

# Carlos Queiroz Slams Nike, Wants Apology Over World Cup Boots Snub

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -Head coach of the Iran men's national football team Carlos Queiroz has demanded a formal apology from American sportswear manufacturer Nike over its decision to withdraw supply of boots to Iranian footballers ahead of the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

The 65-year-old Portuguese described Nike's statement not to provide the Iranian side, nicknamed Team Melli, with the footwear as unnecessary, and asked the world's soccer governing body to intervene and help.

"It has been a source of inspiration for us. This last comment of Nike was, in my personal view, an unnecessary statement. Everybody is aware about the sanctions" Queiroz told Sky Sports television network.

He added, "They should come out and apologize because this arrogant conduct against 23 boys is absolutely ridiculous and unnecessary."

"U.S. sanctions mean that, as a U.S. company, Nike cannot supply shoes to players in the Iranian national team at this time. Sanctions applicable to Nike have been in place for many years and are enforceable by law," Nike had said in a statement published by ESPN sports television network.

Nike's decision comes despite the fact that it had been supplying Team Melli previously,



Head coach of the Iran men's national football team Carlos Queiroz

including at the 2014 FIFA World Cup when similar sanctions were in place.

During the official 2018 FIFA World Cup draw ceremony at Kremlin State Palace in the Russian capital city of Moscow on December

1 last year, Team Melli joined the Portugal national football team, nicknamed A Seleção, Spain's La Furia Roja and Atlas Lions of Morocco in the preliminary round of the tournament.

## Spain Fire Lopetegui Two Days Before World Cup Debut, Hierro Takes Charge

KRASNODAR, Russia (Reuters) - Spain coach Julen Lopetegui was sensationally sacked on Wednesday, two days before their opening World Cup match, for failing to tell his federation about his move to Real Madrid after the tournament and replaced by Fernando Hierro.

Former Spain defender Hierro's only previous senior coaching role was one season with Oviedo in the Spanish second division, although he was also assistant to Carlo Ancelotti at Real Madrid before that.

The 50-year-old will have barely 48 hours to prepare his team for their opening World Cup match against neighbors



Spain fires coach Lopetegui 2 days before World Cup opener

and bitter rivals Portugal in Sochi on Friday.

Real unexpectedly announced

on Tuesday that Lopetegui, who had only recently extended his contract with Spain and was

unbeaten in his 20 games in charge, would take over next season.

In announcing one of the most extraordinary coach sackings in World Cup history, Spanish football federation (RFEF) president Luis Rubiales said he had found out about the move five minutes before it was announced by the Champions League winners.

"The coach, while he is a RFEF employee cannot do things in this way. I found out with a phone call five minutes before the official announcement. We feel obliged to take this decision," Rubiales told a news conference at the team base in Krasnodar.

## Over 1,200 British 'Thugs' Stopped From Going to World Cup

LONDON (Dispatches) - More than 1,200 people banned from attending football matches have surrendered their passports ahead of the World Cup, the Home Office says.

Of 1,312 individuals with football banning orders, 1,254 have given up their documents before the tournament in Russia, which starts on 14 June.

Police say they will continue working to trace the remaining 58.

Police minister Nick Hurd said the action would ensure "thugs" would not "ruin the tournament for real fans".

About 10,000 people from the UK are expected to travel to

Russia for the World Cup.

In March, English police had to reassure Russian authorities only "genuine fans" would make the journey, after more than 100 supporters were arrested when England played the Netherlands in Amsterdam.

There were also violent clashes between Russia and England supporters when the two countries played each other in Marseille at Euro 2016.

As well as the banning orders, police will be deployed at major UK ports during the World Cup to stop known troublemakers from travelling to Russia.

A delegation from the UK will



travel to the country to work with their police counterparts during the tournament.

Football banning orders are imposed by courts and can last for

up to 10 years.

There are 327 banned individuals who do not hold passports and they are not required to report to police.

## U.S., Mexico, Canada to Host 2026 World Cup



Sunil Gulati President of United States Soccer Federation (C) poses for a picture next to Victor Montagliani CONCACAF President (L) and Decio de Maria President of the Mexican Football Federation (R) after announcing the next soccer 2026 World Cup.

MOSCOW (AFP) - The United States, Mexico and Canada won the right to host the 2026 World Cup after easily beating Morocco in a vote by FIFA member nations on Wednesday.

The joint North American bid received 134 of the 203 votes, while Morocco polled 65 in the ballot at a FIFA Congress held in Moscow on the eve of the 2018 World Cup.

Global football's showpiece event will return to the North American continent for the first time since 1994 when the United States hosted the tournament.

Bid leader Carlos Cordeiro said his team was "humbled by the trust our colleagues in the FIFA family have put in our bid" and his tournament had an opportunity to put football "on a new and sustainable path for generations to come."

It will be the first World Cup to

be expanded to 48 teams, posing an enormous logistical challenge for the hosts.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino was believed to have strongly backed the North American bid behind the scenes because the trio of countries involved backed him in 2016 when he took over after the corruption-tainted reign of Sepp Blatter.

Delegates had been faced with a clear choice in the 2026 vote.

The joint North American bid boasted modern, established stadiums and well-developed transport links underpinned by Mexican football fervor.

Morocco, on the other hand, promised a "European" World Cup in Africa, playing on its proximity to Europe and an appeal to take the tournament back to the African continent for just the second time.

## Hearn Calls Wilder's Bluff on Joshua Title Fight



LONDON (AFP) - American Deontay Wilder will have a contract in front of him by the end of this week for a world heavyweight unification bout with Britain's Anthony Joshua, the latter's promoter Eddie Hearn said Tuesday.

Hearn told Sky Sports News it is the only way to find out if the WBC titleholder Wilder is serious about fighting Joshua even though reports out of the United States on Monday suggested he had accepted a two fight deal with the 2012 Olympic champion and now holder of the WBA, WBO and IBF belts.

Complicating matters is that Joshua is already due to take on WBA mandatory challenger Alexander Povetkin.

If the fight is confirmed, it will be the biggest bout seen in the division in years.

The winner of a Joshua-Wilder bout would be the first man to hold all four heavyweight titles -- WBA, WBC, IBF and WBO -- simultaneously.

"The fact that we've lost four weeks waiting for an answer from Deontay Wilder makes a fight happening in 11 or 12 weeks of this magnitude unlikely," Hearn said.

## Saudi Loan Plan in Spain Ends in Fiasco

MADRID (AFP) - Nine Saudi players loaned to Spanish clubs to improve their level before the World Cup left without hardly playing in what ended up as a "fiasco".

"Adapting is difficult," said David Cobeno, sporting director at Madrid-based second division side Rayo Vallecano, which signed 24-year-old Saudi midfielder Abdulmajeed Al-Sulayhem.

"Everything outside of sports, the language, food, the city, that was what

was hardest for him," he said.

Al-Sulayhem, who only speaks Arabic, needed to be accompanied at all times by a translator, even during training. He never played in an official match.

A scenario was played out at six other Spanish clubs which took on one or two Saudi players during the winter transfer window under an agreement between La Liga and the Saudi sports authority.

The cost of the loans was split between the participating Spanish and Saudi clubs.



Saudi midfielder Salem Al-Dawsari only played a few minutes while on loan to Spanish club Villarreal

Saudi winger Salem Al-Dawsari, who was on loan at Villarreal in Spain's top-flight, and striker Fahad Al-Muwallad who went to Levante, only played for a few minutes at the end of the season when their teams' fate was already decided.

Attacking midfielder Yahia Al-Sheri, who went to Leganes, never played in a match.

In the second division none of the four clubs that received a Saudi -- Sporting Gijon, Valladolid, Numancia and Rayo Vallecano -- used them in a match.

"From a sporting point of view, this is perhaps the biggest fiasco of the agreement, because the participation of these nine players has been practically negligible," former Gijon president and University of Oviedo football economist Placido Rodriguez told AFP.

"Knowing training techniques or playing with Spaniards, that is not why they come, clearly. They come for more than that, to contribute, to experience another rhythm of play, and that is done by playing, not training."