

Romania to Play Friendlies With Iran Football Team: Official



Romanian Football Federation president Razvan Burleanu (left) meets with Iran's Football Federation Chief Medi Taj

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Romanian Football Federation president Razvan Burleanu said that they are interested in arranging friendly matches with Iran.

Iran and Romanian football federations signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) as part of efforts to boost cooperation between the two countries.

The MoU was signed on Thursday at the headquarters of Iran Football Federation in Tehran, the capital of Iran.

"I would like to congratulate the Iranian football federation for being the best Asian team in FIFA rankings. Furthermore, Team Melli has a great chance to qualify for the 2018 World Cup," Burleanu said.

"We are happy due to cooperation with Iran as a European country. We like to arrange friendly matches with Iran football team. Football is a popular sport both in Iran and Romania and I hope that the two countries advance to the 2018 World Cup," the Romanian added.

Olympiakos Into Europa League Last 16 Thanks to Ansarifard's Brace



Karim Ansarifard scored twice on his European competition debut to give Olympiakos the boost it needed to see off host Osmanlispor with a 3-0 score in Ankara

TEHRAN (Dspatches) - Karim Ansarifard scored twice on his European competition debut to help Olympiakos advance to the last 16 of the Europa League on Thursday.

With the first leg in Piraeus having ended goalless a week earlier, Olympiakos had to score away from home to advance to the next round of the competition, and did so three times in the second half in Turkey despite the tricky pitch.

The first half was actually quite poor for Olympiakos, with the hosts having several occasions to open the score; however their finishing touch let them down time and again. The Reds committed several defensive errors and were lucky not to pay for them.

Yet barely two minutes after the interval Seba took a corner, Alberto Botia tried a swerving header and Ansarifard tucked the ball in from close range for a dream debut in Europe with the Olympiakos jersey. The Iranian striker only got a place in the starting line-up because Brown Ideye appears destined for China.

The goal turned the game on its head as the Turks clearly lacked the necessary experience – being at their first ever European campaign – to bounce back from this setback at home.

Olympiakos started missing chances until the 70th minute when substitute Thanassis Androustos tried a parallel cross to find Tarik Elyounoussi in the box and the Norwegian international headed the ball home for 2-0.

The Turkish defense had crumbled and three minutes from time Ansarifard scored his second of the night heading the ball in after Osmanlispor keeper Zydrunas Karcemarskas had saved a Seba shot.

The result is also preserving the job of manager Paulo Bento, as the Portuguese's position had become somewhat precarious after the goalless draws with Osmanlispor and Atromitos at home and the loss to AEK away last Sunday. The irony is that Bento's job is safe thanks to a player he had chosen to keep out of the squad and resorted to using on Thursday due to Ideye's departure.

Notably the Osmanlispor fans surprised the Greeks with a banner that read "Dear neighbor, friendship will win" in Greek, English and Turkish.

Olympiakos is joined in the last 16 of the Europa League by Cypriot champion APOEL, that defeated Athletic Bilbao 2-0 in Nicosia on Thursday and 4-3 on aggregate.

AFC Hails Persepolis Defenders

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Asian Football Confederation (AFC) site wrote that Mohsen Mosalman and Ramin Rezaeian were particularly important players in providing protection to Persepolis's defense.

Persepolis and Al Hilal's 2017 AFC Champions League meeting in Muscat on Tuesday saw the clash of two sides with vastly opposing styles end in deadlock with a 1-1 draw, the AFC wrote.

Table-toppers in their respective leagues, both sides move on with confidence following 90 minutes where both sides will feel they executed their tactical plans to perfection.

Mosalman and Rezaeian's role was particularly important given their opponents' determination to push their full-backs forward to support the attack. Both Yasir



Ranieri has been sacked, despite leading Leicester to the title last season

Al Shahrani and Mohammed Al-Burayk were integral to Hilal's attempts to make the pitch as wide as possible in their build up play in order to create space for their attacking team-mates.

Only midfielder Salman Al Faraj enjoyed more touches of the ball than Al-Burayk and Al Shahrani on the night.

Saudi-side Al Hilal sought to impose themselves from the

start, dominating possession from the start to end with 58.6% of the ball over the course of the tie. The Blue Wave spent a lot of the match in the front foot, attempting 18 crosses to their opponents' six and carving out the clearer of the game's opportunities.

However, for all of Al Hilal's dominance of the ball it was its Iranian rival who looked set for the win until Carlos Eduardo's late headed intervention.

Playing on the counterattack throughout, Persepolis created more shooting chances than its rival over the course of the 90 minutes and got three shots on target to their rival's two. Branko Ivankovic will surely be delighted with his side's excellent use of their limited possession.

Clippers Lose to Warriors 123-113 for 10th Consecutive Time



Golden State Warriors' Stephen Curry, right, drives past Los Angeles Clippers' Blake Griffin during the second half of an NBA basketball game Thursday, Feb. 23, 2017, in Oakland, Calif.

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Stephen Curry scored 17 of his 35 points in a 3-point flurry over the final 3:37 of the third quarter, and the two-time reigning MVP also had seven rebounds, five assists and four steals as the Warriors used a big second half to beat the Los Angeles Clippers 123-113 on Thursday night.

Curry's four-point play with 30.7 seconds left in the third and buzzer-beating 3 to punctuate the one-sided period propelled Golden State. Curry and Kevin Durant combined for eight of their team's nine 3-pointers in the third.

The Warriors scored 50 points in the quarter after trailing 61-49 at halftime. It was the NBA's first 50-point quarter since the Lakers had 51 against the Knicks on

March 25, 2014.

Durant scored 15 of his 25 points in the third and also contributed 15 rebounds and seven assists as the NBA-best Warriors (48-9) began the stretch run with a downright dominant second half.

Austin Rivers and Jamal Crawford scored 19 points apiece and DeAndre Jordan had 17 and 11 rebounds as the Clippers missed Chris Paul for a 14th straight game as he recovers from surgery last month for a torn ligament in his left thumb. Los Angeles had its four-game winning streak snapped.

Jordan received a technical at halftime as players were walking off the court.

Klay Thompson scored 18 points and had his streak of eight straight games scoring 20 or more points snapped. It matched the longest such streak of his career, also done Dec. 2-16, 2014.

Golden State welcomed back starting center Zaza Pachulia after

he missed eight games with a right shoulder injury and backup big man David West, who missed 14 games with a non-displaced fracture in his left thumb.

Pachulia had three blocked shots in five minutes of the first quarter and finished with a career-best four.

After the Clippers took a 144-98 beating in their last visit to Oracle Arena on Jan. 28, they controlled the game for the first two quarters. That 46-point win matched the largest margin of victory in the series.

Golden State won its 10th straight in the rivalry.

So, how did Los Angeles feel about facing the NBA's best team immediately out of the All-Star break?

"I kind of like jumping back in, personally," Clippers coach Doc Rivers said of starting with the Warriors. "I did as a player. I would rather get going."

Hungary Withdraws Candidacy From 2024 Olympic Games



Budapest to pull out of bid for 2024 Olympics as government withdraws support

BUDAPEST (IANS) The Hungarian government announced a decision on a proposal to withdraw the candidacy from the 2024 Olympic Games in Budapest, addressed to both the Budapest City Hall and the National Olympic Committee, media reports said.

"The Olympic Games are a national cause for Budapest and Hungary. According to our experience, unity is necessary to represent national causes. This unity between the leaders of the country and the parties was real at the time of the presentation of the bid, reflected in the decisions of the Budapest City Hall by a majority of 92 per cent, and of the Parliament by a majority of 80 per cent," Xinhua news agency quoted the resolution of the government as saying on Wednesday.

According to the Hungarian government, this unity has been disintegrated in the last months, for which the opposition parties are to blame.

The national cause of the Olympic Games became a political party affair, for which the opposition parties are liable, who turned their backs on the former decision, the government added.

As the necessary unity in Budapest has been lost, the bid of Budapest lost all of its chances, the government said.

"In such a context, the only responsible decision is that if the city of Budapest and the National Olympic Committee do not maintain their bid. That is why the government of Hungary proposes to withdraw the candidacy from the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic games in Budapest," the government said.