

Iran U17 on the Verge of History

High-Flying Iran Seek Improbable Against Spain



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - After waylaying Germany in Goa, Iran aim to do the improbable again as they meet European champion Spain in the quarterfinal of the FIFA U-17 World Cup at the Jawaharlal Nehru stadium on Sunday.

Iran, which qualified for the quarterfinals for the first time, will be playing against an opponent that have steadily improved as the tournament has progressed. At their best, Spain have shown glimpses of tiki-taka and have moved the ball through both the flanks. Striker Abel Ruiz has struck form at the right time.

Spain's languid yet attacking style will challenge Iran's resilience. Iran have been master of playing percentage football in this tournament. The team have allowed its rival to dominate possession but have backed their defensive strategy, managing to win all the four matches. The Iranians even in their huge win over Germany enjoyed less possession when compared to their rival - 43 per cent to 57 per cent.

Iran's switch from defensive to attacking mode has caught their rivals napping. Iran have pacy strikers in Younes Delfi and Allahyar Sayyed who lent potency to the counter-attack. The entire team backtracks into

its own half when it loses the ball to the opposition. Stifling the rival midfielders for space is a strategy that Iran have managed to follow consistently this tournament. The team has let in only two goals in the tournament while having scored 12 goals.

"We have reached this stage by playing hard. Spain is a tough opponent but they will also be under pressure. Our objective is to keep a clean slate and then score a goal. Once we score we try our best to defend it," said coach Abbas Chamanyan. The coach also downplayed the absence of Delfi, who will miss the match due to suspension.

But captain Allahyar Sayyed, who has struck thrice in the tournament, said his team is loaded with enough talent to replace the striker. Sayyed said his team is on a 'mission impossible' to beat Spain and qualify for the semifinals, but like his coach, Sayyed expressed confidence in his team's ability to put it across the European side.

Spain have won three matches on the bounce after its opening defeat against Brazil. Abel Ruiz's last-minute penalty gave Spain a narrow win against France in the pre-quarterfinals which is certainly a morale booster for Santiago Deni's side.

"We are aware of Iran's strength. We have great respect for them. Iran are a dangerous side on counter-attacks and they defend pretty well. We need to improve our defense. We are pretty flexible with our game-plan. Our aim is to win and enter the semifinals," Santi said.

It has been raining pretty hard in Kochi for the last two days and the humidity, which has been a deterrent for Spain, will no longer be a factor if rains on the match day. The teams will then be on even keel. However, adaptability to slow turf will hold the key.

Chelsea 4-2 Watford: Blues Launch Superb Comeback



At one stage Chelsea were facing a third consecutive Premier League defeat

LONDON (Dispatches) - Chelsea scored two late goals as they came from behind to claim a dramatic victory against Watford at Stamford Bridge and the pressure eased slightly on Antonio Conte on Saturday.

Chelsea took the lead through Pedro but Watford came surging back with Abdoulaye Doucoure equalizing and Roberto Pereyra putting them ahead either side of half time.

Cesar Azpilicueta headed the Blues 3-2 in front in the 87th minute before Michy Batshuayi sealed the victory in stoppage time despite an unconvincing performance from the champions.

Batshuayi had headed in an equalizer for Chelsea midway through the second half after the home side fell behind to two Watford goals either side of half-time to suggest the possibility of a third consecutive Premier League defeat.

Pedro had put the Blues ahead in the 12th minute with a sensational 25-yard strike that curled away from Watford goalkeeper Heurelho Gomes and in off the right-hand post.

But the Blues were shaky defensively throughout and Marco Silva's Hornets scored twice through Abdoulaye Doucoure and Roberto Pereyra to put them on course for a famous victory.

It could have been worse for Antonio Conte's side as Brazilian Richarlison missed two glorious chances for Watford either side of Pereyra's goal.

But Batshuayi's equaliser and the third for Azpilicueta saw Conte throw himself into the home crowd as his side completed a turnaround that the Belgium striker then capped deep into injury time.

Victory takes Chelsea above Watford into third in the table, six points behind leaders Manchester City.

Marquez Snatches Pole for Australian Grand Prix

Phillip ISLAND (Australia) (AFP) - World championship leader Marc Marquez snatched pole position and left title rival Andrea Dovizioso in his wake in the final seconds of qualifying Saturday for the Australian MotoGP.

Triple world champion Marquez grabbed his 44th pole in his 88th MotoGP with a best lap time of one minute 28.386 seconds at Phillip Island, while Ducati's Dovizioso struggled to 11th fastest and will start Sunday's race from the fourth row.

The Spanish Honda rider, who leads Dovizioso by 11 points with three rounds left, will start on the inside of the grid, alongside his compatriot Maverick Vinales and French Yamaha racer Johann Zarco.

Dovizioso will be hoping Marquez continues to have his impetuous moments around the fast, sweeping Phillip Island track.

Marquez crashed out of last year's race while leading and already crowned world champion. He also came off his



Honda rider Marc Marquez in action during a qualifying session for the Australian MotoGP at Phillip Island, on October 21, 2017.

Honda bike during the 2014 race.

Zarco, who snatched pole position at Motegi last weekend, looked set to repeat the feat when he hit the front

before Vinales and Marquez in turn claimed the best lap time in the final moments of qualifying.

Andrea Iannone (Suzuki), Australian

Jack Miller (Honda) and Pol Espargaro (KTM) will start off the second row of the grid.

Six-time race winner Valentino Rossi will join Aleix Espargaro (Aprilia) and Briton Bradley Smith (KTM) on the third row.

Dovizioso, who beat Marquez in a thrilling final lap duel in Japan last weekend, struggled in qualifying and will start off the fourth row along with last year's race winner Cal Crutchlow and Dani Pedrosa.

Rossi and Smith advanced to the second qualifying session by finishing in the top two positions in the first session, for riders whose practice times were outside the top ten.

Rossi posted a best 1:29.346 lap time on his Yamaha, 0.359secs ahead of Smith on a KTM.

Triple world MotoGP champion Jorge Lorenzo, who injured his ankle in a tumble during third free practice, was sixth on his Ducati to push him down to 16th on Sunday's race grid.

LeBron James Delivers as Cavaliers Breeze Past Bucks

LOS ANGELES (AFP) - LeBron James has picked up right where he left off last season, scoring 24 points and dishing out eight assists on Friday as the Cleveland Cavaliers cruised past the Milwaukee Bucks 116-97.

The four-time NBA most valuable player led the Cavaliers in scoring for the second straight game despite missing most of the pre-season with an injury.

When James started the season he knew it was going to take time to fully recover from a sprained left ankle that limited him to just one pre-season game.

He played 37 minutes and drained 10 of 16 shots on Friday in front of a crowd of 18,700 at Milwaukee's Bradley Center arena.

"I felt better tonight than I did after game one," said James who scored a team high 29 points in a season-opening win over Boston on Tuesday.

"Each game is going to be another opportunity for me to get into game shape," he added. "Today I am still not where I want to be."

Don't tell that to the Bucks, who also had to contend with Kevin Love's second double-double of the season.

Love finished with 17 points and 12 rebounds while Kyle Korver tallied 17, hitting five-of-six three pointers.

James said the Cavs stuck to their game plan, setting the tone early on defense before getting the offence "popping".

FIFA Says Deal Close to Resolve Transfer System Complaint

ZURICH (AP) - A complaint to the European Commission challenging soccer's transfer market is set to be withdrawn by the global group of players' unions, according to FIFA.

A formal complaint that the trading system is "anti-competitive, unjustified and illegal" was filed in Brussels two years ago by FIFPro.

After a meeting Thursday of the FIFA stakeholders committee, soccer's world governing body said a tentative agreement relating to unpaid player wages and transfer fees reached with FIFPro, European clubs and a global leagues' group can help end the dispute next year.

"It was an issue that was stewing for a long, long, long time," FIFA vice president Victor Montagliani told reporters after chairing the meeting. "Because of our impetus they came to an agreement."

FIFPro, which has campaigned to let players terminate contracts after going unpaid for several weeks, cautiously

welcomed its "constructive talks with FIFA."

"(It's) premature to discuss what might happen next regarding our legal complaint against the transfer system, or any prospective deal until we are satisfied with the proposals put forth," the Netherlands-based union said.

FIFA has been open to reviewing a transfer system which has seemed weighted in favor of wealthy clubs and was widely criticized in the European summer trading window. Salary caps, limits on squad sizes and restricting loan deals have been suggested.

Representing 65,000 players, FIFPro had suggested its September 2015 filing threatened the biggest upheaval in transfer rules since the Bosman case in 1995.

Then, a European Court of Justice ruling gave players more freedom to move within the European Union and drove up salaries by letting clubs sign out-of-contract players without paying a transfer fee.

Hamilton Triumphs in F1 U.S. Grand Prix Free Practice

WASHINGTON (Xinhua) - Lewis Hamilton has registered the fastest laps in both free practice sessions of the F1 U.S. Grand Prix as the Mercedes driver is closing to winning his fourth drivers' title.

The 32-year-old Britain had a best lap in the first free practice with one minute and 36.335 seconds to outpace title rival Sebastian Vettel of Ferrari by 0.593 seconds.

Hamilton's teammate Valtteri Bottas was third.

Hamilton then kept his top form in the second practice session to clock a time of 1 minute and 34.668 seconds. Red Bull's Max Verstappen was second, 0.397 seconds behind. Vettel was third.

"It's been an interesting day with lots of ups and downs in terms of how the track has moved around

and how the car feels. But overall the car was feeling good. There are lots of areas we can improve on, but generally it feels like a solid platform and a solid start to the weekend," said Hamilton.

"It was amazing to have so much support from the fans here. I have a lot of support out here, which I am super grateful for. I'm excited to see everyone tomorrow," added the

Briton, who won here in the past three seasons.

In the drivers' standings, Hamilton leads on 306 points, 59 more than second-placed Vettel. Hamilton will seal the title in Sunday's race if he can win and Vettel fails to finish in the top five.

Lewis Hamilton registered the fastest laps in both free practice sessions of the F1 U.S. Grand Prix.

Barca Want to Stay in La Liga Amid Independence Crisis - President

MADRID (Reuters) - Barcelona president Josep Maria Bartomeu confirmed on Saturday the club wishes to continue playing in La Liga even if Catalonia is granted independence from Spain.

The Spanish government is holding a special cabinet meeting to deal with the crisis after Catalonia's president

Carles Puigdemont wrote Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy a letter threatening a formal declaration of independence.

Bartomeu previously said the club members would be able to help decide Barcelona's future but speaking at the annual general meeting, the president was clear

about his preferred option.

"You can be sure that this board will always act in the club's defense," said Bartomeu. "We will never put the club nor its presence in any competition at risk. That's why, to all the socios (members), I say that we want to continue playing in La Liga and, as of today, our participation in

La Liga is guaranteed.

"It's mutually beneficial for La Liga and Barcelona for that link to continue." Bartomeu reiterated the club's call for "dialogue, respect and sport", a phrase which they displayed on a giant banner before their Champions League victory over Olympiakos on Wednesday.