

Semi-Finals Heat Up in the Zain Bahrain Basketball League

TDT | Manama

The 2025-26 Zain Bahrain Basketball League semi-finals tip off tonight at Khalifa Sports City Hall in Isa Town, with reigning champions Muharraq facing Al Ahli at 8 PM, and Manama squaring off against Al Najma at 6 PM. Both matchups are best-of-five series, with the finals scheduled for April 5 or April 8 depending on how quickly the semi-finals conclude.

Red Wolves Hungry for More

All eyes are on Muharraq after their 80-73 victory over Manama in the Khalifa bin Salman Cup final. The game turned on Muharraq's precise tempo control and relentless pressure in the third quarter, where turnovers and disrupted rhythm defined the contest.

Despite their early exit from the FIBA West Asia Super League in February, Muharraq have transformed disappointment into motivation. Power forward and Cup final MVP Mohammed Ameer summed it up: "The league semi-finals are huge for us. While the WASL



Muharraq squad, officials, and fans rejoice in last season's league triumph

is the title I dream of, every game here counts. We want to show we can dominate at home."

The league's final four matchups are separate from the recent cup, but the cup semi-final results offer insight into each team's form. In the Khalifa bin Salman Cup, Manama swept Al Najma 2-0, winning 78-66 in Game 1 and 77-75 in Game 2. Muharraq also swept Al Ahli, taking Game 1 193-87 and Game 2 96-80. These cup victories highlight the strengths and momentum of the teams heading into the league semi-finals tonight.

Depth Fuels Dominance

Muharraq's strength lies not just in star players but in tactical versatility. Under German coach Peter Schomers, the team can seamlessly shift between structured half-court sets and lightning-fast transition play. Their clean sweep over Al Ahli in the cup semi-finals highlighted the depth and cohesion that make them the team to beat.

Manama, meanwhile, faces a tougher climb. Their narrow victories over Al Najma showcased both scoring firepower and

Schedule

Applies to both semi-finals

Game 1 - 26 March

Game 2 - 29 March

Game 3 - 1 April

Game 4 - 4 April

Game 5 - 7 April

All matches will take place at Khalifa Sports City

vulnerability under pressure. To challenge the champions, Manama must stay composed, minimize mistakes, and seize every opportunity. Key players will need to deliver under pressure, or small lapses could turn the tide.

Underdogs Ready to Strike

While Muharraq and Manama enter as favorites, Al Najma and Al Ahli are far from mere spectators. Both underdogs have the talent and tactical awareness to capitalize on any slip-ups. For Al Najma, it is about exploiting gaps in Manama's defense. For Al Ahli, it is finding ways to disrupt Muharraq's rhythm and prevent them from dictating the pace.

Knicks close on Celtics after Brunson's 32 points



Jalen Brunson reacts during the fourth quarter of the New York Knicks defeat of the New Orleans Pelicans

AFP | Los Angeles

Jalen Brunson scored 32 points as the New York Knicks stretched their winning streak to seven games with a 121-116 defeat of the New Orleans Pelicans on Tuesday.

Brunson was one of seven Knicks players to finish in double figures, with Karl Anthony-Towns and OG Anunoby finishing with 21 points apiece at Madison Square Garden.

The win saw the Knicks keep up the pressure on the Boston Celtics in the battle for the No.2 seed in the Eastern Conference playoff picture.

With less than three weeks of the regular season remaining, the Knicks are third in the East with a 48-25 record, a fraction behind the Celtics who are second on 47-24. Detroit lead the standings on

52-19.

Zion Williamson scored 22 points to lead the scoring for the Pelicans, who have been eliminated from playoff contention in the West.

In other games, Donovan Mitchell scored 42 points as the Cleveland Cavaliers edged the Orlando Magic 136-131.

The Cavs' fourth straight victory leaves them in fourth place in the Eastern Conference on 45-27.

The Charlotte Hornets remain in the hunt for a playoff spot after thrashing the Sacramento Kings 134-90.

The Hornets are one of three teams in the middle of the Eastern Conference standings with identical 38-34 records.

The Philadelphia 76ers are just above them on 39-33, one spot outside the last automatic playoff place occupied by the Atlanta Hawks (40-22).

Filipino fighters rally support during Middle East crisis

TDT | Manama

Filipino mixed martial arts fighters Stephen Loman and Drex Zamboanga have expressed concern for Filipino communities in Bahrain and across the Middle East as regional tensions continue to escalate, casting uncertainty over daily life and the sporting calendar.

The situation carries particular significance for Loman, who built a key part of his career under BRAVE Combat Federation and has often described the region as a second home. Between 2016 and 2019, he competed six times for the promotion, including three bouts in Bahrain, highlighted by his bantamweight world title victory in 2017.

Reflecting on the current situation, Loman said: "My heart is heavy seeing what is happening across the Middle East. Bahrain



Stephen "The Sniper" Loman (L) and Drex "The T-Rex" Zamboanga (R)

holds a special place in my journey, and I know so many Filipinos there who are working hard for their families. It is painful to think of what they are going through right now."

Zamboanga, who joined BRAVE CF in 2025, echoed those sentiments, extending his support to overseas Filipinos affected by the crisis. "I offer my prayers to all Filipinos in Bah-

rain and throughout the Middle East. May God surround you with protection, strength, and comfort in these difficult times," he said.

The concern comes amid a significant Filipino presence in the region, with an estimated 2.1 to 2.4 million living and working across the Middle East. Around 86,000 are currently in areas under active crisis alert, raising the possibility of repatriation if tensions persist.

The situation has also begun to affect the sporting calendar, with bouts involving both fighters under BRAVE CF potentially being pushed back to later in 2026.

Despite the uncertainty, both fighters expressed hope that stability would return soon, with Loman looking forward to competing again and Zamboanga remaining optimistic about the future.

Injury threatens ex-Arsenal ace Tomiyasu's World Cup dream

AFP | Tokyo

Former Arsenal defender Takehiro Tomiyasu on Tuesday pulled out of Japan's squad for friendlies against Scotland and England because of injury, putting his World Cup hopes at further risk.

The 27-year-old was last week called up for the first time in almost two years, but he will now have no chance to play for his country before coach Hajime Moriyasu names his World Cup squad.

Tomiyasu started for his club Ajax against Feyenoord on Sunday, but he signalled to the bench in discomfort after going



Japan's Takehiro Tomiyasu in action (file photo)

down and was substituted in the 73rd minute.

He said in an Instagram post

that it was "part of a process".

"Haste makes waste. Do what you need to do," he wrote.

Japan play Scotland in Glasgow on Saturday before taking on England at Wembley three days later.

They have been drawn in Group F with the Netherlands, Tunisia and a European qualifier at the World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico which begins on June 11.

Tomiyasu left Arsenal in July last year with 12 months remaining on his contract in order to focus on his rehabilitation.

He signed for Ajax in December and returned to action in January for the first time since October 2024, although he has yet to complete 90 minutes for his new club.