

# Muharraq come up short in qualifiers

Bahrainis lose in second leg to secure elimination from King Salman Club Cup

● **Youssef Oumarou fires in match winner in second half**

● **Muharraq bow to Tunisians 0-3 on aggregate**

TDI | Manama

Bahrain's Muharraq Club were last night eliminated from the 2023 King Salman Club Cup.

The Bahrainis' exit was secured following a 0-1 loss yesterday in the second leg of their second qualification round match-up against Tunisian outfit Union Sportive Monastirienne (USM).

Muharraq thus bowed to their rivals 0-3 on aggregate as they came up short in their bid for a berth in the region's top tournament, organised by the Union of Arab Football Associations, also known as the Arab Club Champions Cup.



Action from the match



The King Salman Club Cup carries a huge prize purse, with the champions pocketing a cool US\$6million. The runners-up get \$2.5million, while the semi-finalists each take home \$200,000 and the quarter-finalists \$150,000 each

They had earlier lost in the first leg held in Tunis just over a week ago.

Last night's game was played at the Shaikh Ali bin Mohammed Al Khalifa Stadium in Arad. Youssef Oumarou scored the game's lone goal in the 76th minute of play.

Muharraq were then reduced to just 10 men in the fifth minute of second-half stoppage time after Waleed Al Hayyam was given his marching orders with a red card.

With the loss, Muharraq became the second Bahraini team to be booted out of the tournament, following in the footsteps of Manama, who lost in the first

qualifying stage against Al Hilal Omdurman of Sudan.

Twelve teams are in this second phase of qualification, which will determine the six teams that will move on to the group stage.

Ten squads have already entered the King Salman Club Cup directly, including champion clubs from Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia.

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**Alcaraz overcomes wobble to reach French Open last 32**



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz Garfia

AFP | Paris, France

World number one Carlos Alcaraz overcame a second set blip to defeat Japan's Taro Daniel and reach the French Open last 32 yesterday.

The Spanish star came through 6-1, 3-6, 6-1, 6-2 against his 112th-ranked opponent and will face Canada's Denis Shapovalov for a place in the fourth round.

Alcaraz, 20, is bidding to add the Roland Garros title to the US Open he won in 2022.

**'Political statements not banned,' says ITF**

AFP | Paris, France

International tennis chiefs insisted yesterday that "political statements" are not banned at Grand Slam events after Novak Djokovic controversially wrote "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia" on a camera at the French Open.

Djokovic defended his message in comments to Serb media, saying that Kosovo is Serbia's "cradle, our stronghold".

The International Tennis Federation (ITF), the governing body of the sport, said they had received a request from the Kosovo Tennis Federation demanding Djokovic be sanctioned over his actions.

However, they pointed out that such statements do not contravene regulations.

"Rules for player conduct at a Grand Slam event are governed by the Grand Slam rulebook, administered by the relevant organiser and regulator. There is no provision in this that prohibits political statements," an ITF spokesman told AFP.

Djokovic was criticised earlier Wednesday for his comments about recent clashes in Kosovo by French sports minister Amelie Oudea-Castera who said he "shouldn't get involved".

Ukrainian player Elina Svitolina said Djokovic should be free to "say his opinion".



## Badminton could allow Russians to return from ban

Kuala Lumpur

Badminton's governing body paved the way yesterday for Russian and Belarusian players to return to competition as neutrals after they were banned over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

It comes with the Paris Olympics just over a year away and sports federations grappling with what to do about athletes from Russia and its ally Belarus.

Badminton World Federation (BWF) barred Russian and Belarusian players in March last year and in April extended the ban as Moscow's assault on Ukraine



stretched into a second year.

But on Wednesday the BWF said it had commissioned "a regulative and operational framework to allow athletes with Rus-

sian and Belarusian passports to compete as individual neutral athletes".

"BWF council will then deliberate on the merits of the prin-

ciples, framework and timeline to potentially lift the suspension of Russian and Belarusian athletes," the Kuala Lumpur-based BWF said in a statement.

The council will meet in August in Copenhagen.

Athletes from both countries have faced differing sanctions from a multitude of sports since Russia invaded Ukraine.

In March the IOC recommended that Russian and Belarusian athletes return to international competition, without commenting on their possible presence at the Paris Games.



Many sports, including badminton, have begun their qualifying campaigns for the 2024 Games.

## Vettel invests in high-speed, high-tech sailing team

AFP | Paris

Former Formula 1 champion Sebastian Vettel said yesterday he is taking to the water as the co-owner of a German entry in SailGP, a competition for ultramodern catamarans.

"Parallels between sailors and Formula 1 have long existed," said the 35-year-old Vettel at the team launch in Dusseldorf. "The boats are fascinating and the speeds on the water are incredibly high." The German boat is scheduled to compete when SailGP launches its fourth season in Chicago on June 16-17.

Vettel, who retired after last season, was the youngest world



Sebastian Vettel

champion in Formula One history when he won the first of four consecutive titles in 2010. He is

an investor in the SailGP team owned by German businessman Thomas Riedel. "Both will take



Australia SailGP Team

an active role in the management and performance of the team," said a SailGP press re-

lease, without saying how much Vettel is investing.

SailGP stages regattas close to shore with identical high-performance, foiling, multi-hull boats that can reach speeds of 100 kilometres per hour.

Australia, skippered by Tom Slingsby, won the first three editions. Erik Heil, a 33-year-old double Olympic bronze medallist, will skipper the German boat in its first season.

Ben Ainslie, a quadruple Olympic gold medallist, helms the British boat and Peter Burling, the youngest coxswain to win the America's Cup, heads the New Zealand entry.