

Cristiano Ronaldo wins FIFA World Footballer of the Year



We'll keep

Iranians out of the box, Singapore coach says

Tehran Times Sports Desk
TEHRAN — Radojko Avramovic said on Monday that the Singaporean football team will get a good result against three times champion Iran in the opener of the 2011 Asian Cup qualifiers.

"Iran is a physically very strong and compact team and have very fast attacking individuals," he said.

"We'll have to keep them out of our penalty box and cut their passing game," Avramovic added.

Iran football team has been drawn alongside Singapore, Thailand and Jordan in Group E of the 2011 Asian Cup qualifiers.

Only the top two teams will reach the 2011 Asian Cup finals in Qatar.

Torres admits Man Utd now in pole position

LONDON (AFP) — Fernando Torres has admitted that Manchester United's demolition of Chelsea at the weekend has put them in pole position to claim a third consecutive Premier League title.

But the Liverpool striker remains confident that Sir Alex Ferguson's side can be knocked off their perch and has billed the meeting between the two clubs at Old Trafford on March 14 as a potential title decider.

A 3-0 win over Chelsea on Sunday means United will displace Liverpool at the top of the table for the first time this season if they beat Wigan on Wednesday evening then take all three points from their trip to Bolton on Saturday.

"United are the champions right now, they are the favorites," Torres told reporters at FIFA's World Footballer of the Year award in Zurich on Monday evening.

"They have shown in the last few years that they're a very strong side. Look at the great players they have, and they have played two matches fewer, so they could catch up and even go top."

The win over a weary-looking Chelsea has seen bookmakers and pundits install United as odds-on favourites to retain their title in the belief that Ferguson's side has come through the toughest part of the season.

The successful trip to Japan for the World Club championship did not result in any dropped points on the squad's return to domestic action and United have already played all their away matches against other members of England's current Champions League quartet.

"We all know what Manchester United are about," Torres added. "They are champions of England, Europe, the world."

"We do respect them as a team. They have class, they have classy players, we are struggling to keep up with them and stay ahead of them. So, they have quality. But we have options and know the chances we have. I think United have their chances as do Liverpool and Chelsea."

"We have to fight until the end and see what happens. Old Trafford is waiting and hopefully we can make it on an equal footing and try to benefit from a place not always advantageous to us."

Liverpool's determination to wrest the Premier League trophy away from their great rivals was underlined last week by their manager, Rafael Benitez, ferocious verbal onslaught on Ferguson.

ZURICH (AFP) — Manchester United and Portugal star Cristiano Ronaldo was on Monday named FIFA World Footballer of the Year for 2008.

Ronaldo, who is also holder of the prestigious Ballon d'Or for the European Footballer of the Year, beat off competition from 2007 winner Kaka (Brazil), Lionel Messi (Argentina), Fernando Torres (Spain) and Xavi (Spain).

"It's an overwhelming moment in my career and I'd like to dedicate this award to my family, friends and colleagues," he said.

"Winning the Champions League for me was the most memorable moment of 2008," added Ronaldo, who scored in the final but missed a penalty in the penalty shootout against Chelsea.

Ronaldo went out of his way to heap praise on United manager Sir Alex Ferguson, with whom relations became strained during last summer over whether he was going to leave the club for Real Madrid.

"It's also true that the manager always has an important role to play," said Ronaldo.

"It was a great season for me and for my club, and the coach was important for me because I learned a lot from him."

"His experience over so many years is of paramount importance - it's a privilege to have such a great club manager."

"This is the climax of a fantastic era for me. I'm happy and proud about what has been done by my team and what we have won."

"I am lucky to be part of the history of a club like Manchester United."

Portugal manager Carlos Queiroz, who was also with Ronaldo at Manchester United when he was assistant coach to Ferguson, said it was a logical decision.

"Quality and justice were behind this decision," said Queiroz.

Serena breezes into Sydney WTA quarter-finals

SYDNEY (AFP) — Serena Williams stepped up a gear dispatching Italian Sara Errani in quick time to power into the quarter-finals of the Sydney WTA International.

The American world number two and tournament top seed rattled past the 38th-ranked Errani 6-1, 6-2 in just 50 minutes to set up a last-eight meeting with Denmark's eighth seed Caroline Wozniacki.

Should the nine-time grand slam champion get past the world number 12 Wozniacki on Wednesday night she will likely have to beat two Russian opponents to win the final lead-up tournament into next week's Australian Open in Melbourne.

Williams, who is favorite to land her fourth Australian Open crown, is pleased with her form



"This is a great achievement for a player as young (23) as he is and with his career before him. I congratulate Cristiano Ronaldo and hope that this award both stimulates and inspires his career."

Ronaldo, scorer of 42 goals in all competitions in the 2007-8 season, was one of United's architects behind the club's English Premiership and Champions League double.

It was not a perfectly scripted year for Ronaldo, however, as Portugal crashed out 3-2 to Germany in the quarter-final of Euro 2008 in June.

Ronaldo becomes the second Portuguese player to win the FIFA accolade after Luis Figo in 2001, and the first one playing for a British club. He reaped 935 points in the vote in which the

coaches and captains of 155 national teams took part. Messi finished second (678 points) and was trailed by Torres (203), Kaka (183) and Xavi (155).

Brazilian midfielder Marta was unveiled as FIFA World Women's Footballer of the year for 2008, for the third year running.

Marta delivered an outstanding performance at the women's Olympic football tournament in Beijing 2008, and equalled the record set by Birgit Prinz by claiming her third consecutive title.

For the women's vote, 139 coaches and captains cast their vote and Marta won comfortably (1,002 points) ahead of Germany's Prinz (328), Brazil's Cristiane (275), Germany's Nadine Angerer (198) and England's Kelly Smith (150).

Iran to host junior Water Polo World Cup qualifications

Tehran Times Sports Desk

TEHRAN — Iran has been selected on Tuesday as the host of the 15th FINA Junior Men's Water Polo World Championship qualifications.

Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA) selected Tehran as the host of the Junior Men's Water Polo World Championship qualifications which will take place in Azadi stadium from May 1st to 5th.

Some five countries, namely Qatar, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Kazakhstan have announced their readiness to take part in the event.

The 15th FINA Junior Men's Water Polo World Championship will be held in Croatia in late August 2009.



heading into the business end of the Sydney tournament.

"I was a little better today," she said. "I still think I can improve on some things, and that's what I want to do. I don't want to peak too soon."

The intimidating 27-year-old American, who collected her 400th career victory in the first-round win over Australian Samantha Stosur, was encouraged by her service game on Tuesday, winning 79 percent of the

points on her serve.

"I was a little disappointed with my serve in the first round, but it was much better today," she said.

With forecast temperatures of 38-40 Celsius (100-104 Fahrenheit) over the next two days, Williams was not perturbed at the prospect.

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Add.: No. 6, Ground Floor, Qabaedian Passage, Mellat St., Tehran

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Daei attends FIFA Gala 2008

Tehran Times Sports Desk

TEHRAN — Iran football coach Ali Daei attended the FIFA World Player of the Year which took place at the Zurich Opera House on Monday.

In the ceremony, Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo won the FIFA World Player of the Year award to complete a sweep of the top individual honors for 2008.

The FIFA award is voted by the national team coaches and captains of the 208-member associations of world soccer's governing body.

Both Ali Daei and Iran's captain Karim Bagheri voted for Argentinian Lionel Messi as the best player of the world.

India cricket team to tour Sri Lanka next month

COLOMBO (AFP) — India will play five one-dayers and a Twenty20 international against hosts Sri Lanka next month to help fill the gap created by their cancelled tour of Pakistan, officials said Tuesday.

The dates and venues for the hastily arranged series will be announced within a few days, Indian cricket board secretary N. Srinivasan told reporters after talks with Sri Lankan board officials.

"India and Sri Lanka have a very long and close relationship in cricket, among other things, and we will continue to support Sri Lankan cricket in future," said Srinivasan.

"We look forward to an interesting one-day series and a Twenty20 game in Sri Lanka when our team comes here."

Sri Lanka's Sports Minister Gamini Lokuge, meanwhile, said his country's cricketers will be available for the lucrative Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 competition for the next 10 years.

"We have decided to allow our players to play freely in the IPL," Lokuge said, adding that a 10-year agreement on IPL and other Twenty20 tournaments had been signed between the two cricket boards.

Indian media reports said the upcoming tour was likely to take place between February 1-15 and all matches would be played in Colombo.

Mahendra Singh Dhoni's team was given a rare break from international cricket after the Indian government declined permission to tour Pakistan in January-February following November's Mumbai terror attacks.

AC Milan's Galliani happy with Beckham debut

ROME (AFP) — AC Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani congratulated former England captain David Beckham following the midfielder's workmanlike debut for the club in the 2-2 draw at AS Roma.

The former Manchester United and Real Madrid star was taken off with a minute to go of the Serie A encounter after giving an industrious performance on the right side of a three-man midfield having made a surprise start.

"It went a lot better than we expected," said Galliani of the on-loan LA Galaxy man's first appearance.

However, the Milan chief was less pleased with his team as a whole as they failed to take advantage of leaders Inter Milan's slip at home to Cagliari (they drew 1-1), leaving them still third and nine points adrift.