

# Iran Best Team in Asian Cup: Japanese Captain



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Japan defender Maya Yoshida believes that Iran national football team is the best team in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.

The Southampton center back played a key role in hard fought 1-0 win over Saudi Arabia on Sunday in the second round of the Asian Cup at the Sharjah Stadium. "Iran is currently the best football playing country in Asia but most

important thing for now is that we go to the next round," Yoshida said.

Japan, Asia's second ranked team, will play Vietnam, ranked 17th, in the quarterfinal at the Al Maktoum stadium in Dubai on Thursday before a potential semifinal clash against Iran at the Hazza bin Zayed stadium in Al Ain on Jan. 28.

"We don't have any information

about Vietnam to be honest and we have to be ready for them. I will think about Iran after we have beaten Vietnam," the Japan captain added.

Iran has been the most consistent team at the tournament so far and is chasing a fifth straight victory.

Queiroz has been in charge of Iran since 2011. The 65-year-old Portuguese coach's contract ends after the tournament and he has

been widely linked with the vacant Colombia job.

When China plays Iran on Thursday, many observers will be looking at the benches.

China is coached by Marcello Lippi, who led Italy to the 2006 World Cup title, while Iran is led by former Real Madrid coach Carlos Queiroz.

Victory would give Lippi his best result in two years with China. He will leave the job after the Asian Cup.

South Korea and defending champion Australia made it through to the quarterfinals of the Asian Cup.

Even with the arrival of Tottenham forward Son Heung-min, South Korea struggled to beat Bahrain 2-1 in the last 16. The 2015 finalists needed an extra-time goal from Kim Jin-su to advance and set up a quarterfinal match against Qatar.

Australia needed a penalty shootout to get past Uzbekistan after 120 goalless minutes, and Japan was below its best in a 1-0 victory over Saudi Arabia.

The quarterfinals take place on Thursday and Friday. The final will be on Feb. 1 in Abu Dhabi.

## Pliskova Stuns Serena at Australian Open

MELBOURNE, Australia (Dispatches) - Four times, Serena Williams was only one point - a single point - from closing out a victory in the Australian Open quarterfinals.

On the first such chance, at 5-1, 40-30 in the third set, she turned her left ankle awkwardly. The owner of the best serve in the sport would lose every point she served the rest of the way.

And so it was that a startling reversal and result would follow Wednesday at Melbourne Park, with Williams dropping the last

six games of a 6-4, 4-6, 7-5 loss to No. 7 seed Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic.

The 37-year-old American didn't call for a trainer during the match and later wouldn't blame the ankle for the way everything changed down the stretch, saying afterward that it "seems to be fine."

But instead of Williams moving closer to an eighth championship at the Australian Open and record-tying 24th Grand Slam title overall, it is Pliskova who will continue the pursuit of her first major trophy.

## Sri Lanka Seek History in Australia



BRISBANE (Reuters) - Sri Lanka, inspired by India's recent breakthrough triumph, are dreaming of their own maiden test victory in Australia this week when their two-match series gets underway in Brisbane on Thursday.

India justified their top ranking by beating Tim Paine's men 2-1 earlier this month, ending their agonizing 71-year wait for a test series victory in Australia.

Captain Dinesh Chandimal confirmed the Sri Lankans closely followed how India got the better of an Australia side missing top batsmen Steve Smith and David Warner through ball-tampering suspensions.

Sri Lanka have personnel issues of their own with all-rounder Angelo Mathews and paceman Nuwan Pradeep missing through injuries but Chandimal was confident they could emulate their

neighbours Down Under.

"India played some outstanding cricket throughout the series," said Chandimal who was particularly impressed how India's Cheteshwar Pujara wore down the Australian attack.

"One of my dreams is to win a test match here, as a captain and as a player. But that's not an easy thing. It needs a lot of hard work. Hundred percent is not enough, you have to give 200 percent and that has to come from all 11 players.

Since 1988, Sri Lanka have played 13 tests in Australia, managing two draws while succumbing to defeat in others.

Even in Mathews' absence, Chandimal's team have a decent batting unit with Dimuth Karunaratne and Kusal Mendis sharing their scoring responsibility with their captain.

## Sharks Extend Caps' Slump



Jan 22, 2019; Washington, DC, USA; Washington Capitals goaltender Braden Holtby (70) makes a save on San Jose Sharks center Tomas Hertl (48) in the second period at Capital One Arena. The Sharks won 7-6 in overtime. Mandatory Credit: Geoff Burke-USA TODAY Sports

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Tomas Hertl has completed a hat trick by scoring 1:48 into overtime to give the visiting San Jose Sharks a come-from-behind, 7-6 victory over the Washington Capitals.

Evander Kane (two goals) knocked in a loose puck with one second left in regulation to force overtime, and Hertl then won it for San Jose, which ended a three-game losing streak.

Hertl, taking an OT pass from Logan Couture, beat Washington goalie Braden Holtby from the right circle on a shot just inside the far post. Hertl notched his second career hat trick and added an assist.

Alex Ovechkin registered his 23rd hat trick for the Capitals, who have dropped six straight

(0-4-2). With his first goal, Ovechkin moved past Dave Andreychuk (640) and into 14th place all-time for goals.

Mikael Backlund scored 15 seconds into overtime, and David Rittich made 33 saves in a sparkling performance as host Calgary beat Carolina.

Backlund added an assist in a two-point game. T.J. Brodie finished with two assists, and Oliver Kylington and Mark Jankowski also scored for Calgary. The Western Conference-leading Flames head into the All-Star break riding a three-game winning streak and an 8-0-1 run.

Dougie Hamilton and Sebastian Aho had goals for the Hurricanes, who fell to 1-2-1 in their past four games. Petr Mrazek made 22 saves.

## Honda Unveils 2019 Liveries for Marquez, Lorenzo



Marc Marquez, Repsol Honda Team Carlos Guil Iglesias

TOKYO (Dispatches) - The works RC213V bikes will continue to carry its title sponsor's orange, white and red colors, which have adorned Honda's premier-class machinery since 1995. Repsol's current deal with the team runs through 2020.

Both reigning champion

Marquez and Lorenzo, who has replaced the long-serving Dani Pedrosa at the outfit, were present at the season launch event at Repsol's headquarters in Madrid.

This was despite Lorenzo undergoing surgery just two days earlier, the Spaniard having sustained a scaphoid

fracture that will rule him out of the opening pre-season test at Sepang.

"Marc needs no presentation, for his actions speak louder than words. For Jorge, we want to welcome him in the team, and we are sure that the fact he accepted this challenge proves he is a true champion." Honda Racing Corporation director Tetsuhiro Kuwata said.

Also present were former Honda 500cc riders Mick Doohan and Alex Criville, who were part of its line-up in its first year with Repsol, in which Doohan became champion.

The 2019 bikes again feature prominent branding for backer Red Bull, marking a first for Lorenzo, who has previously represented rival energy drink companies Rockstar and Monster.

In addition to Marquez's crown, Honda will be defending its teams' and manufacturers' titles in a 19-race campaign that will kick off in Qatar on March 10.

## Vonn Best Ever Skier, Says Miller

LONDON (Reuters) - Lindsey Vonn will end her career as the greatest Alpine ski racer of all time but might one day be usurped by fellow American Mikaela Shiffrin, according to Bode Miller.

Vonn is considering ending her career before next month's world championships in Are, Sweden with a succession of knee injuries having taken a toll on the 34-year-old.

But even if the former Olympic downhill champion falls just short of Swedish slalom specialist Ingemar Stenmark's long-standing record of 86 World Cup wins, former team mate Miller says she should be regarded as the best ever.

Vonn has 82 World Cup victories to her name.

"In my opinion she is at the very top. You can make a lot of different cases for a lot of different athletes and her case is strong," four-time world champion Miller, who will be analyzing the Are championships for broadcaster Eurosport, said.

"She has a lot of check marks that put her at the very, very top. Stenmark lived in a different era, it wasn't the modern era and he never



FILE PHOTO: Lindsey Vonn of the U.S. competes in Pyeongchang Winter Olympics Pyeongchang, South Korea - February 22, 2018.

had to deal with the things Lindsey had to deal with throughout her career.

"Even just the number of races he had in a season was different to Lindsey, so in my opinion she is at the top."

Stenmark's victories all came in slalom and giant slalom whereas Vonn, while a speed specialist, is one of six women to have won World Cup races in all five disciplines.

Shiffrin is predicted to be face of the world championships after a season of domination in the World Cup.

Last weekend she won the Cortina super-G shortly after Vonn failed to finish the race.

Still only 23, Shiffrin already has 54 World Cup wins, tying her in sixth place on the all-time list with Austrian great Hermann Maier. She has 11 wins this season alone.