

FIFA Won't Be Bound by Politics Over Sharing Qatar WC

DOHA, Qatar (Dispatches) - Political tensions won't prevent FIFA from deciding whether to place some World Cup games outside Qatar, the head of world soccer's governing body said Thursday.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino used a summit of soccer nations in Qatar to gather support for his mission to add 16 teams to the 2022 tournament - a move that would require the tiny, energy-rich nation sharing games in the region. That would be complicated by Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt cutting ties with Qatar in 2017 in an ongoing political dispute that



FIFA president Gianni Infantino speaks during a news conference in Doha, Qatar December 13, 2018.

prevents flights between Doha and the boycotting countries.

Qatar won a vote in 2010 to host the World Cup with 32 teams and is only building eight stadiums. A 48-team tournament is already planned for 2026 in the United States, Canada and Mexico, but Infantino wants to fast-track that expansion and add 16 more games for the first World Cup in the Middle East.

"Is it feasible to do it only in Qatar? Difficult probably," Infantino said. "Is it feasible to have a few games being played in neighboring countries? Well, maybe this is an option, of course."

Harden's 50-Point Triple-Double Leads Rockets Over Lakers

HOUSTON (AP) - The Houston Rockets were clinging to a lead over the Los Angeles Lakers in the fourth quarter on Thursday night when James Harden told coach Mike D'Antoni he needed to come out for a bit to rest - something the reigning MVP never does.

D'Antoni was perfectly happy to fulfill Harden's request, and the move could not have worked better for the Rockets.

Harden returned with about five minutes left to take over the game, scoring 11 points during a big run to cap a 50-point, 10-rebound and 11-assist night in a 126-111 victory.

"You play 45, 46 minutes, it's difficult on anybody in this league," Harden said. "The guys are so talented and great, so that little period that I had to rest, came back in re-energized and ready to make good plays."

Chris Paul was surprised when Harden asked for the break.

Harden grabbed his 10th rebound with less than 90 seconds left to give him his second triple-double this season and the 37th of his career.

LeBron James finished with 29 points for the Lakers, who had won their previous two games.

James was unhappy that the Lakers sent Harden to the line 19 times, where he only missed once.

Houston's lead was three after



James Harden #13 of the Houston Rockets drives to basket between Tyson Chandler #5 of the Los Angeles Lakers and Josh Hart #3 during the second quarter at Toyota Center on December 13, 2018 in Houston, Texas.

Kyle Kuzma's soaring dunk, but Harden was fouled on a 3-pointer and made all three free throws to make it 112-106.

Harden then made 3-pointers on consecutive possessions to push the lead to 12 and cause Lakers coach Luke Walton to call a timeout. James was in Harden's face on the second one and Harden fell to the court as the ball rolled around the rim for a couple of seconds before dropping in.

James added a dunk before Clint Capela and Harden made consecutive baskets to compete the 13-2 run and make it 122-108.

French League Postpones Five More Games Following Protests

week in a row, Ligue 1 said.

Paris St Germain's match at Dijon on Saturday is among those postponed, along with Amiens' match against Angers and Nantes' game against Montpellier.

On Sunday, games between Olympique de Marseille and Girondins de Bordeaux and Guingamp against Stade Rennais have also been postponed.

"In the wake of continued security concerns, the Ligue 1 Conforama Week 18 matches that were set to be played in Dijon, Nantes, Amiens, Guingamp and Marseille this weekend

have been postponed, while the matches in Nice and Caen have been moved," Ligue 1 said in a statement.

The Caen v Toulouse clash will now take place on Tuesday, Dec. 18 while the Nice v St Etienne game has been rescheduled for Sunday, Dec. 16 in a bid to avoid a fixture backlog.

The French league takes a winter break between Dec. 22 and Jan. 12.

Six of last weekend's 10 fixtures were called off ahead of a weekend of protests across the country against rising living costs and liberal economic reforms.



PARIS (Reuters) - Five top-flight French soccer matches have been postponed this weekend due to

security concerns following anti-government protests, depleting the league program for the second

UEFA Fines Milan \$13mn, Threatens 1-Year European Ban

NYON, Switzerland (AP) — AC Milan was fined 12 million euros (\$13.6 million) by UEFA on Friday and threatened with a one-season ban from European competition for breaking financial fair play rules.

UEFA said its club finance panel ruled the ban will be activated if Milan fails to break even on soccer-related business in June 2021. If Milan fails to comply, it will be banned for the next UEFA competition it qualifies for in either of the 2022-23 or 2023-24 seasons.

The decision was announced the day after Milan was eliminated from the Europa League in the group stage. The 12 million euros (\$13.6 million) will be deducted from its prize money.

The fine is one of the biggest imposed by UEFA since financial fair play sanctions began in 2014. Then, Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain had 20 million euros (\$22.6 million) withheld from their Champions League prize money.

UEFA originally banned Milan from the Europa League in June for violations of rules monitoring spending on player transfers and wages up to 2017. The club also spent heavily in an offseason spending spree that year.

Milan was reinstated within weeks by the Court of Arbitration for Sport, which sent the case back to UEFA for a fairer punishment.

The court said an immediate ban had been too harsh given the club's new business plan after a takeover by U.S.-based hedge fund Elliott Management.

Elliott took control of Milan

in June after former owner Li Yonghong missed a deadline to repay part of a loan worth more than 300 million euros (\$350 million) from the hedge fund. Elliott repossessed the holding company in Luxembourg that Li used to buy Milan.

For 2017-18, Milan spent more than 200 million euros (then nearly \$250 million) on new players. That was despite questions over the financial stability of the Chinese-led consortium that paid \$800 million to buy the club from former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi in April 2017.

CSKA Moscow Thrash Real Madrid in Historic Champions League Victory



CSKA Moscow are the first team to score 3+ goals against Real Madrid at the Bernabéu in all competitions this season.

MADRID (Dispatches) - The Russian underdogs won their home UCL group stage match against the Spanish giants back in October, but the latest victory over Real Madrid, a 3-0 thrashing at the Bernabeu, was nevertheless still a shock result.

CSKA Moscow enjoyed yet another triumph over La Liga heavyweights Real Madrid in the UEFA Champions League (UCL) group stage - this time a 3-0 thrashing away from home.

After failing to capitalize on several chances in the early stages of the game, Los Blancos conceded two goals in quick session before half time, and Icelandic midfielder Arnór Sigurðsson sealed the win, scoring CSKA's third goal in the 73rd minute.

The result makes the Moscow-based club, who currently sit third in the Russian Premier League on 30 points, the first team to beat Real both home and away in the Champions League group stage.

Djokovic, Halep Honored by ITF as World Champions



Serbia's Novak Djokovic returns against Germany's Alexander Zverev during their men's singles final match on day eight of the ATP World Tour Finals tennis tournament at the O2 Arena in London on Nov 18, 2018.

LONDON (AP) - Novak Djokovic and Simona Halep were named the 2018 World Champions by the International Tennis Federation on Thursday after each won Grand Slam titles and finished the year atop the world rankings.

Djokovic, recognized by the ITF for the sixth time, won the Wimbledon and U.S. Open titles a year after undergoing surgery on his right elbow.

Halep, who won the French Open in June, earned the honor for the first time despite being unable to compete at the WTA Finals because of a back injury.

U.S. Relay Teams Set Short Course World Records

HANGZHOU, China (AP) - The United States has set a world record in the 4x50-meter mixed freestyle at the world short-course swimming championships.

The U.S. team of Caeleb Dressel, Ryan Held, Mallory Comerford and Kelsi Dahlia won in 1 minute, 27.89 seconds, ahead of the Netherlands and Russia.

The Americans beat the previous

world record of 1:28.39 set by the Netherlands in Copenhagen in 2011.

Dahlia and Comerford also helped the U.S. set a world record in the women's 4x50 medley, combining with Olivia Smoliga and Katie Meili for a time of 1:42.38. China was second with the Netherlands third.

The previous record of 1:43.27 was set by the U.S. in Canada in 2016.

Wimbledon Set for Huge Expansion

LONDON (AFP) - Wimbledon's expansion plans have taken a huge step forward after the neighboring golf club in London voted to sell its land.

The All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC) made an offer, reported to be £65 million (\$82 million), to buy Wimbledon Park Golf Club's land

in a move that would see its estate roughly triple in size.

On Thursday, the All England club announced a vote had gone in its favor, and that the transfer, pending court approval, would go through on December 21.

A statement said it was "an important and exciting step" for the

club and the future of Wimbledon.

"The decision of the Wimbledon Park Golf Club members to vote in favor of the acquisition offer is a hugely significant moment for the AELTC and the Championships," said All England club chairman Philip Brook.

"We have achieved what we set

out to do many months ago in having certainty in our planning for the future."

Top of the wish list will be moving the Wimbledon qualifiers from their current Roehampton home to the main Wimbledon site, in keeping with the other three Grand Slam events.