

Dragan Skocic Named Iran National Football Team Coach



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TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Dragan Skocic has been officially appointed as Team Melli's new head coach, following the departure of Mark Wilmots.

Skocic, who had recently parted ways with Iranian club Sanat Naft Abadan, took the helm of Iran's National Team on Thursday.

The 51-year-old Croatian replaced Wilmots after the Belgian re-signed from the post in December.

Skocic will start his tenure as Manager of Iran in the 2022 World Cup qualification against Hong Kong on the 26th of March at Azadi Stadium in Tehran, and play Cambodia five days later away from Home.

Iran, are currently third in Group C of the qualifying round on six points, three behind second-placed Bahrain, while Iraq top the group on 11 points.

Persepolis, Esteghlal Share Spoils in Tehran Derby



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Persepolis and Esteghlal football teams settled for a breathtaking 2-2 draw in Iran Professional League (IPL) on Thursday.

In the match held in front of 56,000 spectators at the Azadi Stadium, Arsalan Motahari's deflected strike gave Esteghlal the lead in the 24th minute.

However, the lead lasted just five minutes.

Ali Alipour put the ball into the net for the Reds after receiving a superb pass from Christian Osaguona.

Motahari made a brace in the 52nd minute. Mehdi Ghaedi picked up the ball on the left flank, setting Esteghlal's second

goal and Motahari sent the ball into the roof of the net.

Shortly after, Persepolis put the Blues under pressure and finally leveled the match in the 89th minute.

Anthony Stokes's strike from inside the area was only parried by Esteghlal goalie Hossein Hosseini into the path of substitute Bashar Resan and he equalized the match.

Sepahan also drew 0-0 with Naft Masjed Soleyman in another match.

Persepolis lead the table with 41 points, five points ahead of Sepahan.

Esteghlal are third with 33 points and one game in hand.

Copa del Rey Shocks Continue as Barca and Madrid Knocked Out

BILBAO (AP) - Athletic Club Bilbao and Real Sociedad booked their places in the semifinals of Spain's Copa del Rey on an incredible night of football that saw them knock favorites FC Barcelona and Real Madrid out of the competition.

Inaki Williams' flicked header in the 93rd minute of Athletic's home game against Barcelona saw Athletic through after a tense game which saw them withstand second half pressure from Barca, with home keeper Unai Simon making two key saves from Leo Messi and Antoine Griezmann to keep the scores level.

Williams' header sent the 49,000 fans in the San Mames stadium into wild celebrations and produced the second surprise of



Athletic Bilbao's players celebrate Spanish forward Inaki Williams' goal during the Spanish Copa del Rey (King's Cup) quarter-final football match Athletic Club Bilbao against FC Barcelona at the San Mames stadium in Bilbao on Feb 06, 2020.

the day after Real Sociedad beat Real Madrid 4-3 in the Santiago

Bernabeu Stadium. A 22nd minute goal from Martin

Odegaard, who is on loan from Real Madrid, put Real Sociedad in front, before two quickfire goals from the impressive Alexander Isak in the 54th and 56th minute, the first of which was an impressive volley, made it 3-0.

Marcelo quickly gave Real Madrid a lifeline but Mikel Merino's 69th minute strike re-established Real Sociedad's lead, although late goals from Rodrygo and Nacho Fernandez - the second of which came in the 3rd minute of injury time, meant there were a few nervous moments for the visiting fans before the final celebrations.

Athletic and Real Sociedad join Granada and second division Mirandes in Friday's draw for the last four.

Germany's Bauhaus Claims Saudi Tour Lead With Third-Stage Win



Bauhaus sealed his first stage win of 2020 in Saudi Arabia

RIYADH (AFP) - German Phil Bauhaus grabbed the overall lead of the Saudi Tour on Thursday with victory in a bunch sprint at the end of the third stage in Riyadh.

The 25-year-old was given an excellent lead-out by Bahrain-McLaren teammates Heinrich

Haussler and Mark Cavendish before pipping Reinardt Janse van Rensburg on the line after the 119km ride.

Bauhaus now leads former pacesetter Rui Costa by three seconds in the overall standings with two stages remaining.

Osaka Suffers Shock Loss to World Number 78 in Fed Cup Tie

LONDON (Dispatches) - Former world number one Naomi Osaka suffered a shock 6-0 6-3 loss to Sara Sorribes Tormo as Spain took a 1-0 lead in their Fed Cup tie against Japan.

Osaka lost her opening 10 points on serve as Sorribes Tormo dominated in the opening set of the match at La Manga Club in Murcia.

The Japanese player led 2-0 in the second set, but Sorribes Tormo, ranked 78th in the world, fought back.

The winners will be one of 12 nations in April's new-look Fed Cup Finals.

"We knew Sara could make it very uncomfortable for Naomi and she stuck to the gameplan perfectly," said Spain captain Anabel Medina Garrigues.



Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo celebrates her victory over Japan's Naomi Osaka in the Fed Cup

Great Britain are also trying to book their place in the Fed Cup Finals and they play away in Slovakia this weekend.

Shaheen Helps Pakistan Bowl Bangladesh for 233 in First Test

RAWALPINDI, Pakistan (AFP) - Lanky paceman Shaheen Shah Afridi took four wickets to help Pakistan dismiss Bangladesh for a paltry 233 on the opening day of the first Test in Rawalpindi on Friday.

Shaheen recorded figures of 4-53 in 21.5 overs and was ably assisted by fellow pacer Mohammad Abbas (2-19) and spinner Haris Sohail (2-11) to justify Pakistan's decision to send Bangladesh in to bat on a greenish-yellow Rawalpindi sta-

dium pitch. Pakistan were due to bat for five overs but bad light forced umpires to call it a day.

Bangladesh could have been bowled out for inside 200 had it not been for a defiant display of batting from Mohammad Mithun who top-scored with 63 including seven fours and a six in his 193-minute stand.

Bangladesh were reeling against pace at 161-6 when Mithun added

an invaluable 53 run stand for the seventh wicket with Taijul Islam who made a resolute 24.

It was Sohail who had Islam caught by Yasir Shah before Pakistan wiped off the tail with the second new ball as 16-year-old Naseem Shah ended Mithun's resistance, getting him caught behind.

Shaheen said he was happy to do his part.

Just before tea, Sohail broke a

defiant 54-run stand for the sixth wicket between Liton Das (33) and Mithun as the two led Bangladesh's fightback after the Pakistan bowlers totally dominated the first session.

Sohail had dropped Mithun off a luckless Yasir at wide second slip when the batsman was on 22 but compensated for the lapse with two wickets.

Yasir failed to get a wicket in 22 overs, conceding 83 runs.

Portland Beat San Antonio 125 in NBA

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) -- With the trade deadline past and a playoff race ahead, the Portland Trail Blazers understood the importance of their game against the San Antonio Spurs.

Damian Lillard had 26 points and 10 assists, Hassan Whiteside scored 17 points and tied a season-high with 23 rebounds as the Trail Blazers beat San Antonio 125-117, taking two of three games from the Spurs to claim the season series in matchup with playoff tiebreaker potential.

The Blazers are 2 1/2 games behind the Memphis Grizzlies for the 8th and final playoff spot in the Western Conference. The Spurs are 4 1/2 games back of Memphis.

The Blazers got a major boost off their bench from Gary Trent Jr., who scored 18 points. Trent's points late were important as he hit four 3-pointers and scored 12 points in the fourth quarter as Portland rallied from a 92-86 deficit.

Trent, Lillard says, is giving the Blazers something they need.

"I think he's giving us something to be excited about," Lillard said. "He's been consistent. How he's playing on the defensive end, how he's getting to his spots to be effective and making shots. He's somebody that has to be accounted for, especially on a night like tonight, he came up big for us."

Trent, who barely played as a rookie, has been getting consistent minutes and is shooting nearly 42% from the 3-point line on four attempts per game.

"It's like you belong. I work on everything with my coaches every day, it's just paying off," Trent said.

Trey Lyles had a season-high 23 points and 10 rebounds, DeMar DeRozan added 21 points and LaMarcus Aldridge added 20 points and eight rebounds for the Spurs.

San Antonio built a 10-point lead multiple times in the first half, but Portland stayed within reach



on the strength of the play of Lillard (14 points) and McCollum (11 points), trailing 60-59 at halftime.

While DeRozan struggled from the field (6 for 16), he helped the Spurs with 9-for-9 shooting from the foul line.

A pair of 3-pointers in the third quarter by Carmelo Anthony forced a timeout by the Spurs with 5:23 left in the third as they nursed a 75-74 lead. Anthony kept Portland close, scoring 16 of his 20 points in the second half.

The Blazers also got a 10-point performance off the bench by Anfernee Simons.

While Portland had plenty of contributions, Spurs Gregg Popovich says Portland's success started with Lillard.

"It was a good game, until Damian broke it open with his basketball play," Popovich said. "I mean, you know, he got through the double teams and split pick and rolls and found his teammates and they knocked down shots."

A layup by Caleb Swanigan with 3:16 left in the third quarter gave Portland its first lead since the opening quarter. But that advantage was short-lived as the Spurs closed out the quarter on a 9-0 run for a 92-86 lead after three periods.