





FIELD FINALISED FOR AL KASS QUARTERFINALS



On the final day of the group stage at the 2018 Al Kass International Tournament, each of the three matches at Aspire Zone saw teams jockey for position in the next round. While most teams' tickets to the quarterfinals had already been punched entering the day, seeding was at stake, leading to high drama typical of the tournament.

In the opening match, both Espérance de Tunis and AC Milan entered knowing qualification was all assured, and the game began at a slow pace. On 30 minutes, however, the Tunisians stepped up the pressure, and the result was a goal by Zied Berrima, who easily slotted home a rebound.

After the break, Espérance wasted no time doubling its lead, with Hamza Abdelkarim volleying in a cross from the left side. AC Milan found no answers with a host of attack-minded substitutions, and the 2-0 defeat left Espérance atop Group C without conceding a goal at Al Kass 2018. Milan, meanwhile, moves on as well.

They'll be joined in the quarterfinals by Benfica, who stunned the home crowd with seven goals in the second half to beat Aspire Academy, 7-3. Despite the scoreline, though, Aspire earned a victory of sorts, booking a late berth in the knockout stage.

They entered needing only to keep the goal differential within four, and with a 2-0 lead at the half, their spot seemed assured. Then came the Benfica onslaught. Coach Renato Paiva brought on several subs, and seemingly in the blink of an eye, the Portuguese were on top. Gonçalo Ramos' hat trick highlighted a run of seven unanswered goals, including four in nine minutes.

Needing a goal to advance on differential, Aspire seemed doomed. But on the final play of the game, Naif Alhadhrami headed in a corner, giving the hosts the goal they needed—and a spot in the next round.

The group stage closed with a hard-fought 1-1 draw between Paris Saint-Germain and Kashiwa Reysol. Both had won their first matches and were through as it was, but positioning was in play. Leo Kokubo, appearing for his third straight year in goal for Kashiwa, kept the Japanese side in the game throughout. In the 53rd minute, though, PSG's Maxen Kapo found a rebound in a goalmouth scramble and finished well.

Kashiwa equalised on 66 minutes, when Hadetoshi Tomita volleyed home a delivery from Keita Ide. Kashiwa used that momentum to launch several attacks on the PSG goal, but the French back line held strong.

At the end of the group stage, Benfica topped Group A, with Aspire Academy also moving on. Real Madrid won Group B, followed by Aspire Football Dreams. In Group C, Espérance de Tunis took top honours, with AC Milan moving on as well, and PSG took Group D on goal differential over Kashiwa Reysol.

The consolation round begins today at 3:30 pm, when Guangzhou Evergrande and Tottenham Hotspur square off. That's followed by Fenerbahçe and Wydad AC at 5:55 pm. The quarterfinals start tomorrow, with the first game at 3:30 pm

AL KASS TEAMS INSPIRE YOUNG QATAR FOOTBALLERS

WHILE THE WORLD'S TOP UNDERIT- PLAYERS SHOWCASE THEIR SKILLS AT THE 2018 AL KASS INTERNATIONAL CUP, THE NEXT, YOUNGER GENERATION OF FOOTBALLERS WAS ALREADY THINKING ABOUT THEIR OWN TIME TO SHINE..

A contingent of young players from the Qatar Community Football League (QCFL), sponsored by the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy and managed by Evolution Sports Qatar, was in attendance during the group stage at Al Kass to root on their favourite clubs.

Omar Saad of Evolution Sports Qatar said, "For the young players from our club it's fantastic to come to Al Kass and watch the football stars of the future in action. Watching some of the best academies in the world is a big learning curve for our players."

More than 1,200 players representing 75 different nationalities play in the QCFL, which plays its games at Aspire Zone. The league was launched to create a bond among Qatar's resident communities and capitalise on the country's passion for football.

Qatar resident Rebecca Jane Rogers attended the Al Kass tournament with her daughter and two sons, all three of whom play in the QCFL. "My kids are huge fans of Real Madrid and that's the team we are supporting. We caught a few games at Al Kass last year and the one before," Rogers said.

"I think it's great being able to watch such good quality football in Qatar. It provides the local teams valuable exposure to worldrenowned football teams such as Real Madrid. Playing with such a diversity of players is great for all teams involved, as it offers an opportunity for them to improve their skills," **she added.**

Quote of The Day

"As we progress in the tournament, I am not concerned about our opponents, what matters is that we stick to our game model and that the players develop their skills."

Renato Paiva, Benfica Coach

TOP PLAYERS OF MATCH DAY ONE







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POWERFUL TUNIS TOO STRONG FOR MILAN



Esperance Tunis proved their convincing opening victory over Wydad was no fluke, dominating AC Milan and roaring to a 2-0 victory, in so doing preserving their proud record of not conceding at Al Kass 2018.

Regardless of the result, both sides were already assured of qualification for the knockout stage. This knowledge seemed to contribute to a rather low-key opening, with little of the urgency that had characterised each team's match-up against Wydad on display.

Neither Milan nor Tunis had conceded a goal in their opening games, and their backlines were not unduly tested in the opening quarter this time round, with little to choose between the teams and few clear-cut chances.

But all that changed on the half hour mark, as Tunis began to enjoy a sustained spell of pressure, culminating in the opening goal. Milan keeper Niccolo Zanellato saved a close-range effort and saw the rebound headed onto the bar, only for the ball to cannon into the path of Zied Berrima, who stroked home effortlessly.

Roared on by a vociferous support, Esperance were now firmly in the ascendancy, snapping into tackles and generally disrupting Milan's rhythm. The Italian bench erupted in protest against some rough treatment handed out by the Tunis side, but Milan could not find a way to fashion an equaliser before the half time whistle sounded.

Tunis were straight out of the blocks as soon as the second half got underway, and doubled their advantage almost immediately. A powerful cross was swung in from the left, and Hamza Abdelkarim volleyed a first time effort home.

On 50 minutes, two goals almost became three as midfielder Khalil Melliti burst into the area and shot hard and low into the right corner, but keeper Zanellato produced a brilliant reflex save to keep the ball out.

Milan coach Simone Baldo had seen enough and, in an effort to introduce some attacking momentum, made a triple change. Alessandro Sala, Riccardo Tonin and Daniel Maldini replacing Niccolo Corti, Marco Frigerio and Andrea Porrini. With 15 minutes remaining, Milan almost found a way back into the game when Fantaziu Corneliu stole in at the far post, but shot over with the goal at his mercy. The chance exemplified the Italians' day, with hope replaced by disappointment.

On 80 minutes, flying winger Anice Ammous was centimetres away from adding a third for Tunis, after breaking free down the left and firing a low cross-shot that Zanellato somehow managed to tip round the post.

It mattered little, as Milan were unable to muster a response, and ultimately came out second best. Tunis have the look of a side who are improving with every game and, with an aggregate tally of five goals scored and none against, will now believe they can go all the way.

Milan, meanwhile, have plenty to do if they are to advance beyond the next round.



AC MILAN



ı	Niccolo' Zanellato	GK
2	Alberto Barazzetta	DF
5	Edoardo Brusa	DF
6	Niccolo' Corti	FW
8	Marco Romano Frigerio	MF
11	Siaka Haidara	FW
13	Riccardo Martimbianco (Cap	.) D
14	Giacomo Olzer	MF
15	Andrea Porrini	MF

FW

DF



ESPÉRANCE DE TUNIS

Riccardo Angelo Sassi

Fantaziu Corneliu



16	Fares Jebali	GK
2	Ahmed Aziz Chaouachi	MF
3	Ghassen Mahresi	DF
4	Khalil Melliti	MF
5	Samer Marweni	DF
6	Ghassen Jellali	DF
7	Mobtassar Triki (Cap.)	MF
10	Zied Berrima	FW
17	Hamza Adbelkarim	FW
18	Farouk Mimouni	FW
30	Wael Dhouibi	DF





Hamza Abdelkarim, Espérance de Tunis MVP of the Match



"It was a very tough match against Espérance. They played a good game, and even though we didn't win, we are happy with how we played."

Riccardo Martimbianco,

AC Milan



"We were a bit nervous, as we know AC Milan is a top team, but once we started playing we realised that we had the skills and training to compete at their level."

Hamza Abdelkarim
Espérance de Tunis

THE EXPERTS SAY...

Mark Tompkins – Al Kass Analyst

It was a fairly even opening for both teams in the first 11 minutes. Barazzetta was playing really well in the beginning, and Corneliu had a great chance to bring a goal for AC Milan.

On the Tunisian side, Abdelkarim was doing really well on defense duty. The Espérance coach was on his feet for most of the first half. It was beautiful to watch the opening goal come in; it was pure hard work.

It was their second or third attack before Berrima finally managed to get the ball through. It was AC Milan nil, and Espérance 1, at halftime. Nick Summerbee – Al Kass Analyst

The Espérance fans had created a fantastic atmosphere on the ground today. As soon as the second half kicked off, the Tunisians brought another goal. We could see the warning signs long before the goal came in.

They passed the ball around a bit, and Abdelkarim was there to make it 2-nil.

AC Milan was giving the ball away a lot today; it was real sloppy game of football from the Italians today.

Espérance was showing more quality in the game, and they definitely looked like the more mature players, of the two teams.



Benfica produced a stunning second-half comeback against Aspire Academy on an evening of high drama at Al Kass 2018. Two goals down at the break, an inspired double substitution changed everything as the Portuguese scored five goals in a devastating 16-minute spell on their way to an astonishing 7-3 victory. With the last play of the game, Aspire prevented being knocked out of the

Benfica had made eight changes from their first game, while Aspire made four. Hugo Nunes, scorer of what was arguably the goal of this or any other Al Kass tournament in the Portuguese side's opener against Guangzhou Evergrande, was among the substitutes.

tournament with a goal by Naif Alhadhrami,

which secured progression to the next round

thanks to the goal difference.

Aspire conjured an early chance when Fahad Al-Abdulla latched on to a bouncing ball in the area, but his snatched shot went narrowly wide. It was a confident start from the home side, and on five minutes they took the lead. Naif Alhadhrami picked up the ball on the edge of the area and, after taking a touch, unleashed an unstoppable drive into the top right corner.

Despite this early setback, Benfica retained their positive approach and almost levelled three minutes later when Nuno Cunha's rasping drive was well saved by Aspire keeper Mahmoud Abunada.
Having fired off a warning shot, Tombari went one better on 13 minutes when he was set free through the middle and slotted home an expert finish to put Aspire 2-0 up.

Benfica, so dominant and self-assured in their previous rout of Guangzhou, were suddenly rocked back. Aspire had undoubtedly brought their A Game to this clash, their skilled approach play defined by poise, purpose and pragmatism.

At the start of the second period, Benfica coach Renato Paiva made a double switch, introducing Jair Tavares and Goncalo Ramos to the action.

The substitutions had an instant effect on the Portuguese, who created several chances in quick succession. Tavares had been the side's linchpin against Evergrande, and he immediately sought to get on the ball and advance down the left.

In the 49th minute, Benfica pulled a goal back. Tavares jinked down the wing before cutting the ball inside to Nuno Cunha, who teed up Ramos to provide a first-tine finish. The most astonishing recovery in Al Kass history was underway.

It was all Benfica now, and they drew level on 52 minutes when Ronaldo Camara's smart backflick deceived the Aspire backline and played in Cunha, who planted a low shot past Abunada.

Implausibly, the Portuguese side went ahead on 57 minutes when Rafael De Brito latched on to a deflected free kick to volley the ball first time into the bottom right corner.

And, astonishingly, they added a fourth with the very next attack when Ramos cut inside his marker and powered an unstoppable drive into the top corner.

Four goals in nine incredible minutes had completely upended the course of the game, and Aspire were suddenly in a fight to regain their composure. Their task appeared even more difficult when Nunes was introduced from the bench on 63 minutes.

Benfica added a fifth moments later when De Brito embarked on a powerful run from his right back berth before delivering a cross that flew over Abunada and straight into the net.

With 20 minutes remaining,, Nunes picked up the ball midway inside the Aspire half and set off on a mesmerising run that left a trail of defenders in his wake. He seemed certain to score another goal of sumptuous quality, only for his shot to go just wide of the right-hand post. But moments later, a sixth goal duly arrived for Benfica, when Gomes hammered home from ten yards.

And, on 85 minutes, the rampant Portuguese added a seventh. De Brito was set free down the right, and he cut back for Ramos to fire home and complete his hat-trick.

Suddenly, from a position of relative safety, Aspire faced elimination, with a goal difference that was now inferior to Evergrande's. Five minutes of added time were signalled and, amazingly, with the last touch of the game, Alhadlhrami powered home a header from a corner on the left to salvage the Academy's hopes of further progress at Al Kass 2018.

MATCH SCORE

7

BENFICA

ASPIRE

ASPIRE

ASPIRE ACADEMY

BENFICA



	Dario Caetano	GK
2	Joao Ferreira	DF
3	Alexandre Correia (Cap.)	DF
5	Henrique Jocu	MF
7	Tiago Araujo	FΜ
7	Gonçalo Gomes	FΜ
0	Nuno Cunha	MF
3	Rafael De Brito	DF



ASPIRE ACADEMY

Tomas Tavares

Tiago Gouveia

Ronaldo Camara

17

ASPIRE







Gonçalo Ramos, Benfica MVP of the Match



"In the beginning, we didn't play the way we usually do or the way we were taught. In the second half, once we changed our attitudes and adapted to our model, we managed to turn the game around."

Jair Da Veiga Vieira Tavares,

Benfica

DF

FW



"I think we played really well in the first half, but in the second half we were tired and lost concentration which cost us the game. I'm happy we managed to score the third goal and have qualified for the next round and we're going to focus and play better in the next match."

Ahmed Alganehi

Aspire Academy

THE EXPERTS SAY...

Chris Makin – Al Kass Analyst

Benfica was back in the game with the start of the second half, with a first goal from Ramos.

Suddenly, we were looking at a different side of Benfica — they were starting to look like the more dominant team in the second half.

The equalizing goal came in from Cunha, and another goal from Rafael De Brito made it 3-2 for them. After that it was one goal after the other. In the last ten minutes Aspire Academy was looking very nervous.

It was a 'hat-trick' from Ramos, that made it 7-2 for Benfica. Alhadhrami's header came in just as the whistle was about to go off, which will enable Aspire Academy to go to the quarterfinals.

Nick Summerbee – Al Kass Analyst

Aspire Academy was looking very organized, and hard to beat, today. After missing out on their first opportunity to strike, it was 1-nil for the locals within the first five minutes.

Tombari brought a second goal for Aspire Academy, in the first half. Benfica seemed to be very tight on the midfield; they had to spread out a bit more, and get their rhythm going. Mahmoud, the goalkeeper, was really good at sniffing out the danger, and had some great saves today for Aspire Academy.

Benfica didn't seem to be getting anywhere in the first half – their build up was fantastic, but they had to work better on their crossings. The locals were looking good with their twogoal lead at half time.



Paris Saint-Germain and Kashiwa Reysol fought out a 1-1 draw in the final group game of Al Kass 2018. Both sides were already assured of reaching the knockout phase after each winning their opening games against Tottenham, to leave the London side with zero points. But the pedigree of both PSG and Kashiwa during previous editions of Al Kass suggested that this match would be treated as far more than just a training session, and so it proved, although the pace was initially rather sedate.

Paris Saint-Germain, just 24 hours on from their high energy clash against Spurs, made wholesale changes, with only Curtis Fiawoo and Maxen Kapo surviving from the previous starting 11. Kashiwa, meanwhile, made four changes, with their line-up once again including keeper Leo Kokubo.

Incredibly, AI Kass 2018 is the third edition of the tournament that Kokubo has starred in, having first appeared as a 14-year-old in 2016. His reliability has been key to Kashiwa's strong performances throughout, and once again he was Mr Dependable this evening, reacting smartly to turn aside a rasping, longrange drive from Arnaud Kalimuendo on 20 minutes. It was one of the few shots on target

in an opening period where each side was given time to settle.

Then, on the half hour, Reysol should have gone in front, Mao Hosoya set off on a determined run through the middle, evading several challenges and attempting to round keeper Yanis Saidani, who just got a hand to the ball. It fell to skipper Keita Ide on the edge of the area, but he blasted narrowly wide with the keeper stranded.

Soon after, Kokubo was again Kashiwa's saviour when he somehow managed to hold on to a rising drive that appeared goalbound.

There was nothing between the two sides as the first 45 drew to a close, although PSG had arguably created the better chances. They began to turn the screw as the second half began and, in the 53rd minute, they were ahead.

The ball was worked out to the right and crossed low to prompt a goalmouth scramble. For once, Reysol could not clear, and captain Kapo forced the ball home from a few yards out, despite suspicions of offside.

Kashiwa were hanging on, repelling a string of PSG attacks with stubborn and courageous defending.

But then, on 66 minutes, following a rare foray upfield, Reysol won a corner on the right. A teasing delivery was flicked on by captain Ide, and Hadetoshi Tomita volleyed home at the far post.

The equaliser was the catalyst for Kashiwa's best spell of the match, as they began to attack in numbers and press the PSG backline. The Parisians remained assured throughout, however, and were rarely troubled until the last minute, when Ide could have won it, only to fire over from close range.

PSG instantly went on the attack and Tanguy Coulibaly delivered a powerful effort after cutting in from the left that, once again, Kokubo was equal to, sealing his Man of the Match award in the process.

The game finished all square, with both sides already looking forward to what promises to be a thrilling knockout phase.



KASHIWA REYSOL

Shunto Ibi

Takuma Otake



1	Leo Kokubo	GK
12	Fumiya Unoki	FW
14	Mao Hosoya	FW
15	Koki Takeda	MF
17	Hidetoshi Tomita	DF
20	Keita Ide (Cap.)	DF
22	Hayato Fujimoto	DF
28	Sohki Tamura	MF
29	Naito Saito	MF



PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN F.C.

MF



1	Yanik Saidani	GK
2	Richard Makutungu	DF
5	Curtis Fiawoo	DF
6	Nianzou Kouassi	DF
8	Ziyad Larkeche	DF
10	Herve Malebe	MF
11	Maxen Kapo (Cap.)	MF
13	Anfane M'Ze	MF
14	Kays Atil	MF
19	Arnaud Kalimuendo	FW
20	Kenny Nagera	FW





Leo Kokubo, Kashiwa Reysol MVP of the Match



"We were well prepared for the game and our focus was just to perform our best and we did."

Keita Ide Kashiwa Reysol



"Al Kass is a high-level tournament, and our match against Kashiwa was more difficult than our first $match\ of\ the\ tournament.\ I\ think$ we played well, and hopefully we will advance to the next round and ultimately secure the title."

Tanguy Coulibaly PSG

THE EXPERTS SAY...

Mark Tompkins – Al Kass Analyst

There were some hefty challenges, from both sides, right from the beginning of the match. The Kashiwa players were trying to create some good openings, and Paris Saint-Germain was really good at defense.

The Paris Saint-Germain players were not really testing Leo Kokubo too much in the first half. It was starting to look fairly even, 16 minutes into the clock. Inside the final ten minutes into the first half, it was nil-nil; but they still had their chances.

The first half never really came

Chris Makins -Al Kass Analyst

IKashiwa made four changes at halftime. In the second half, there was nothing that Kashiwa could do, when Paris Saint-Germain was battling at the forefront to get their opening goal.

It was a fabulous strike from Kapo, and it went straight through the legs of the goalkeeper. After Kashiwa equalized, it looked as if it

was going to end as a draw. Fujimoto was playing some good football in the last few minutes.

rising from both teams. Paris Saint-Germain made some final changes, just to get some fresh legs in the last minute.



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GROUP STAGE

GROUI STAGE								
GROUP A		GROUP B		GROUP C		GROUP D		
***	SL Benfica	***	Aspire Football Dreams	ACM (899)	AC Milan	OAR/S San-coult	Paris Saint- Germain F.C.	
	Guangzhou Evergrande	TIGE SPOTE	Fenerbahçe S.K.		Espérance Sportive de Tunis	TOTTENHAM MOTSPUR	Tottenham Hotspur F.C.	
ASPIRE	Aspire Academy		Real Madrid		Wydad AC	R	Kashiwa Reysol	

DATE	NO.			TEAMS			TIME	VENUE
S	1	Real Madrid	6	VS	2	Fenerbahçe	16:25	5
Sun 21.01.	2	Guangzhou	0	VS	4	Benfica	18:30	5
	3	Espérance	3	VS	0	Wydad AC	20:35	5
Mon 22.01.	4	Aspire Football Dreams	2	VS	0	Fenerbahçe	15:30	4
	5	Guangzhou	1	VS	1	Aspire Academy	17:35	4
22.01.	6	Kashiwa	3	VS	2	Tottenham	19:40	4
_	7	AC Milan	1	VS	0	Wydad AC	15:30	5
Tue 23.01.	8	Aspire Football Dreams	1	VS	1	Real Madrid	17:35	5
20.01.	9	Tottenham	2	VS	4	PSG	19:40	5
	10	AC Milan	0	VS	2	Espérance	15:30	4
Wed 24.01.	11	Benfica	7	VS	3	Aspire Academy	17:35	4
24.01.	12	Kashiwa	1	VS	1	PSG	19:40	4
			POS	SITION 9	- 12			
Thu	13	Position 10		VS		Position 9	15:30	5
25.01.	14	Position 12		VS		Position 11	17:55	5
			QUA	ARTER FII	NALS			
Fri	15	1st Group A		VS		2nd Group C	15:30	4
26.01.	16	1st Group C		VS		2nd Group A	17:55	4
Sat	17	1st Group B		VS		2nd Group D	15:30	5
27.01.	18	1st Group D		VS		2nd Group B	17:55	5
PLAY OFFS POSITION 5 - 8								
Sun	19	Loser Game No. 16		VS		Loser Game No. 18	15:30	4
28.01.	20	Loser Game No. 15		VS		Loser Game No. 17	17:55	4
			SE	MI FINA	LS			
Mon	21	Winner Game No. 16		VS		Winner Game No. 18	15:30	5
29.01.	22	Winner Game No. 15		VS		Winner Game No. 17	17:55	5
			PO	SITION 5	i - 8			
Tue	23	Loser Game No. 19		VS		Loser Game No. 20	15:30	4
30.01.	24	Winner Game No. 19		VS		Winner Game No. 20	17:55	4
			PO	SITION 3	- 4			
Wed 31.01.	25	Loser Game No. 21		VS		Loser Game No. 22	15:30	5
				FINAL				
Wed 31.01.	26	Winner Game No. 21		VS		Winner Game No. 22	17:55	5

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