

Al Najma, Manama Secure Top-Flight Spots

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Matchday 2 of the 2025-2026 Bahrain promotion and relegation play-offs confirmed the final composition of next season's Nasser Bin Hamad Bahrain Premier Football League last night. With all four sides now aware of their fate, Al Najma retained their top-flight status, Manama secured promotion, Budaiya were relegated, and Al Ettihad remained in the First Division.

At Bahrain National Stadium, Al Najma completed a perfect play-off campaign with a convincing 3-0 win over Budaiya. They took the lead just before half-time when Ali Al Doseri reacted quickest after Faisal Bodahoom's corner was cleared and struck a loose ball from around 30 yards, finishing low into the bottom corner.

Coach Mohamed Shamlan's side doubled their lead in the 55th minute through Saleh Al



Al Zubaidi celebrates scoring Al Najma's second goal against Budaiya

Zubaidi, who converted from close range after another dangerous Bodahoom delivery bounced inside the box. Their momentum was briefly disrupted in the 75th minute when Al Doseri was sent off following a VAR review for an accidental stamp on Qassim Saeed, reducing them to ten men

for the closing stages.

Despite the dismissal, Al Najma remained in control and sealed the win in stoppage time. Budaiya captain Nawaf Abdulla played a poor back pass under pressure from Zachary Hadji, who was then brought down by Qassim Saeed inside the area, earning a



Manama's Mustafa Al Salem in action against Al Ettihad

penalty. The Moroccan stepped up and scored down the middle for his third goal of the play-offs to complete the 3-0 victory.

Meanwhile, at Al Ahli Club Stadium, Manama were equally dominant in a 3-0 win over Al Ettihad, confirming their return to the top flight. They opened the scoring in

the 20th minute when Suellynton Thiago Silva de Lima Brito met a Nemanja Nikolic cross with a diving header into the corner.

Shortly after the restart, Al Ettihad were awarded a penalty and sensed a route back into the match. However, after reviewing the incident on the monitor,

referee Mohammed Bunafoor overturned his decision and ruled that Manama goalkeeper Mohamed Hassan had made a clean tackle.

The moment proved crucial as Manama doubled their advantage in the 61st minute through Pablo Augusto Servo de Carvalho, who turned home from close range following a set piece. The goal was initially ruled out for offside before a VAR review overturned the flag and confirmed the strike. Carvalho added his second five minutes later, reacting quickest to a corner to extend the lead and put the result beyond doubt.

With Al Najma and Manama confirmed in the 2026-27 Nasser Bin Hamad Bahrain Premier Football League, the final round of fixtures on May 30 will not affect promotion or relegation. Al Ettihad will face Budaiya at Al Ahli Club Stadium, while Al Najma meet Manama at Bahrain National Stadium, with both matches kicking off at 7pm.

Swiatek, Rybakina cruise through Roland Garros openers

AFP | Paris

Four-time French Open champion Iga Swiatek and second seed Elena Rybakina both eased into the second round with comfortable wins at a sweltering Roland Garros yesterday, as Stan Wawrinka bade an emotional farewell to the tournament.

Swiatek, playing at a Grand Slam event for the first time since linking up with Rafael Nadal's former coach Francisco Roig, made short work of seeing off Australian teenager Emerson Jones 6-1, 6-2 in just 60 minutes.

The Pole is looking to regain the trophy she won at Roland Garros in three successive years from 2022-24 before losing to Aryna Sabalenka in the semi-finals 12 months ago.

Swiatek will take on Czech



Poland's Iga Swiatek during the match

Sara Bejlek for a place in the last 32 on Wednesday.

The third seed is among the favourites for the title after finding some form by reaching the Italian Open semi-finals earlier this month.

"I'm really happy with the way I played. It was a solid match from the beginning to the end. I technically knew how to play," said Swiatek.

Rybakina also wasted little time in swatting aside Slovenian Veronika Erjavec 6-2, 6-2 on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Like Swiatek, the Kazakh was pleased to not spend too much time on court in the 32C heat.

"It's tough conditions but I'm happy things worked, and I'm looking forward to the next match," she said.

Rybakina, who won the Australian Open earlier this year, plays Ukraine's Yuliia Starodubtseva next.

Elina Svitolina survived a serious scare against Hungary's Anna Bondar on Court Suzanne Lenglen, fighting back from 3-1 down in a deciding set to win 3-6, 6-1, 7-6 (10/3).

Yamal leads Spain World Cup squad, Merino recalled

AFP | Madrid

Lamine Yamal is the star name in Spain's squad for the 2026 World Cup named by coach Luis de la Fuente yesterday, which also included Arsenal midfielder Mikel Merino after his recent return from injury.

For the first time at a World Cup, the Spain squad will not feature a Real Madrid player with Dean Huijzen dropped and veteran Dani Carvajal also excluded after struggling through an injury-hit campaign.

Merino, a favourite of coach De la Fuente, appeared as a substitute for the Gunners against Crystal Palace on Sunday in their final Premier League match, for his first appearance since January after a foot fracture.

De La Fuente also called up



Lamine Yamal in action (file photo)

defenders Eric Garcia and Marc Pubill after impressive seasons with Barcelona and Atletico Madrid respectively, deciding to leave out Huijzen and Atletico's Robin Le Normand.

Along with 18-year-old Barca star Yamal, Athletic Bilbao's Nico Williams played a key role as Spain won Euro 2024 and he is in the squad despite a season badly disrupted by fitness issues.

Bahrain handball league semi-finals get underway tonight

TDT | Manama

Barbar will aim to spring an upset when they face defending champions Al Najma in the Golden Square semi-finals of the 2025-26 Khalid Bin Hamad Bahrain Handball League, with the best-of-three series beginning tonight at Khalifa Sports City.

Najma enter the tie as clear favourites after topping the regular season standings with 56 points, finishing ahead of all

challengers and asserting their dominance with two wins over Barbar during the campaign. Their consistency across the season has reinforced their status as the team to beat as they continue their bid to defend the title.

Barbar, meanwhile, finished fourth in the table with 46 points from 13 wins and seven defeats, but head into the semi-finals determined to overturn the odds. Despite losing both league meetings against Najma, Barbar

Khalid bin Hamad Handball League – Golden Square Semi-finals

Venue: Khalifa Sports City Hall

Game	Date	Time	Fixture
Game 1	Tonight	5:30pm	Al Najma vs Barbar
Game 1	Tonight	7:30pm	Al Ahli vs Al Shabab
Game 2	28 May (Thu)	5:30pm	Al Ahli vs Al Shabab
Game 2	28 May (Thu)	7:30pm	Al Najma vs Barbar
Game 3*	30 May (Sat)	5:30pm	Al Najma vs Barbar
Game 3*	30 May (Sat)	7:30pm	Al Shabab vs Al Ahli

will look to reset in a knockout environment where form can often shift under pressure, especially in a short best-of-three series.

The other semi-final promises to be just as competitive, with Al Shabab taking on Al Ahli in a closely matched contest.

Shabab secured second place with 55 points after an impressive campaign featuring 17 wins, one draw, and just two defeats, while Al Ahli finished close behind in third on 54 points with

17 victories and three losses, setting up a near-even clash for a place in the final. The series begins with a double-header today, as Al Najma face Barbar at 5:30pm followed by Al Shabab against Al Ahli at 7:30pm.

The second round of fixtures will be played on Thursday, with a potential decider scheduled for Saturday if required. All matches will take place at Khalifa Sports City in Isa Town, where the race for a place in the final is set to intensify.

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