

Al Khaldiya take control in title race

Mahdi Humaidan scores hat-trick to help Al Khaldiya power to top of league table, just one point ahead of Manama

● **Manama held to crucial 1-1 stalemate by East Riffa**

● **Bahrain Club end Sitra's title aspirations with 3-1 win**

TDT | Manama

Al Khaldiya moved into the driver's seat in the thrilling race for the coveted title in the 2022/2023 Nasser bin Hamad Bahrain Premier Football League.

Khaldiya leapfrogged long-time leaders Manama to first place on the standings with just one match week remaining after routing lowly Budaiya 6-0, while Manama dropped points after being held to a 1-1 stalemate by 10-man East Riffa.

Khaldiya headed into yesterday's week 21 fixtures just a single point behind Manama, but with their big victory, have turned the tables and are now one ahead of their rivals.

Also last night, Sitra fell out of title contention after losing 1-3 to



Al Khaldiya's Mahdi Humaidan evades a tackle during their match against Budaiya last night

Bahrain Club. Sitra thus dropped four points behind Khaldiya on the rankings.

The league now heads into its final week of action, with only Khaldiya and Manama still with a chance at clinching the crown. Following last night's results, having their title hopes end along with Sitra were Muharraq and last year's champions Riffa.

In Khaldiya's big win, Mahdi Humaidan had a superb hat-trick to spearhead his team.

Samy Frioui opened their account in the 24th minute after scoring from close range, having taken advantage of poor Budaiya defending. Ayman Al Harzi had a poorly hit pass to Frioui but he beat the opposing defenders to the ball and struck home.

Ismaeel Abdullatif then doubled Khaldiya's lead in the 34th minute with a brilliant low strike from a few metres outside the box. Humaidan then scored his first in the 41st minute off a fine



assist supplied by Dominique Mendy.

In the second half, Humaidan made it 4-0 in the 68th minute following a fantastic through-pass by Zahir Al Aghbari. Humaidan hit home with a turning, left-footed strike from near the penalty spot.

Al Aghbari then scored in the 72nd minute with a fine left-footed effort to make it 5-0.

Standings

	P	W	D	L	+/-	Pts
Al Khaldiya	21	12	5	4	22	41
Manama	21	11	7	3	19	40
Muharraq	21	9	10	2	20	37
Sitra	21	10	7	4	10	37
Riffa	21	10	6	5	11	36
Al Ahli	21	7	9	5	1	30
Hidd	21	7	6	8	-7	27
Al Shabab	21	7	5	9	-4	26
East Riffa	21	4	9	8	-6	21
Al Hala	21	5	6	10	-10	21
Bahrain Club	21	4	6	11	-10	18
Budaiya*	21	1	2	18	-46	-1

(*Budaiya deducted six points due to a decision by the Bahrain Football Association)

Humaidan applied the final nail in the coffin and completed his hat-trick four minutes from full time with a fine shot from inside the penalty area off another assist by Al Aghbari.

Khaldiya claimed their 12th win and improved to 41 points with just one match to play, while Budaiya suffered their 18th loss.

In Manama's draw, Mohammed Al Hallaq put them ahead in the 30th minute with a strike from inside the box off a long pass from beyond the half-pitch

line.

But East Riffa struck back in the 61st minute through Jassim Khelaif, who put on a show of brilliant individual skill. He received a pass and controlled the ball with his first touch before sending it home with a header in one fluid motion.

Manama posted their seventh draw and went to 40 points, while East Riffa claimed their ninth deadlock and went to 21 points, earning them a crucial improvement on the standings in the hopes of avoiding a relegation play-off.

In Bahrain Club's win, Ebrahim Abdulla Khudair scored for the victors in the 28th minute and then Joel Vinicius Silva Dos Anjos headed in their second three minutes from the half.

Sitra got a goal back in the second half but Abdulrahman Yousef Salem fired in a penalty in the seventh minute of second-half stoppage time to seal the win.

Bahrain Club improved to 18 points with only their fourth victory and are looking to avoid relegation, while Sitra stayed on 37 points following their fourth loss.

Sabalenka enjoys early birthday present with Madrid final spot

AFP | Madrid

Aryna Sabalenka gave herself an early birthday gift by easing into the Madrid Open final for the second time in three years yesterday.

The world number two turns 25 on Friday and the Belarusian celebrated in style by breezing past Greek world number nine Maria Sakkari, 6-4, 6-1.

Sabalenka, the 2021 champion in Madrid, will face either world number one Iga Swiatek or 13th-ranked Veronika Kudermetova in Saturday's championship match.

Reigning Australian Open champion Sabalenka will be chasing a fifth WTA 1000 title, a 13th career title overall and third in 2023.

Yesterday, she took her head-to-head record over Sakkari to 6-3.

From 3-3 in the opening set, Sabalenka won nine of the last 11 games including the last five.

Aslan Karatsev won the battle



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka returns the ball to Greece's Maria Sakkari

of the underdogs when he edged Zhang Zhizhen 7-6 (7/3), 6-4 to make the last four of the men's event.

Karatsev, the Russian ranked 121 in the world, had to come through qualifying in the Spanish capital.

Zhang, ranked 99, was the first Chinese player to make an

ATP 1000 event last eight.

"I am happy with my condition. Back to the top level," Karatsev said. "Playing well and feeling well."

Between them the two men had knocked out six seeds to reach the quarter-finals with Karatsev dropping only one set in seven matches, as he elim-

inated second seed and compatriot Daniil Medvedev in the round of 16.

Yesterday, Karatsev kept his nerve better at key moments and saved all three break points he faced in the first set before winning the tie-break.

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PSG boosts security after protests target Neymar and Messi

AFP | Paris



PSG's Lionel Messi (L) Neymar celebrate during a match (file photo)

AFP | Paris

Paris Saint-Germain have ordered extra security at the club's training ground and at the homes of Lionel Messi and Neymar after protests by fans angry over recent results at the Ligue 1 leaders, sources close to the club said yesterday.

Several hundred PSG supporters gathered outside club headquarters on Wednesday evening where they set off smoke flares and sang hostile chants about underperforming stars Messi, Neymar and Italian midfielder Marco Verratti.

Some of them, dressed in black, then travelled to Neymar's home in a wealthy suburb west of Paris where they chanted "Neymar, get lost".

"Paris Saint-Germain condemns in the strongest possible terms the unacceptable and insulting actions of a small group of individuals," a club statement said on Wednesday evening.

"Whatever the differences of opinion, nothing justifies such behaviour."

Neymar, who has been

plagued by injuries at PSG and is out until the end of the season, reacted by writing on Instagram: "Don't let people put you in their storm. Put them in your peace."

The club decided to boost security at its training ground and outside the homes of the players singled out during the protests, two sources told AFP, asking not to be named.

Some of the fans had indicated "they wanted to do the same thing every evening," one of the sources said.

The protesters left "calmly, several minutes after their arrival" without any clashes with police, the source added.

Messi's future at PSG was plunged into doubt on Wednesday after he was suspended for two weeks for travelling to Saudi Arabia to fulfil a commercial role without the club's permission.

Bowlers hold nerves in death overs as Kolkata beat Hyderabad

AFP | Hyderabad

Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) bowled held their nerves to deliver skilful bowling spells in death overs to clinch a five-run win over Sunrisers Hyderabad in their Indian Premier League (IPL) match at Hyderabad yesterday.

Now, KKR is at eighth position with four wins and six losses. They have a total of eight points. SRH is at ninth position with three wins and six losses. They have a total of six points.

In the chase of 172, Sunrisers Hyderabad was off to a solid



Anukul Roy of Kolkata Knight Riders celebrates with teammates after a wicket

Scorecard
Kolkata Knight Riders 171/9 (Rinku Singh 46, Nitish Rana 42, T Natarajan 2/30) won against Sunrisers Hyderabad: 166/8 (Aiden Markram 41, Heinrich Klaasen 36, Shardul Thakur 2/23)

start. But Harshit Rana disrupted the chase by dismissing Mayank Agarwal for 18 off 11 balls. SRH was at 29/1 in 2.5 overs.

Abhishek Sharma was also dismissed for nine runs by Shardul Thakur, after he was caught by Andre Russell at deep backward square. SRH was at 37/2 in 3.5 overs.