

Kish Island to Host Asia Beach Rugby Championship

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran's Kish Island in the Persian Gulf has been chosen to host the inaugural edition of Asia Beach Rugby Championship.

The exact date of the competition is yet to be announced.

Asia Rugby president Qais Abdulla Al Dhalai has praised the Iranian federation for the development of sporting infrastructure in the country.

Rugby returned to the Olympic program at Rio 2016, when the sevens format provided a captivating showcase for this energetic and thrilling team sport.

Rugby's roots can be traced back to the sport of football as it was played in English public schools during the 19th century.

Iran became a fully fledged member of the International Rugby Board in November 2010.

Jahanbakhsh Shortlisted for Goal of Month Prize



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Brighton winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh has been confirmed as a contender for the Premier League goal of the month prize for January.

His spectacular overhead kick on New Year's Day against Chelsea is one of eight goals shortlisted.

The list also includes Richarlison's well-taken winner against the Seagulls for Everton.

Other contenders are James Maddison and Hamza Choudhury (both Leicester at Newcastle), Sebastien Haller (West Ham v Bournemouth), Nathan Redmond (Southampton at Crystal Palace), Jay Rodriguez (Burnley at Manchester United) and Raul Jimenez (Wolves v Liverpool).

The winner is partly decided by a fans' poll. Votes can be cast at premierleague.com.

Blazers Top Lakers on Tribute Night for Bryant

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Kobe Bryant's resonant voice echoed through the darkened Staples Center while images from his life and career flickered on the scoreboard above.

LeBron James' heartfelt pregame speech honoring his friend then left Lakers fans and players alike cheering through tears.

The Lakers and the Portland Trail Blazers somehow had to play a basketball game after a wrenching pregame ceremony honoring Bryant and the other eight victims of the helicopter crash just five days earlier.

And Damian Lillard gave a performance that nudged aside the basketball world's collective heartbreak for just a moment.

Lillard scored 48 points and the Trail Blazers beat Los Angeles 127-119 on Friday night in the Lakers' first game since Bryant, his 13-year-old daughter Gianna and seven others died in a helicopter crash.

Lillard hit seven 3-pointers and added 10 assists and nine rebounds in an inspired effort that sent the Blazers to a win over



Los Angeles Lakers forward Anthony Davis, top, blocks a shot by Portland Trail Blazers guard Damian Lillard during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Los Angeles, Friday, Jan. 31, 2020.

an opponent still dealing with the trauma of the crash that claimed the life of their franchise icon.

"I think everybody was emotional tonight," said James, who played in two Olympics alongside Bryant. "We all have our individual reasons why emotion hits us, and then we all have this brotherhood and this family, being a part of this Laker organization, which automatically brings in even more emotion."

Both teams stood on the court during a poignant pregame tribute

to Bryant including songs, Kobe highlights and James' speech, which captivated the arena.

"So in the words of Kobe Bryant, 'Mamba out,'" James told the crowd. "But in the words of us, 'not forgotten.' Live on, brother."

Highlights of Bryant's career played during every break, but Lillard put on a show between the whistles.

Lillard's seven 3-pointers gave him 40 in his last five games, setting an NBA record. But even the Blazers star knew results were

secondary on this unique evening.

James had 22 points, 10 assists and eight rebounds, and Anthony Davis had 37 points and 15 boards in the Lakers' first game since last Saturday.

Hassan Whiteside scored 30 points, and C.J. McCollum added 19 for the Blazers, who were playing their third game since Bryant's death, which seems to have affected practically everyone who picked up a basketball in the past quarter-century.

The entire evening was likely both profoundly painful and cathartic for anyone who loves the Lakers or Bryant, who won five championships while playing his entire 20-year NBA career in purple and gold.

Bryant retired in 2016, but he remained a face of his only franchise and an inspiration to the current players, who learned about his death on their plane ride home from an East Coast road trip. Their next game against the Clippers was postponed, and the Lakers franchise persevered through a brutal week of coping with the loss.

Leicester, Chelsea Share Spoils in Thriller



Chelsea's Antonio Rudiger (2L) celebrates scoring against Leicester

LEICESTER, (AFP) - Antonio Rudiger rescued Chelsea as the German defender's second goal of the game earned a 2-2 draw against top-four rivals Leicester on Saturday.

Rudiger put Chelsea ahead early in the second half at the King Power Stadium before Harvey Barnes and Ben Chilwell scored in quick succession to give Leicester the lead.

A thrilling second half climaxed when Rudiger became the first defender to score a brace for Chelsea in the Premier League since John Terry against Fulham in 2013.

Third-placed Leicester could be more sanguine about the result as they sit eight points clear of fourth-placed Chelsea, who have now won just one of their last five league games.

Frustrated that Chelsea failed to make any signings during the window, Blues boss Frank Lampard claims his team are now underdogs in the race to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top-four finish.

Depending on Manchester

United and Tottenham's results, Lampard's prediction could look prescient by the conclusion of the weekend's action.

Showing his irritation with Chelsea's spluttering form, Lampard dropped Kepa Arrizabalaga after some error-prone displays from Chelsea's keeper, with 38-year-old Willy Caballero making his first league appearance since May.

Chelsea started on the front foot and Tammy Abraham appealed for a penalty when he was challenged by Caglar Soyuncu, but referee Lee Mason and then VAR both rejected the claim.

Jamie Vardy was back from injury but Leicester's 17-goal leading scorer hadn't netted in his last four league games and he wasted a good chance to put the hosts ahead when he burst onto Ayoze Perez's chestdown in the penalty area, only to shoot straight at Caballero.

Pedro went close with a clever chip from the edge of the area which Leicester keeper Kasper Schmeichel tipped over at full stretch.

Infantino Wants Africa Cup Every 4 Years, More Youth WCups

ZURICH (Dispatches) - The Africa Cup of Nations tournament should be played every four years instead of two, FIFA President Gianni Infantino urged the continent's soccer leaders on Saturday.

Infantino said revenue could rise up to six-fold for a four-yearly continental championship, and become a must-see event "not only for Africa but the world." The idea would likely be backed by European clubs who dislike losing their players to national-team duty, and especially in midseason. The 2021 Africa Cup of Nations kicks off in January.

The FIFA president also tempted African officials with the prospect of more entries in an expanded slate of youth World Cups.

Infantino suggested annual under-16 and under-18 tournaments for boys and girls instead of the current under-17 events every two years.

The boys' tournaments could grow from 24 teams to 48 if FIFA's ruling council agrees. Girls' tournaments could grow to 24 teams from 16.

Infantino's comments came in a keynote speech at a conference in Salé, Morocco, on developing soccer in Africa, and closing a widening gap to Europe's dominance of the world game.

Kenin Tops Muguruza at Australian Open

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) -- This, essentially, was where Sofia Kenin was going to win or lose the Australian Open final: She was down love-40 while serving at 2-all in the third set against two-time major champion Garbine Muguruza.

Kenin came through in spectacular fashion. She won the next five points, each with a winner -- one an ace, the others clean groundstrokes to cap exchanges of 11 shots or more.

The American wouldn't lose another game on her way to earning a Grand Slam title at age 21.

Demonstrative as can be -- whether spiking a ball, dropping her red-white-and-blue racket or slapping her thigh -- and at her best when necessary, the 14th-seeded Kenin won the first major final of her career Saturday by coming back to

beat a fading Muguruza 4-6, 6-2, 6-2 at Melbourne Park.

"This is my first speech, but I'm going to try my best," Kenin said during the trophy ceremony at Rod Laver Arena, where the retractable roof was shut because of rain much of the day.

"My dream has officially come true," she told the crowd. "Dreams come true. So if you have a dream, go for it, and it's going to come true."

Kenin was so magnificent when it mattered the most, saving 10 of 12 break points she faced, while converting 5 of 6 that she earned.

"I'm not very happy about my performance. ... At the important moments, I didn't find my shots," Muguruza said. "I think she found her shots. I didn't."

Muguruza was visited by a trainer



Sofia Kenin of the U.S. answers questions at a press conference following her win over Spain's Garbine Muguruza in the women's final at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia, Saturday, Feb. 1, 2020.

after the second set and her movement wasn't ideal down the stretch. Nor was her serving: She double-

faulted eight times, including three in the last game, one on championship point.