

# Sepahan Beat UAE's Al Ain 4-0 in AFC Champions League



DUBAI (Dispatches) - **Sepahan FC of Iran have begun thier 2020 AFC Champions League campaign on high note after easing past UAE's Al Ain 4-0 in Group D at the Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium**

Sepahan took a half-time lead courtesy of Mohammad Mohebbi's header, while goals from Brazilian Kiros, Soroush Rafiei and Mohammad Tayebi sealed an emphatic victory.

Al Ain's first chance came in the

18th minute when Kodjo Laba's right footed shot from outside the box was saved by Sepahan goalie Payam Niazmand.

Laba caused problems for Sepahan again shortly after when the Togolese international came within striking distance from the counter-attack but Shayan Mosleh blocked his goal-bound effort.

Sepahan's hard work paid off handsomely on 38 minutes when Mohebbi rose the highest to nod

home the opener from close range off Saeid Aghaei's cross.

Sepahan, meeting Al Ain for the first time in the competition, tightened their grip a minute after the restart thanks to Kiros' quick feet inside the box when he pounced on an errant back pass to slot the ball past a full stretch Khalid Eisa.

Al Ain, the 2003 AFC Champions League winners, looked out of sorts as they began to give the ball away and fell further behind in the 52nd minute as Aghaei found an unmarked Rafiei, who blasted the ball into the bottom right corner to put Sepahan three goals up.

Sepahan inflicted more damage in the 78th minute through Tayebi's header into the top left corner following Omid Noorafkan's cross.

Sepahan will face Qatar's Al Sadd SC, while Al Ain will be hoping to bounce back against Al Nassr of Saudi Arabia.

In AFC Champions League Group C, Persepolis have kick-started

their 2020 campaign with a 2-nil away-defeat against al-Duhail.

With just five minutes into the match, Almoez Ali's persistence coupled with a lack of discipline from Persepolis defenders allowed Mario Mandzukic to get his first goal in Asia's premier club competition.

Persepolis could have scored the equalizer just four minutes later, only to be denied twice by al-Duhail keeper, Amine Lecomte.

The hosts went up again in the 13th minute, as they capitalized on another defensive mistake. This time it was their Brazilian winger, Edmilson, who fired home from a tight angle to give his team a 2-goal cushion.

With the second half wearing off, Persepolis' chances became more serious, as Anthony Stokes was close to scoring on his continental debut, bit his effort forced a fine save by Lecomte, as al-Duhail held on for the 2-nil victory.

## Harden, Westbrook Help Rockets Beat Celtics 116-105



*Houston Rockets' James Harden (13) drives toward the basket as Boston Celtics' Kemba Walker defends during the first half of an NBA basketball game Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2020, in Houston.*

HOUSTON (AP) — **After James Harden and Russell Westbrook combined for 78 points Tuesday night, Harden was asked just how dangerous this combination can be when it gets rolling.**

Harden scored 42 points, Westbrook had 36 and Houston snapped Boston's seven-game win streak with a 116-105 victory over the Celtics in a game that showcased the Rockets' dynamic small-ball lineup.

Harden had eight rebounds and seven assists and Westbrook finished with 10 rebounds and five assists as the Rockets used a starting lineup without a true center after trading Clint Capela last week.

Houston broke it open with a 15-2 run that made it 116-98 with about two minutes left. Harden scored six points during the decisive stretch, and Danuel House had five.

Boston had two turnovers and missed numerous shots to allow the Rockets to turn the close game into one where D'Antoni cleared the bench for the last minute with the game well in hand.

The Rockets enjoyed a big advantage at the line, going 37 for 42 compared to 20 for 25 for the

Celtics. Harden made 17 of 18 foul shots.

Gordon Hayward had 20 points in Boston's first loss since Jan. 26. Jaylen Brown scored 19, and Jayson Tatum had 15 on 5-for-15 shooting.

Westbrook, who is in his first season in Houston after a trade from Oklahoma City, is excited for the possibilities for this lineup once they have more experience with it.

Harden, who scored 19 points in the third quarter to help Houston take control, picked up his fifth foul with about eight minutes left. But he was able to stay in the game and avoid fouling out.

Robert Covington had 12 points and seven rebounds in his fourth game since he was acquired as part of the four-team trade that sent Capela to the Hawks.

The Rockets were up by seven with about eight minutes left when Harden picked up three fouls in about 30 seconds. The Celtics then closed to 96-94 on Brown's 3-pointer and a dunk by Tatum with 5:40 to go.

But Houston made five straight free throws to push the lead to 101-94 before making the big run to put the game away.

## Tsitsipas Progresses in Rotterdam, Fognini Out

ROTTERDAM (Reuters) - **Second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas clawed his way back from a set and a break down to beat Poland's Hubert Hurkacz 6-7(2) 6-3 6-1 and reach the last-16 of the Rotterdam Open on Tuesday.**

Canadian teenager Felix Auger-Aliassime outlasted Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff to win 6-3 1-6 6-3 and advance, while Italy's Fabio Fognini was upset 6-3 6-3 by Russia's Karen Khachanov.

Tsitsipas reacted well to going 2-0 down in the second set, fighting back strongly to beat Hurkacz, who was celebrating his 23rd birthday.

The Greek big-hitter, who was knocked out in the third round of the Australian Open, has now beaten Hurkacz five times out of six, although this was another close encounter between the



*Second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas*

pair.

Tsitsipas needed a medical timeout to deal with a shoulder problem after making unforced errors in a poor tiebreak, and Hurkacz quickly stole a march in the second set before Tsitsipas launched his comeback.

The world number six broke to go 3-2 up and went on to take the

set in 46 minutes, before dominating in the decisive third.

Auger-Aliassime, 19, who had his breakthrough season last year when he climbed up to 17th in the rankings, nearly threw it away in the second set against Struff when he lost five games in a row before he regained his composure in the final set.

Fognini lost his focus following an argument with the umpire over a call in the second set and the Italian also asked for the trainer's help in strapping up his leg below the knee.

Khachanov sailed through the second set with two breaks of serve and Fognini's unforced error count of 36 only made things easier for the Russian.

Meanwhile, Andrey Rublev knocked out Nikoloz Basilashvili 6-2 6-3 in what was the shortest match of the first round, with the 22-year-old wrapping up the encounter in only 55 minutes after winning 91% of his first serve points.

Rublev's record is 12-1 this year, having won titles in Doha and Adelaide and losing only at the Australian Open in the last-16 to semi-finalist Alexander Zverev.

## Ronaldo, Ibrahimovic Set for Italian Cup Clash



*Cristiano Ronaldo has scored 23 goals in all competitions this season*

MILAN (AFP) - **Cristiano Ronaldo and Zlatan Ibrahimovic are set to go head-to-head in Thursday's Italian Cup semi-final, first leg between Juventus and AC Milan at the San Siro.**

Both Ronaldo and Ibrahimovic scored at the weekend in defeats as Juventus fell 2-1 at Hellas Verona, while AC Milan threw away a two-goal lead in a 4-2 defeat by city rivals Inter.

"It wasn't the result we wanted," said the 35-year-old Ronaldo despite becoming the first Juventus player to score in 10 successive league games, just one game short of the Serie A record.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner has scored 23 goals in all competitions this season.

Ibrahimovic, 38, has scored three goals since returning to Milan last month.

The Swede headed in the second goal on Sunday after setting up the first, but Inter hit back with four second-half strikes.

"I showed that I can still make a difference, even at 38," he said.

But Inter striker Romelu Lukaku will be looking to upstage the two other former Manchester United players against Napoli in the other last-four first leg on Wednesday.

Gennaro Gattuso's Napoli, despite their current slump, ousted holders Lazio in the quarter-finals.

"There's a new king in town," a jubilant Lukaku wrote on Twitter after scoring the fourth goal for Inter in Sunday's derby.

## Vettel Remains Ferrari's First Choice



*Lewis Hamilton continues to be linked with Ferrari, who attempted to play down the speculation on Tuesday.*

BERLIN (Dispatches) - **Sebastian Vettel is still Ferrari's first choice despite rumors linking Mercedes star Lewis Hamilton with a Formula One**

switch, according to team boss Mattia Binotto.

Vettel – who is out of contract at the end of 2020 – was outperformed by Ferrari team-mate Charles Leclerc as Hamilton claimed a sixth F1 world championship last year.

Hamilton is also entering the final year of his deal with Mercedes amid ongoing speculation but Binotto talked up Vettel.

"Seb is our first choice at the moment," said Binotto on Tuesday as Ferrari unveiled their car for the 2020 season.

"Obviously it is something we are

discussing with him and we will continue discussing, but he is certainly our first option, our preference."

Vettel – a four-time world champion – could only manage fifth position in last season's championship, behind winner Hamilton and adrift of fourth-placed team-mate Leclerc.

Asked if Hamilton could be a fall-back option if Vettel moves on, Binotto added: "We are focused on our drivers - and we are considering Seb as our option at the moment."