

Iran to Take on Iraq in Jordan as Neutral Venue for 2022 World Cup



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iraq Football Association has proposed Jordan to host its 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asia Cup qualifiers, after FIFA requested an alternative venue because of ongoing protests, officials said Wednesday.

Iran had been due to play the two games in Basra — against Iran on November 14 and Bahrain on November 19— but the southern port city has been caught up in the anti-government demonstrations that have swept Baghdad and the south.

“Jordan was chosen to host the matches against Bahrain and Iran,” Abdelkhalq Masud, the head of Iraq’s football federation, told AFP on Wednesday.

The proposal must now be approved by FIFA.

Earlier, the Iraqi federation’s deputy head said FIFA had requested it move the games outside the country.

“FIFA informed us late Tuesday night that we must choose a new

place, an alternative outside Iraq, for the scheduled match with Iran on Wednesday,” Ali Jabbar told AFP.

A statement from FIFA said it had assessed “the current security situation in Iraq” and informed the local federation that upcoming matches “must be played on neutral ground.”

“The Iraqi Football Association has been requested to nominate a neutral venue for the said matches, which is subject to confirmation by FIFA and the AFC,” it said.

Iraq tops its group for Asia Cup qualification with seven points, leading Bahrain on goal difference, while Iran holds third spot with six points.

Hong Kong and Cambodia each have one point.

Man United, Celtic, Sevilla, Basel Progress in Europa League



Manchester United’s English striker Marcus Rashford (R) celebrates scoring their third goal with Manchester United’s English defender Ashley Young (L) during the UEFA Europa League Group L football match between Manchester United and Partizan Belgrade at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on Nov 7, 2019.

BERLIN (AP) – Manchester United, Celtic, and Sevilla all have reached the knockout stages of the Europa League, with Espanyol joining them thanks to a 6-0 rout of nine-man Ludogorets.

Man United defeated Partizan Belgrade 3-0 while Celtic scored a last-gasp winner to beat Lazio 2-1 away.

Ludogorets had Rafael Forster sent off in the 12th minute and Jacek Goralski followed in the 35th, giving Espanyol a clear path to qualify from Group H.

Basel also advanced by beating Getafe 2-1 at home, and Sevilla won 5-2 at Luxembourg champion Dudelange.

United had struggled to score in the Europa League with just two goals from their first three games, but eased into the next round with their win over a hapless Partizan Belgrade side.

Marcus Rashford eluded five Partizan defenders to set up the 18-year-old Mason Greenwood in the 21st minute, Anthony Martial profited from more sloppy defending in the 33rd, and Rashford rifled in the third goal in the 49th.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer’s side maintained their grip on the game but couldn’t take advantage of a number of additional chances it created.

United tops Group L with 10 points, two ahead of AZ Alkmaar, which routed Astana 5-0, with Partizan on four points and Astana bottom with none.

Olivier Ntcham scored deep in injury time for Celtic to complete its come-from-behind win at Lazio.

The French midfielder, who previously played for Lazio’s Italian rival Genoa, lifted the ball over goalkeeper Thomas Strakosha after Odsonne Edouard capitalized on a mistake from Valon Berisha to set him up in the 95th minute.

The goal set off wild celebrations among an estimated 9,000 Celtic fans attending the game at Rome’s Stadio Olimpico.

Police said two traveling fans had been stabbed by Lazio sup-

porters before the game, following a brawl outside a pub, and that five Lazio fans were stopped for possession of dangerous materials such as baseball bats and knives.

With just three points from its opening three games, Lazio needed a win to have any realistic hopes of progressing. The home side took a seventh-minute lead through Ciro Immobile before pushing for more.

But James Forrest equalized with Celtic’s first attempt in the 38th and Ntcham’s late lob all but ended Lazio’s prospects of advancing from Group E.

With two games remaining, Celtic leads with 10 points, one ahead of Romanian side Cluj, which beat Rennes 1-0, and seven ahead of Lazio. Rennes has one point.

Five-time champion Sevilla raced into a four-goal lead in the first 36 minutes, with Munir El Haddadi completing a hat trick in the second half at Dudelange.

APOEL Nicosia defeated Qarabag 2-1 in the other Group A game.

Marcus Thuram scored in the fifth minute of injury time for Borussia Monchengladbach to beat Roma 2-1 in Group J, and Raul Jimenez’s injury-time goal was enough for Wolverhampton Wanderers to beat Slovan Bratislava 1-0 in Group K.

In Group F, Maxime Lestienne scored in injury time for Belgian side Standard Liege to beat Eintracht Frankfurt 2-1.

Filip Kostic could have put the German side into the knockout stages when he only had the goalkeeper to beat in injury time. But Kostic missed the chance, seconds before Lestienne claimed the winner at the other end.

Arsenal, which conceded an injury-time equalizer to draw 1-1 with Vitoria in Portugal, tops the group on 10 points, followed by Liege and Frankfurt both with six, then Vitoria on one.

There were wins too for Rangers, Gent, Krasnodar, Istanbul Basaksehir, Sporting Lisbon and Austrian side LASK Linz.

Inter, Napoli Under Pressure as Juventus Take on Ailing AC Milan

MILAN (AFP) – Inter Milan and Napoli return to the Serie A fray after a disappointing week of European football for the Italian giants as leaders Juventus look to pull clear after punching their ticket to the Champions League last 16.

Juventus have 29 points from 11 games, one point ahead of Inter Milan, with resurgent Roma a further six points adrift in third.

Napoli are seventh after a run of three league games without a victory.

A win over struggling AC Milan would allow Juventus to keep ahead of Inter, who host



Napoli coach Carlo Ancelotti looks on as forward Lorenzo Insigne, left, attends a training session.

midtable Verona after their 3-2 Champions League defeat by Borussia Dortmund.

After the frustration of throwing away a two-goal lead against the Germans, Antonio Conte’s Inter need a boost against Verona, who were themselves under fire during the week after their fans aimed racist chants at Brescia’s Mario Balotelli last weekend.

“This defeat has really got to me and I hope that’s the same for my players,” said Conte, who blamed a lack of resources despite remodelling the team after his arrival last summer.

Clippers Rally Past Blazers for Rivers’ 900th Win



Portland Trail Blazers at Los Angeles Clippers

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – Kawhi Leonard scored 27 points and grabbed 13 rebounds, and the Los Angeles Clippers rallied from an eight-point, fourth-quarter hole to defeat the visiting Portland Trail Blazers 107-101 on Thursday night.

Lou Williams scored 26 points and recorded eight assists while Montrezl Harrell and Ivica Zubac each scored 15 points for the Clippers. Zubac also had 13 rebounds,

nine on the offensive end.

Leonard contributed 18 points to the fourth-quarter comeback.

The victory was the 900th of Clippers coach Doc Rivers’ career. He is the 13th coach to reach the milestone.

Jayson Tatum scored 23 points, Kemba Walker added 14 in his return to Charlotte, and Boston cruised past host Charlotte.

Gordon Hayward added 20

points and 10 rebounds as the Celtics won their sixth straight. Jaylen Brown chipped in 12 points after missing the team’s previous three games due to an illness.

Miles Bridges had 18 points, and Devonte’ Graham added 15 for the Hornets, who had a three-game winning streak snapped. Terry Rozier, playing against Boston for the first time after four seasons with the Celtics, was held to three points on 1-of-11 shooting.

LaMarcus Aldridge scored a season-high 39 points on 19-for-23 shooting as San Antonio snapped a two-game losing streak with a win over visiting Oklahoma City.

The Spurs led by eight heading into the fourth quarter and never allowed the Thunder to get closer than five points the rest of the way.

When Aldridge is on his game, the Spurs win. In San Antonio’s five victories this season, he has averaged 25 points per game; in its three losses, he has managed just

nine points per contest. Last season, Aldridge scored a career-high 56 points against Oklahoma City.

Jimmy Butler scored 30 of his 34 points in the first half and Goran Dragic scored 20 of his 25 points in the second half as Miami beat host Phoenix to stop the Suns’ three-game winning streak.

Bam Adebayo had 15 points, 10 rebounds, six assists and five steals, Tyler Herro scored 15 points off the bench, and Kendrick Nunn added 11 for the Heat, who at 6-2 are off to their best start since the 2012-13 team won six of its first eight.

Butler made 11 of 16 field-goal attempts and Dragic made 9 of 16 to help the Heat shoot 54.9 percent from the field and 53.6 percent from the 3-point line, where they made 15 of 28. Dragic tied his season high in points and made 3-pointers (five) as the Heat became the first team to outshoot the Suns this season. The Suns shot 44.0 percent.

Nadal Racing to Be Fit for ATP Finals With No.1 Up for Grabs

LONDON (AFP) – Rafael Nadal is facing a race against time to be ready for the ATP Finals as he battles Novak Djokovic for the year-end number one ranking, admitting he is struggling with his serve.

The 33-year-old said he was happy to be in London after being forced to pull out of last week’s Paris Masters at the semi-final stage with an abdominal strain, but admitted he was not serving at full tilt ahead of his opening match against defending champion Alexander Zverev.

Nadal is bidding to clinch the year-end number one spot in the ATP rankings for a fifth time -- he is currently 640 points ahead of Djokovic ahead of the season-end-



Rafael Nadal

ing tournament in London, starting on Sunday.

The Spaniard, who has never

won the ATP Finals despite his trophy-laden career, dethroned Djokovic from the top of the rank-

ings this week.

He has often struggled with injuries towards the end of the season -- missing the ATP Finals last year through injury and pulling out after just one match in 2017.

The top seed said he had only started practising his serving on Thursday and it had been “very slow”.

Nadal, who won the French Open and US Open this year, said he had been happy with

Nadal’s opponents in the Andre Agassi group are Daniil Medvedev, Stefanos Tsitsipas and Zverev.

The Bjorn Bjorg group features Djokovic, Roger Federer, Dominic Thiem and Matteo Berrettini.

Inoue Defeats Donaire in World Boxing Super Series Final

SAITAMA, Japan (Dispatches) – Naoya Inoue has won a unanimous decision over Nonito Donaire in the World Boxing Super Series bantamweight final.

Inoue, the IBF world bantamweight champion from Japan, sent Donaire to the canvas in the 11th round at Saitama Super Arena with a body blow to the abdomen. Donaire got back up to finish the round and the bout but couldn’t turn things around.

“This fight showed my real strengths and weaknesses,” Inoue said. “After a year of fights, I’m satisfied to win this championship.”

The three judges scored the bout 116-111, 117-109, 114-113 in favor of Inoue, who improved to 19-0 with 16 knockouts. Donaire, who is from the Philippines, dropped to 40-6 with 26 KOs.

Donaire opened a cut above Inoue’s right eye with a left hook in the second round. He was in control until the fifth when Inoue landed a right hook to the jaw, stunning the WBA and WBC world bantamweight title holder and seizing momentum.