Shabab	34	35
14	Al Kholood	33	32
15	Damac	33	29
16	Al Riyadh	33	27
17	Al Akhdoud	33	20
18	Al Najma	34	16

would secure Al Nassr a first Saudi Pro League title since 2018-19 and an 11th league championship in their history.

# Pride of arabia set to light up dubai this weekend

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Pride of Arabia is set to take over Coca-Cola Arena this weekend (May 23-24) for two nights of world-class entertainment, live music, and elite cage action from across the Middle East and North Africa.

The two-night event - held in collaboration with Dubai Sports Council and the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism - brings together fighters representing eleven nations across the MENA region for the 2026 season opener. The weekend gets underway on Saturday May 23 with live concerts from Arab icons Mohamed Ramadan and

Bader Al Shuaibi at the Ceremonial Weigh-in, before the action moves inside the cage on Sunday May 24.

Leading the charge on fight night, Mohammad "The UAE Warrior" Yahya (12-6) headlines PFL MENA: Pride of Arabia on home soil, making his long-awaited PFL debut against Tunisia's Mehdi Saadi (6-2) in the Featherweight Tournament Quarterfinal. A fighter who has competed at UFC level and a former UAE Warriors Champion, Yahya has been here before - and insists the occasion holds no fear for him.



"The pressure doesn't really affect me. I've fought in many big events before, including main events. I'm just focused on my goal, and that's winning this fight," said Yahya. "I'm on point and I'm ready."

Facing him is Saadi, who trains in Abu Dhabi and has framed the clash as a battle between two Emirates: "It's my hometown, so we will have a fight between Dubai and Abu Dhabi on the 24th of May."

The Tunisian, a former police officer in France who credits the experience with giving him a unique mental edge, is not short of confidence heading into Sun-

day: "My plan is to finish him in the second round - but let's see what happens. Anything can happen."

A HISTORIC DEBUT  
Zamzam Al Hammadi, the UAE's first female MMA fighter to compete on a major regional promotion, makes her PFL MENA debut on Sunday. At just 18 years old, the IMMAF Youth World Champion arrives with a 2-0 amateur record and a family legacy that runs deep. Her mother, Nada Al Nuaymi, is a judo and jiu-jitsu practitioner, and her sister Ghala is also a decorated grappler and MMA fighter.