

Iran Secure Title at 2018 AFC Futsal Championship



Members of the Iran men's national futsal team rejoice after winning the title at the conclusion of the 2018 AFC Futsal Championship at the Xinzhuang Gymnasium in New Taipei City, Chinese Taipei, on February 11, 2018.

TEHRAN (Press TV) - The Iran men's national futsal team, domestically known as Team Melli Futsal, has vigorously ended its campaign at the 2018 Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Futsal Championship, and defended its title as the champion of the continental tournament.

The Iranian squad blanked the East Asians 4-0 in the final showdown of the event at the Xinzhuang Gymnasium in New Taipei City. Both teams began the battle as expected, playing a high pressure game with intense marking from the first blow of the whistle.

Iranian skipper Mahdi Javid came

dangerously close in the opening minutes, when his effort struck the goal frame.

Iran and Japan national futsal teams were evenly matched and had their fair share of ball possession until a minute from the half-time whistle.

Iran's 29-year-old striker Farhad Tavakoli Roozbahani intercepted a

long-range pass by Japan's goalkeeper Higor Pires, and rolled the ball down the left flank before sending a neat pass to teammate Ali Asghar Hassanzadeh.

Hassanzadeh then unleashed a fine shot to the bottom right, and gave Iran the lead.

Shortly after the break, Tavakoli made no mistake from close range to double Iran's lead in the 21st minute.

Ahmad Esmailpour displayed spectacular individual skills in the 29th minute, when he dribbled through the Japanese defense before passing it to Hassanzadeh, who finished superbly and netted his brace.

Despite numerous attempts to pull back a goal, Japan's efforts did not pay off. Hossein Tayyebi Bidgoli shot into an unguarded goalmouth in the final minute, and sealed Iran's 4-0 convincing victory.

Earlier in the day, Uzbekistan clinched the third place, defeating Iraq 2-1 in a penalty shoot-out after the exciting play-off ended 4-4.

The 2018 AFC Futsal Championship, which was the 15th edition of the games, opened on February 1 and closed on February 11 in Chinese Taipei.

Bulls Fall Short to Wizards, 101-90

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - There wasn't much wizardly to be found with either team Saturday in the United Center as the Washington Wizards defeated the Bulls 101-90.

There also was no Zach LaVine and Kris Dunn for the Bulls, which was another problem.

The Bulls looked like frozen ice fishermen after a long day to start the game after the fabulous win Friday night against Jimmy Butler and the Minnesota Timberwolves. The Wizards were basically without their All-Star backcourt, John Wall injured and Bradley Beal having his poorest game of the season, missing all seven of his threes and shooting three of 13 for seven points.

The Bulls would, in effect, be taken out by Tomas Satoransky, the Czech mate who set a career high with 25 points, making 10 of 12 shots and five of six threes as the Bulls never really seemed to believe he was in the scouting report. And then Bobby Portis just took out Satoransky, Portis called for a flagrant foul 2 and ejected with 2:35 left in the game as Satoransky was driving baseline



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for a dunk.

It didn't much matter, at least for the final result if not for Satoransky's health, as the Bulls were in the midst of the the last four minutes of the game failing to score a point in missing their last seven shots. It wasn't unlike the start of the game when the Bulls missed five of their first six shots with a pair of turnovers, trailed 9-2 and never led again after their 2-0 start.

It wasn't happening on this night as the Bulls dropped to 19-36. Washington is 32-24.

The Bulls had six players score in double figures led by Justin Holiday with just 15 points. Portis had 13. Lauri Markkanen, Robin Lopez and David Nwaba each had 12,

Jerian Grant 11 and Denzel Valentine, starting for the resting LaVine, 10. LaVine isn't playing the second of back to backs now as a precaution. Markkanen and Valentine had double/doubles with 10 rebounds each. Grant added eight assists and Holiday four steals.

And that was it, it being Satoransky's fifth three with 3:25 left for a 100-90 lead.

The Bulls weren't making any big run in this game without their two closers, LaVine and Dunn. And with the Wizards figuring out, "Hey, no LaVine and Dunn. We'll stay with that Markkanen guy."

Markkanen missed once more before the Wizards rebounded another Beal miss. Satoransky firing in along the left baseline got a pass and went for the dunk. Portis went for the ball (Bulls version). Portis took down Satoransky while he was off balance in the air (Washington and officials' version). And the Bulls blended slowly into defeat. Satoransky was escorted to the locker room.

Low Committed to Germany Amid Bayern Links



Germany head coach Joachim Low has played down links with Bayern Munich from the 2018-19 Bundesliga season.

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Joachim Low has dismissed speculation that he could take control of Bayern Munich next season after leading Germany at the 2018 World Cup.

Low's future with the national team has become uncertain in recent weeks after he was heavily linked with replacing Zinedine Zidane at Real Madrid.

Reports have suggested Zidane will

leave the Santiago Bernabeu should they exit the Champions League against Paris Saint-Germain, Los Blancos having already been dumped out of the Copa del Rey and finding themselves way off the pace in LaLiga.

But Bayern have emerged as a rival for his signature with Jupp Heynckes only in charge until the end of the season after replacing Carlo Ancelotti in October.

Norway Sweep Podium of Men's Skiathlon at PyeongChang Olympics



Champion Simen Hegstad Krueger (C), second-placed Martin Johnsrud Sundby (L) and third-placed Hans Christer Holund, all from Norway, pose for photos during the medal ceremony of men's 15km+15km skiathlon event of cross-country skiing at 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games at the Medal Plaza in PyeongChang, South Korea, on Feb. 11, 2018.

PYEONGCHANG (Dispatches) - Norway made a sweep of the podium of the men's skiathlon of 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games at the Alpensia cross-country skiing center here on Sunday.

Simen Hegstad Krueger came first in a time of one hour, 16 minutes and 20 seconds in an event combining 15 km classic and 15 km freestyle skiing.

"It is an indescribable feeling. It is an amazing day but it started in the worst way with the fall after the first 100 meters and a broken pole," said Krueger, who

won the 15 km freestyle in a World Cup race in Toblach, Italy, on 16 December 2017.

The 24-year-old Krueger, who crashed on the first lap, stormed back with a strong intermediate sprint 4 km before the finish line to win his Olympic debut.

His compatriots Martin Johnsrud Sundby and Hans Christer Holund took the silver in 1:16:28 and bronze 1:16:29 respectively.

It was Norway's 13th medal sweep at Winter Olympics, of which five were in a cross-country skiing events.

PSG More Ready for Real Madrid Now Than for Barca: Coach

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain coach Unai Emery has said that his club are more ready for their Champions League round-of-16 tie with Real Madrid next week than they were for Barcelona at the same point last campaign.

Speaking at a prematch news conference ahead of PSG's Ligue 1 trip to Toulouse on Saturday, Emery feels that his players are ready for the challenge that awaits them at Santiago Bernabeu and more so than they were for their ill-fated outing at Camp Nou a year ago.

"The team is better prepared this season than last," Emery said at a snowy Camp des Loges. "The team has grown the same way that the club has grown."

"We need to continue this way. We all

want to demonstrate this [in Madrid]."

Emery also said that Brazilian superstar Neymar is ready after being rested for the 4-1 Coupe de France round-of-16 win away at Ligue 2 side Sochaux on Tuesday.

"Neymar has been training well," Emery said. "I think that he really wants to play in Toulouse. Everything is fine, normal -- we have managed his playing time carefully."

Emery also praised Angel Di Maria, who scored three of PSG's four goals in midweek amid speculation that he could start away at former club Real Madrid next week.

Emery also confessed that although he is not 100 percent sure of his starting XI at the Bernabeu, he has an idea of how he will line his PSG side up.

Napoli Crush Lazio to Stay Top Ahead of Juventus

MILAN (AFP) - Napoli have tamped their authority on the Serie A title race with a come-from-behind 4-1 thumping of Lazio on Saturday to reclaim top spot from champions Juventus.

Juventus' 2-0 win in Fiorentina had put them top, but Maurizio Sarri's side responded in style to maintain their one-point advantage over the six-time defending champions.

It was a third straight defeat for Lazio whose position in third -- 17 points behind Napoli -- is now threatened by Inter Milan and Roma. "It was a win earned with heart and soul," said Napoli goalscorer Jose Callejon of his side who are targeting a third Serie A title and first since 1990.

"We are working together to achieve the dream. We'll give our all to the end. We've had this dream in our minds since the first day of pre-season training and must continue like this."

Lazio had taken the lead in Naples when Dutch defender Stefan de Vrij scored in the third minute at the San Paolo Stadium from a Ciro Immobile cross, before Spaniard Callejon pulled the hosts level just before the break.

Napoli's second came from an unfortunate Lazio own goal as Brazilian defender Wallace tried to intercept a Callejon centre on 53 minutes only to send the ball past his own goalkeeper Thomas Strakosha.

Lazio were reeling two minutes later when left-back Mario Rui scored with a long-range effort which took a lucky deflection off Piotr Zielinski, with the Polish midfielder setting up Dries Mertens, back after an ankle injury, for the fourth and his 15th goal in Serie A this season after 72 minutes.

"I saw an unacceptable Lazio," said coach Simone Inzaghi. "We deserved to lose. We weren't in the game in the second half and against Napoli you pay."

Kvitova Sends Czechs Into Fed Cup Semis

PRAGUE (AP) - The Czech Republic advanced to the Fed Cup semifinals after double Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova beat Switzerland's Belinda Bencic 6-2, 6-4 Sunday.

Kvitova's victory gave the Czechs an insurmountable 3-0 lead in the first-round match and secured a 10th straight appearance in the last four. They will face Germany or Belarus in the April semifinals.

The 27-year-old Kvitova, who triumphed at Wimbledon in 2011 and 2014, secured the win against Bencic on her first match point.

"It was better today than yesterday, when I played in the Fed Cup again after such a long time away and needed time to get used to it," she said. "It was a good game from both of us but I wasn't so nervous as

yesterday."

The big-hitting Czech player put her opponent under pressure with aggressive strokes on the indoor hard court at Prague's O2 Arena, breaking serve twice in the opening set.

Kvitova, who hit a total of 10 aces, then got the decisive break for a 4-3 lead in the second set after Bencic sent a forehand long.

It was a memorable return to the Fed Cup for Kvitova after she was injured in a knife attack at her home in December 2016.

Kvitova, who won the St. Petersburg Open in Russia earlier this month, was a member of the Czech team that won five of the last seven Fed Cups.

Karolina Pliskova, the Czech No. 1, missed the first-round match against the Swiss because of illness.