

Iran to play N. Korea in Qatar football tourney

Tehran Times Sports Desk
DOHA — Iran is scheduled to play North Korea in the Qatar International Friendship Football Tournament on Monday.

The four-a-side tourney is held at the Suhaim bin Hamad Stadium from December 27 to January 2. The Qatar Football Association



Iranian players train in Doha's Suhaim bin Hamad Stadium on Saturday ahead of International Friendship Football Tournament

which is hosting the tournament will award prizes to the best player, goalkeeper and striker of each match.

The tournament with \$600,000

prize money will be played in a single round and the team finishing with the most number of points will be the winner of the tournament.

Iran, which is getting ready for the 2011 Asian Cup qualifiers, is scheduled to play Singapore on January 6 at the Bishan Stadium in Singapore.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Bernie hails 'comeback kid'



Bernie Ecclestone reckons the return of "comeback kid" Michael Schumacher to Formula One will result in a "jaw-dropping season" in 2010.

The seven-time World Champion announced on Wednesday that he was returning after three years of retirement - Schumacher agreeing a £20million, three-year deal with Mercedes GP.

His return at the age of 41 adds another dimension to what was already shaping up to be a fascinating season.

(Source: Skysports)

Haye out to emulate Ali



WBA heavyweight champion David Haye wants to follow in the footsteps of Muhammad Ali and fight all over the world.

Haye is set for a big 2010, with a mandatory defence against John Ruiz set to be followed by a showdown with

WBC champion Vitali Klitschko.

WBO and IBF titlist Wladimir Klitschko also remains on the 29-year-old Londoner's radar for the 12 months ahead.

Britain and Las Vegas are high on Haye's list on possible venues for the bouts but he is also keen on emulating his hero Ali by recreating the Rumble in the Jungle and the Thriller in Manila.

Haye told the News of the World: "Of course I want to defend my title in Britain and also fight in Las Vegas, but as heavyweight champion of the world I also want to fight all over the world."

(Source: Skysports)

Nadal reveals schedule woes



World number two Rafael Nadal has admitted that top players struggle to reach their targets due to the demanding ATP schedule.

The Spaniard has endured a fairly disappointing 2009 in which Roger Federer replaced him as world number one and he battled to overcome a recurring knee injury.

The 23-year-old, who contributed to Spain's Davis Cup victory earlier this month, is now training for 2010 and will get his new season underway with an exhibition event in Abu Dhabi before he turns his attention to defending his Australian Open title.

"I have been training for some time," said Nadal.

(Source: Skysports)

Angels sign Rodney to two year deal



LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — The Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim have signed free agent reliever Fernando Rodney to a two year contract, the team said in a statement.

Dominican Rodney, 32, spent the last seven years

with the Detroit Tigers and last season he served as the club's closer, finishing sixth in the American League with a career-high 37 saves.

Daei to take charge of Persepolis

Tehran Times Sports Desk



TEHRAN — Former Iran coach Ali Daei will likely take charge of Tehran-favorite football team Persepolis.

The team, which is currently coached by Croat Zlatko Kranjcar, sits third in the Iran Professional League behind Sepahan and Zob Ahan.

Daei, who played for Persepolis during 1994 to 1996 and 2003 to 2004, will negotiate with the team's officials on Monday.

Daei was sacked from Iran national team in March following disappointing results in the 2010 World Cup qualifiers.

Mazloomi named Abu Moslem football coach

Tehran Times Sports Desk



MASHHAD — Parviz Mazloomi was appointed as Abu Moslem of Mashhad football coach on Sunday.

Mazloomi guided Mes of Kerman to the first ever Asian Champion League last season, but he could not continue his success in the current season.

"I have reached an overall agreement with Abu Moslem, but have yet to sign a contract," Mazloomi said.

The 57-year old was coach of Abu Moslem from 2007 to 2008.

Wenger calls for rule change

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger has proposed the radical suggestion of scrapping throw-ins in favor of kick-ins.

The experienced French tactician is unhappy some clubs gain an unfair advantage from having a long-thrower in their starting XI.

Wenger specifically pinpoints Stoke's Rory Delap who is able to hurl the ball into an opponents' penalty area from the sidelines.

The Gunners boss believes it is an unfair advantage and that the playing field would be levelled by simply allowing players to kick the ball back into play.

As well as levelling the playing field, Wenger thinks that it would speed up the game and make the spectacle all the more exciting.

"The rule I would change would be maybe to play throw-ins by foot. Why not? I think it would make the game quicker," he told the club's official website.

"For example at Stoke, for Rory Delap it is like kicking the ball.

"It is a little bit of an unfair advantage. He is using a strength that is usually not a strength in football.

"Football is the most popular team game in the world and one day some crazy guy said 'we don't use the hands'.

"How could you have imagined on that day a game that is completely natural to play with your hands would become the most popular sport?"

"There is still an uncertainty about him," said Wenger.

(Source: Skysports)

Hawks end road trip with victory over Pacers

INDIANAPOLIS, Indiana (Reuters) — The Atlanta Hawks finished their four-game road trip with a comfortable 110-98 victory over the Indiana Pacers on Saturday.

Al Horford led the way with 25 points, 19 rebounds and five blocks while Joe Johnson scored 24 points as the Hawks split their away games 2-2 to improve to 21-8.

Atlanta enjoyed a rest day before their most recent triumph, a factor that was key to their performance.

"I thought the day off really rejuvenated us," Hawks coach Mike Woodson told reporters. "We had fresh legs. I thought we came out and established our game right off. We had a lot of juice going. I thought it carried over throughout the game."

Indiana (9-19) suffered their fifth straight loss despite three players, Troy Murphy, Luther Head and rookie Tyler Hansbrough, each contributing 19 points.

The Hawks led from start to finish, scoring the first nine

points of the game and building a 17-point margin in the first quarter to pull within half a game of Southeast Division leaders Orlando Magic.

"You can't get down on a good team like Atlanta and expect to dig out," Murphy said. "They're too strong and too good of a basketball team."

Atlanta was coming off a lopsided 124-104 loss to the Denver Nuggets on Wednesday, but rebounded with an all-around effort.

Josh Smith chipped in 22 points and five blocks and the Hawks got 19 points off the bench from Jamal Crawford, who is among the league leaders in scoring from a reserve.

The struggling Pacers have lost 16 of their last 20 games. Forward Murphy added 12 boards and has been carrying the load for the team in the absence of leading scorer Danny Granger, who has been out with injury since early this month.

Japan's 2020 bid city decision put on hold

TOKYO (Reuters) — The identity of Japan's bid city for the 2020 Summer Games could remain a mystery until 2011, the country's top Olympic official has said.

Tokyo, which lost out to Rio de Janeiro in October's International Olympic Committee (IOC) vote for the 2016 Games, faces a proposed joint bid from Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

"We will look at what's happening world-wide and devise a strategy," Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) president Tsunekazu Takeda was quoted as saying in Friday's Nikkan Sports.

"It's possible we'll postpone the decision until the spring of 2011. Obviously we would like to decide quickly but this time it's a different situation so there's no need to rush it."

Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara has said the Japanese capital, Asia's first Olympic host city 45 years ago, has a "civic duty" to dust itself down from the failed 2016 bid and reapply to host the 2020 Games.

The city secured a contingency fund of \$4 billion for the 2016 Games, although JOC officials were said to have favored a bid for 2020 from the start.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the only cities to have suffered a nuclear attack, have expressed an interest in tabling a joint-bid for the 2020 Olympics.

Rio won the October 2 IOC vote for 2016, defeating Chicago, Madrid and Tokyo. London will host the 2012 Summer Games.

James flattered by Spurs link

Portsmouth keeper David James admits he is flattered to be linked with a January move to Spurs.

The 39-year-old has been linked with the high-flying White Hart Lane club with back-up shot-stopper Carlo Cudicini unlikely to play again this season.

James, who has started 12 of the club's 19 Premier League matches this season, has hinted that leaving the strugglers could also boost his World Cup hopes.

The former Manchester City, West Ham and Aston Villa keeper has fallen down the pecking order under Fabio Capello and is desperate to make his 23-man squad for South Africa.

"You could say that I'm flattered by a team of Tottenham's stature and that it would be good for my England chances to join an upwardly-mobile club," he told Sunday Telegraph.

"It doesn't surprise me that Harry has been such a success

at Tottenham."

Regardless of the reported interest in his services James is looking to get his head down at Pompey and help the club out of the drop zone.

James has bemoaned the loss of the likes of Peter Crouch, Jermain Defoe and Niko Kranjcar last summer, saying sales made the players feel like they were being 'cheated'.

"You have to focus on where you are, and I want to help Portsmouth to climb the table," he continued.

"The departure of so many players from the club last summer was a great pity, especially when those players are your proven goalscorers.

"When half of the team disperse, you feel a bit cheated."

(Source: Skysports)



Mourinho reiterates desire to see out Inter deal

Inter Milan coach Jose Mourinho has reiterated his intention to see out the remaining two and a half years on his contract with the Italian champions.

The 46-year-old former Chelsea manager has frequently been linked with a return to the Premier League but has insisted he plans to honour his Inter deal.

"We all signed a clear contract until 2012, because we want to continue until 2012," he said in Portuguese newspaper Publico. "Yes, there are clauses to finish earlier - that Inter will pay me if they want me out and another that I will pay if I want to leave Inter... all very easy and objective."

Mourinho, who led Porto to Champions League glory in 2004 and Chelsea to back-to-back Premier League titles in 2005 and 2006, will never deem his job completely secure but is happy with how things are going at the San Siro.

"My job is always in danger because Inter are a team that many want to coach and my teams are always well constructed for the following years," he said. "But if my job is in the balance after winning the championship, being first in the (Serie A) standings and in the knock-out phase of the Champions League, imagine how the situation would be for those who fail to meet their objectives."

Mourinho will take his team back to Stamford Bridge to face Carlo Ancelotti's Chelsea in the last 16 of the Champions League in March, and plans to return to west London before then to see how the land lies at his former stomping ground.

"I will return to Stamford Bridge before the Champions League tie to see a game, because I will not return for the first time to play," he said. "That day, I want to be 'cold', but I know it will not be easy. It was a beautiful story. I cannot forget that I will be playing against my friends."

(Source: Soccernet)

Petrescu quits Unirea

Dan Petrescu has quit Romanian champions Unirea Urziceni, the club have announced.

It remains unclear why the former Chelsea defender has departed the club who are still in this season's Europa League.

Unirea turned a few heads in the UEFA Champions League this season and pipped Rangers to a spot in the Europa League.

The Romanians are due to play against Rafa Benitez's Liverpool in the last 32 of the competition in February.

The 42-year-old's surprise exit now leaves the club searching for a new manager for the remainder of the season.

General manager Mihai Stoica told GSP television: "We'll try to see what coaches are available. We propose to bring in a technician from abroad."

Unirea currently lie second in the Romanian league, level on points with leaders CFR Cluj after 17 games.

(Source: Skysports)