

Iran Edge Past Panama 2-1 in Pre-FIFA World Cup Friendly



The Iranian national football team defeated Panama 2-1 in a friendly match in Graz, Austria on Thursday evening.

TEHRAN(Press TV) - Iran men's national football team, domestically known as Team Melli, has defeated Panama in a friendly fixture as part of preparations for the 2018 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup.

On Thursday evening, Team Melli put its abilities to the test before starting own campaign at the world championship of association football, and managed to beat Los Canaleros (The Canal Men) 2-1 at the end of a match staged in Graz, which is the second-largest city in Austria after the capital Vienna.

Iran started the match in a fairly dominant fashion, and took the lead in the 16th minute with a penalty from Ashkan Dejagah.

The Iranians were awarded the penalty after Panamanian defender Jan Carlos Vargas took a wild and sliding challenge on forward Karim Ansarifard.

Team Melli doubled its advantage three minutes later, when Saman Ghoddos finished off a swift break down the left.

In the 39th minute, Iranian defender Rouzbeh Cheshmi was harshly ruled to have fouled Panamanian midfielder Armando Cooper.

Gabriel Torres converted it, and pulled a goal back for Panama from the penalty spot.

On October 10, Russia held the Iran men's national football team to a one-all draw in a FIFA World Cup warm-up match.

Team Melli defeated Togo's Les Eperviers (The Sparrow Hawks) 2-0 in a fixture staged at Azadi Stadium in western Tehran five days earlier.

The Iran national football team defeated Uzbekistan 2-0 at Tehran's Azadi Stadium on June 12, and became the first Asian team - and the third squad after Brazil and hosts Russia - to secure its place at the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

James Harden Triple-Double Powers Rockets to Win



James Harden notching a triple-double in the Cavs' 117-113 win over the Cavaliers.

HOUSTON (Dispatches) - James Harden had a triple-double of 35 points, 11 rebounds and 13 assists to help the Houston Rockets beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 117-113 on Thursday night.

Harden also had five steals and a block as Houston extended its winning streak to four games.

LeBron James had 33 points for the Cavaliers, and Jeff Green added 27.

Houston led by seven after a layup by James with about 10 minutes left. The Rockets scored the next six points, capped by a 3-pointer by P.J. Tucker to make it 111-98. The Cavaliers used a 13-1 run, with five points from James, to cut the lead to 112-111 with 90 seconds left.

Harden missed a layup after that, but grabbed a rebound and threw an alley-ooop to Clint Capela, who finished for Houston's first basket since Tucker's 3. He was fouled on the play and made the free throw to make it 115-111 with just over a minute remaining.

James made a layup on the other end, but Capela made another basket after a grabbing the rebound on a miss by Harden to put Houston back up by 4 with 10.7 seconds left.

Capela, who finished with 19 points, 13 rebounds and four blocks, blocked a shot by James in the final seconds to secure the win.

Nuggets Top Struggling Thunder

And also, Emmanuel Mudiay scored 10 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter, including the go-ahead 3-pointer midway through the period, and the Denver Nuggets beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 102-94.

Paul Milsap added 17 points and Nikola Jokic had 15 points to go with 11 rebounds for Denver. The Nuggets snapped a five-game losing streak at home to the Thunder, including a 106-105 setback April 9 on a last-second 3-pointer by Russell Westbrook that eliminated Denver from playoff contention.

Carmelo Anthony, who spent his first 7 1-2 years in the league in Denver before being traded to the New York Knicks in 2011, had 28 points to lead the Thunder, who acquired Anthony in a pre-season trade. Paul George and Westbrook each added 13 points for the Thunder, who lost their fourth in a row.

Neither the Thunder nor the Nuggets were able to gain separation on the other in a tightly contested third quarter and the teams went into the final period tied at 75.

The game was tied at 82 when Mudiay connected on a 3-pointer with 7:35 remaining, triggering a 7-0 burst by Denver.

Oklahoma City fought back to within 93-90 but Milsap answered by converting a three-point play with 2:09 left to rebuild Denver's lead to six.

Croatia Thrash Greece in World Cup Play-Off

ZAGREB (Dispatches) - Croatia capitalized on a dismal Greece defensive display to take a commanding lead after the first leg of their World Cup qualifying play-off in Zagreb.

Greek keeper Orestis Karnezis' clumsy touch led to him conceding an early penalty, which Luka Modric converted.

Nikola Kalinic was unmarked to tap in a second but Sokratis Papastathopoulos' fine header gave Greece an away goal.

Ivan Perisic headed Croatia's third before half-time before Andrej Kramaric tapped in after a botched



backpass.

Konstantinos Stafylidis' attempt to chest the ball back to his keeper summed up Greece's defensive display as Sime Vrsaljko stole in to square, giving Kramaric an empty net.

That gave Croatia a three-goal advantage, leaving Greece with a huge task on home soil in Sunday's second leg, when a 3-0 win will be required to send them through on away goals.

Croatia have not lost a competitive fixture by a three-goal margin since a 5-1 defeat by England in 2009.

Russian Skiers' Doping Ban Is Political, National Federation Says



Russian gold medalist Alexander Legkov celebrates as he receives his medal for the men's cross-country 50-kilometer mass start race during the closing ceremony for the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics, Russia, February 23, 2014.

MOSCOW (Reuters) - The head of Russia's cross-country skiing federation on Friday criticized the International Olympic Committee's (IOC)

decision to ban six Russians for life from the games and described it as politically motivated.

The IOC banned six cross-country skiers this month as part of an investigation into allegations of widespread doping among Russians and sample-tampering by laboratory and security officials at the 2014 Sochi Games.

"It has not absolutely nothing to do with sport," federation president Elena Valbe told reporters at the Russian Olympic Committee. "For me, it's (political)."

The banned skiers include Alexander Legkov, won gold in the 50km and silver in the 4x10km relay event in Sochi, and Maxim Vylegzhanin, who won two silver medals in the 50km freestyle and the team sprint.

The ban effectively stripped them and their relay and sprint team mates of their Sochi medals.

The four other skiers - Evgeniy Belov, Alexei Petukhov, Evgenia Shapovalova and Yulia Ivanova -- did not win medals in Sochi.

Valbe blamed the skiers' situation on Grigory Rodchenkov, the former head of Moscow's suspended anti-doping laboratory who revealed a scheme to cover up home competitors' positive samples in Sochi.

Valbe added that the federation would appeal against the IOC decisions at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

At a separate meeting of Russia's suspended athletics federation on Friday, a local Olympic committee official denounced what he said was political pressure on Russian sport.

F1 Has No Plan to Be Like NASCAR, Carey Assures Ferrari

LONDON (Reuters) - Formula One has no desire to emulate U.S. stock car racing, chairman Chase Carey has said in response to criticism from Ferrari boss Sergio Marchionne about increasing standardization in the sport.

Marchionne had warned last week, after manufacturers were presented with proposals for a new engine from 2021 that Ferrari could walk away if it did not like the sport's direction.

"I don't want to play NASCAR globally," the Ferrari chairman declared. Carey, speaking on a

Liberty Media third quarter earnings conference call, suggested Ferrari and Formula One's new U.S.-based owners were on the same page.

"Actually I don't think we have a differing view to Ferrari," he said. "I'm not trying to be derogatory towards NASCAR, but we don't plan to be NASCAR either. "We don't want to standardise the cars. We don't want 20 identical cars going round the track, and the only difference is the driver," he added.

"We want all the teams to have the ability to

do what they do to create cars that are unique to them - unique engines to them, unique bodies to them." The new engine envisaged for 2021 aims to be simpler, cheaper and louder to satisfy fans who yearn for more noise than provided by the current V6 turbo hybrid power units. Carey, who replaced former commercial supremo Bernie Ecclestone in January when Liberty took control, said Formula One wanted to reduce the cost of competing with some sort of spending limit imposed on all teams.

Nadal Confident of Being Fully Fit at ATP Finals

MADRID (Reuters) - World number one Rafa Nadal is confident he will be "100 percent fit" at the ATP Finals event in London as he continues to recover from a knee injury.

The Spaniard pulled out of the Paris Masters before his quarter-final match against American John Isner after experiencing discomfort in his right knee during his third-round win over Pablo Cuevas.

"Hopefully the knee is good," Nadal told Sky Sports. "I've done everything I've needed to do in order to get ready for London... Let's see if I am able to be 100 per cent

to compete.

"If nothing happens, then I will play. I visited my doctors after the Paris Masters - it was a tough day for me having to pull out of Paris.

"I know I'm confident because I'm having a great season with one event to go. I am here to try my best."

Reigning French and U.S. Open winner Nadal begins the quest for his first ATP Finals title against Belgian David Goffin on Monday and will also compete with Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov and Austrian Dominic Thiem in his group.

U.S. Olympic Gymnast Aly Raisman: I Was Abused by Doctor

NEW YORK (AP) - Olympic gymnast Aly Raisman says she is among the young women abused by a former USA Gymnastics team doctor.

Raisman tells "60 Minutes" she was 15 when she was first treated by Dr. Larry Nassar, who spent more than two decades working with athletes at USA Gymnastics. He's now in jail in Michigan awaiting sentencing after pleading guilty to possession of child pornography.

Raisman, the captain of the 2012 and 2016 Olympic gold-medal winning team, details the abuse in her book "Fierce," which will be released on Nov. 14.

Raisman is the latest gymnast to claim she was abused by Nassar. McKayla Maroney, who won two medals at the 2012 Games as Raisman's teammate, said last month she was molested for years by Nassar.