

Iran Chess Master Among Top 15 in World



Iranian Chess player Sara Sadat Khadem al-Sharieh

TEHRAN (dispatches) - Iranian Chess player Sara Sadat Khadem al-Sharieh who attended Belt and Road Hunan International Open Chess received a grandmaster norm and stood among top 15 players in the world, it was announced on Wednesday.

In the final round of the Belt and Road Hunan International Chess Open, Khadem al-Sharieh received 23 ratings and a grandmaster norm.

Indian rival with 2638 points ranked first, China with 2736 points ranked second and Egyptian player stood on the third place.

The event was held with the attendance of 73 players from 16 countries.

Bale Snubbed Again by Zidane for Madrid Friendly

MADRID (AFP) - Gareth Bale's stand-off with Real Madrid continued on Wednesday after the forward was left out of Zinedine Zidane's squad to face Red Bull Salzburg in a friendly.

Bale has only played in two of Real Madrid's five pre-season games so far, coming on as a substitute against Arsenal and Atletico Madrid, and has now been left out completely for a third fixture in a row.

James Rodriguez and Mariano Diaz, who are both expected to be sold, were also not included for the match in Austria.

Zidane has made clear that Bale is not in his plans as he looks to rejuvenate Real Madrid following their miserable season last term.

The club are keen to sign



Gareth Bale agreed terms with Jiangsu Suning last month but the move was called off by Real Madrid.

Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba, with Tottenham's Christian Eriksen and Ajax youngster Donny van de Beek potential alternatives.

But Madrid first need to raise funds, after already spending around 300 million euros (\$336 million) this summer.

Zidane said last month that Bale being sold would be "best for everyone", while Bale's agent Jonathan Barnett told AFP: "Zidane is a disgrace - he shows no respect for a player that has done so much for Real Madrid."

Bale is in no rush to leave the Santiago Bernabeu, where he has a contract until 2022, worth around 18 million euros a year.

He agreed terms with Chinese Super League club Jiangsu Suning last month but the move was called off after Madrid failed to agree a fee for the 30-year-old.

Bayern Munich retain an interest but any deal would be hugely expensive, making it increasingly likely Bale will remain at Madrid for the start of the La Liga season next weekend.

Record-Signing Hernandez Starts Training at Bayern



Lucas Hernandez had his first squad training session with Bayern on Tuesday.

BERLIN (AFP) - Bayern Munich's record signing Lucas Hernandez took part in his first squad training session on Tuesday, four months after a serious knee operation, the Bundesliga champions reported on their website on Wednesday.

The 23-year-old French World Cup winner has yet to feature for Bayern since his 80 million euro (\$89 million) move from Atletico Madrid in March.

His medical showed damage to the medial collateral ligament in his right knee that required an immediate operation.

Hernandez is unlikely to be ready for the opening game of the season against Hertha Berlin on August 16 but it is good news for his new teammates and manager Niko Kovac.

"I think the most important thing for the time being is that he's properly fit and starts to settle in," German international Leon Goretzka told the Bayern website.

The defender's return coincides with a media broadside aimed at the club by striker Robert Lewandowski who has called on Bayern to bring in at least three new players.

Italy Risk Olympic Exclusion Over New Sports Law -- IOC



Italy risk suspension from the Olympic movement if a proposed new sports law is passed.

LAUSANNE (AFP) - Italy's place at next year's Olympic Games in Tokyo is in danger after the International Olympic Committee (IOC) warned the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) of "serious concerns" about a proposed new sports law.

The letter, which was addressed to CONI president Giovanni Malagò and has been seen by AFP, said the legislation "would clearly affect the autonomy of CONI".

The letter, disclosed Tuesday in the Corriere de la Serra newspaper, recalled the fundamental principles of Olympism whereby membership of the Olympic movement "requires compliance with the Olympic Charter and recognition by the IOC."

James Macleod, director of Olympic Solidarity and NOC Relations, who signed the letter, said the new legislation would not conform to the Olympic charter.

He suggested amendments to the draft decree and emphasized that CONI should not, as the draft law proposes, be reorganized by "unilateral decision from the government."

"CONI should be an autonomous and legally independent organisation governed primarily by the Olympic Charter and its own statutes, within the framework of the applicable laws under which it is legally registered in the country," he said.

Racing Point Will Bounce Back, Says Szafnauer

LONDON (Reuters) - Racing Point principal Otmar Szafnauer says it is only a matter of time before the team, successors to now-defunct Force India, get back to being best of the rest behind Formula One's big three.

If the standings question such optimism, with the Canadian-owned outfit languishing eighth out of 10 going into the August break after 12 of 21 races, the American has plenty of perspective.

He has been to the brink and back, as chief operating officer of a Force India team that punched above their weight to finish fourth in 2016 and 2017 before last year running out of money.

"We'll get there," Szafnauer told Reuters at last weekend's Hungarian Grand Prix. "We have the same people, the same process, even better tools and more funding so it's just a matter of time."

Man City, Liverpool Ready for Heavyweight Premier League Battle



LONDON (AFP) - Manchester City have Premier League immortality in their sights as they start their title defense this weekend, but Liverpool's burning desire to get their hands on the trophy will fuel a heavyweight battle for supremacy.

In the blue corner, treble winners City are at the peak of their powers and look capable of enjoying a period of sustained dominance not seen since Manchester United earned three successive Premier League titles from 2007 to 2009.

But in the red corner, European champions Liverpool, chasing a first English title since 1990, have more than a puncher's chance of ending City's reign after pushing Pep Guardiola's side all the way to the final day last season.

The first blows will be landed this week as Liverpool kick off the new Premier League campaign against promoted Norwich at Anfield on Friday, before City head to West Ham on Saturday.

Sunday's no-holds-barred Community Shield clash showed the growing rivalry between England's pre-eminent teams, with City beating Liverpool on penalties following a 1-1 draw that underlined how little there is to separate the sides.

With five major trophies over the past two seasons -- including Premier League crowns clinched with unprecedented hauls of 100 and then 98 points -- City are the bookmakers' favorites to become only the second club to win a hat-trick of English titles in the past 35 years after United did it twice.

Guardiola is a keen student of football history and has revelled in City's record-breaking feats, so the opportunity to further bolster his team's credentials as one of England's all-time greats will not be lost on the Spaniard.

Although City have never won the Champions League and Guardiola last lifted it back in 2011 with Barcelona, he said domestic bliss remains his preferred passion.

It would be a surprise if Liverpool do not make City sweat right to the finish once again after bouncing back from last season's agonizing near-miss in the title race by winning their sixth European Cup.

No team has ever gathered more points without winning the Premier League than second-placed Liverpool did last season with their tally of 97.

Jürgen Klopp's side lost just once in their 38 league games -- crucially that defeat came against City -- but their 2-0 Champions League final win over Tottenham ensured there was no title hangover.

Liverpool had the Premier League's meanest defense last season and boast an attack featuring two of the campaign's three leading scorers in Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mané.

Despite that wealth of talent, Liverpool midfielder Georginio Wijnaldum admits making a fast start is essential to stop City establishing a stranglehold at the top.

Challengers to City and Liverpool are likely to be thin on the ground.

Uruguay Striker Forlan Announces Retirement

LONDON (Reuters) - Former Uruguay striker Diego Forlan has announced his retirement, bringing to an end a 21-year career in which he played club soccer on three different continents.

Forlan, who started his career in South America with Argentine club Independiente, played for major European teams such as Manchester United, Villarreal, Atletico Madrid and Inter Milan before ending his career in Asia.

Forlan, 40, was also instrumental in Uruguay's run to the 2010 World Cup semi-finals, where he was awarded the Golden Ball for best player at the tournament and finished as one of the tournament's top scorers with five goals.

"After 21 years I made the decision to end my career as a professional footballer," Forlan said in a statement.

"A beautiful stage closes full of great memories and emotions but another of new challenges will begin. Thanks to all who in one way or another accompanied me on this path!"

Forlan won the Premier League and FA Cup with United before moving to Spain where he helped Atletico win the Europa League in 2010 with a double in the final against Fulham



Former Uruguay striker Diego Forlan