

Iran's Esteghlal Held, Persepolis Lose at AFC Champions League

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – UAE's Al Ain fought back to earn a late 1-1 draw against Iran's Esteghlal, and Qatar's Al Sadd win Iran's Persepolis 1-0 in their Group D clash on Matchday of the 2019 AFC Champions League on Tuesday at Azadi Stadium.

Al Ain started the second half on the front foot, and the woodwork played its part in keeping the game goalless.

Just two minutes after the restart, Mohammed Khalfan exchanged a one-two with Amer Abdulrahman from the corner and the former advanced deep into the penalty box before hitting the crossbar with a left-footed effort.

Farshid Esmaili showed what he is capable of, going on a slaloming run from the right to skip past three defenders and try to finish from a narrow angle, but Khaled Eisa made an athletic save at the near post to tip it behind for the corner.

The 53rd minute set-piece would finally break the deadlock. Patosi's out-swinging cross was nodded home by Bagheri to the joy of the home fans as Esteghlal took the lead.

The host controlled the rhythm of play for the bulk of the second half and could have added a second goal



in the 76th minute.

Al Ain piled the pressure in the final 10 minutes in pursuit of the equalizer which it got in the 87th minute through Tsukasa Shiotani.

Yaslam's cross from a free-kick was not dealt with properly by the Iranian defense and Shiotani pounced on the loose ball to fire home with his left foot from inside the box.

Both teams head to Doha for Matchday Three. Esteghlal will face Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal on April 8, while Al Ain play Al Duhail on the same day.

And also, Baghdad Bounedjah netted a dramatic late winner to give Qatar's Al Sadd a 1-0 win over

Iran's Persepolis.

Both sides were looking for their first win of the competition, and that attacking intent resulted in end-to-end action early on. Persepolis was unlucky not to score in the ninth minute after somehow failing to tap the ball in during a goalmouth scramble.

Al Sadd's Akram Afif then saw his curling effort take a deflection and miss the goal by inches. Over at the other end, Al Sadd goalkeeper Saad Al Sheeb produced a stunning reflex save to deny Ahmed Noorollahi.

In the 35th minute, Bounedjah had a give-and-go with Afif but failed to direct his header away

from the hands of Persepolis custodian Alireza Beiranvand. Ali Alipour then stole the ball off Pedro Miguel and had a go at goal but saw his shot go wide.

At the stroke of half-time, Al Sadd had the ball in the net after Bounedjah nodded in from close range but the assistant referee ruled the effort out for offside.

The host upped the tempo as the second half kicked off, producing a flurry of chances to keep Beiranvand busy. The Iranian international came up with two excellent saves to keep out Bounedjah in the 50th and 58th minutes.

In the 78th minute, right after Al Sadd had a penalty appeal waved away, Persepolis broke away on the counter which ended in Al Sheeb keeping out Bashar Resan's shot.

In the 88th minute, Alipour could score a winner for Persepolis but missed his excellent chance.

Bounedjah struck the winner for Al Sadd in the stoppage time after nodding in Hassan's headed pass across the goalmouth.

Al Sadd will now travel to Tashkent to face Pakhtakor on Matchday Three while Persepolis will lock horns with Al Ahli in Dubai.

Manchester City Punch Schalke 7-0

MANCHESTER (dispatches) - Manchester City have tied the record for the biggest win in the last 16 of the Champions League by thrashing Schalke 7-0, completing a 10-2 aggregate victory to reach the quarter-finals for the third time in four seasons.

This season's round of 16 has featured some memorable comebacks so far – notably by Ajax and Manchester United – but Schalke's chances of overturning a 3-2 first-leg deficit virtually disappeared when Sergio Aguero chipped home a 35th-minute penalty to make it 1-0 in the second leg.

Aguero doubled the lead three minutes later, Leroy Sane rolled in another goal before halftime, before Raheem Sterling, Bernardo Silva, Phil Foden and Gabriel Jesus added second-half goals for City against the demoralized visitors from Germany.

It equaled the 7-0 wins recorded by Bayern Munich against Basel (2012) and Shakhtar Donetsk (2015). The latter was achieved when City manager Pep Guardiola was coach at Bayern.

With two months left of the season, a quadruple of trophies remains on for City, which has already won the English League Cup, is top of the Premier League, and plays second-tier Swansea in the FA Cup quarter-finals on Saturday.

Winning the Champions League for the first time will be the toughest task but City's chances have improved with Paris Saint-Germain and titleholder Real Madrid getting eliminated at the last-16 stage.

City joined United, Tottenham, Porto and Ajax in the quarter-finals and also Juventus, which beat Atletico 3-0 on Tuesday thanks to a hat trick from Cristiano Ronaldo.

Djokovic Beaten by Philipp Kohlschreiber in Third Round



Novak Djokovic smashed his racquet during his defeat by Philipp Kohlschreiber

LONDON (Dispatches) - World number one Novak Djokovic was knocked out of the BNP Paribas Open in the third round by Philipp Kohlschreiber at Indian Wells.

The Serb, who currently holds three of the four Grand Slam titles, was beaten 6-4 6-4 by the German world number 39.

Djokovic broke his racquet in anger after Kohlschreiber - who had lost his past seven matches against the 31-year-old - took the first set.

Britain's Kyle Edmund beat Radu

Albot 6-3 6-3 to reach the last 16. He will face Roger Federer, who defeated fellow Swiss Stan Wawrinka 6-3 6-4 to reach the fourth round.

The match between Djokovic and Kohlschreiber began on Monday but was delayed until Tuesday because of heavy rain.

Kohlschreiber won 72% of first-serve points and saved four of five break points as he closed out victory.

He will play French 18th seed Gael Monfils in the fourth round.

James Scores 36, Lakers End 5-Game Skid by Beating Bulls

CHICAGO (Dispatches) — LeBron James had 36 points and 10 rebounds, and the Los Angeles Lakers overcame a 20-point deficit to beat the Chicago Bulls 123-107 on Tuesday night and end a five-game losing streak.

James played 33 minutes and showed no signs of letting up with the Lakers barely hanging on in the playoff race. He took over after the Lakers' 14-point lead was cut to four with 8:38 left, making a jumper and then on the next possession going through the lane for a thunderous dunk.

James didn't stop there,



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James (center) dunks in front of Chicago Bulls guard Antonio Blakeney (right) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Chicago, March 12, 2019.

hitting a 3-pointer over 7-footer Robin Lopez and capping it off when Josh Hart passed the ball off the backboard to James, who finished with a reverse dunk to put the Lakers up 115-101 with 5 minutes remaining.

Kyle Kuzma added 21 points after missing two games with an ankle injury. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 24 points off the bench for the Lakers, who outscored the Bulls 43-24 in the third quarter.

Lopez had 20 points and seven rebounds, and Otto Porter Jr. finished with 19 for the Bulls.

Japan May Admit North Korean Athletes for Games - Kyodo

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan will consider allowing North Korean athletes into the country to compete in the 2020 Olympics despite sanctions currently banning any from entering Japan, their Olympics minister said on Wednesday.

North Korean athletes took part in the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics

held in neighboring South Korea, with the two nations fielding a unified team in women's ice hockey and one pair of North Korean figure skaters qualifying. International Olympic Committee (IOC) head Thomas Bach has said the IOC is committed to promoting Korean peace efforts.

North and South Korea have told the

IOC they would like to march together in Tokyo, and have also officially requested to enter joint teams in the qualifying process for four sports - women's basketball, women's hockey, the judo mixed team event and some men's and women's rowing teams.

Japanese Olympics minister Yoshitaka Sakurada told parliament

on Wednesday that the government will review allowing athletes from the North to take part, Kyodo news agency said.

"The Olympics and Paralympics is the world's largest peace event, and it is desirable to have as many participants as possible," Sakurada was quoted as saying.

Ronaldo Nets Hat Trick to Send Juventus Into CL Quarters

MADRID (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo has scored his first hat trick for Juventus to send the club into the Champions League quarter-finals with a 3-0 win over Atletico Madrid as the Italian side fought back from a two-goal first-leg defeat.

Ronaldo netted from open play in each half and then converted a late penalty as Juventus advanced 3-2 on aggregate, ending Atletico's hopes of reaching the final in its Wanda Metropolitan Stadium.

It was Ronaldo's eighth hat trick in the competition, moving him level with Barcelona's Lionel Messi and demonstrating why Juventus paid Real Madrid €112-million (then \$131.5-million) for the Portugal star who has dominated the competition in recent years.

Ronaldo is looking for a fourth straight Champions League title, while Madrid was eliminated without him by Ajax last week.

Manchester City is also through to the final eight after

routing Schalke 7-0 to progress 10-2 on aggregate.

Juventus thought it had taken the lead less than three minutes into the game but VAR confirmed that Ronaldo had fouled Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak before Giorgio Chiellini fired in the rebound.

Italy forward Federico Bernardeschi was handed a start instead of Paulo Dybala for Juventus, and he responded by putting in a cross from the left for Ronaldo to head in at the far post in the 27th minute. Bernardeschi also had several chances to extend Juve's lead – notably with an audacious overhead kick in the 35th minute which flew narrowly over.

Ronaldo went close again shortly before halftime when he again outjumped everyone but headed Leonardo Spinazzola's cross wide of the right post.

Ronaldo did get the second goal three minutes after the break. Joao Cancelo put in a cross from the right and although Oblak clawed Ronaldo's header out from under his crossbar, goal-line technology

confirmed the ball had crossed the line.

Juventus went all out attack and got the decisive third goal four minutes from time. Bernardeschi was nudged over in the penalty area and Ronaldo converted the resulting spot kick to send the home fans wild.

Juventus shares soared more than 20 percent on Wednesday after Cristiano Ronaldo scored a hat-trick to overturn a two-goal deficit and defeat Atletico Madrid in a key Champions League match.

The victory on Tuesday night put the Turin-based club through to the quarter finals of the competition, qualifying the Italian champions for about 10.5 million euros (9 million pounds) in additional payments.

The cash would be on top of the 9.5 million euros the Italian club received for reaching the last 16.

Juventus are controlled by Exor, the investment holding of Italy's Agnelli family, which owns nearly 64 percent of the soccer team.



Sam Bennett (R) celebrates as he crosses the finish line ahead of Australia's Caleb Ewan (L) and Netherlands' Fabio Jakobsen.

MOULINS, France (AFP) - Irishman Sam Bennett of the Bora team emerged victorious from an epic sprint finish on a long home straight at Moulins/Yzeure on Tuesday's stage three of the Paris-Nice cycling race.

Winner of the past two stages, flying Dutchman Dylan Groenewegen looked to be on his way to a third straight victory and while ultimately he could not keep

pace with Bennett, the Jumbo rider kept the overall leader's yellow jersey.

Fabio Jakobsen was third ahead of Briton Dan McLay in fourth with French sprinter Bryan Coquard fifth.

Bennett came to prominence at last season's Giro where he won three stages and the powerful Bora man was unstoppable once in front, leaving Australia's Caleb Ewan grimacing in second.