

Alireza Beiranvand Asia's Best Goalkeeper: Gabriel Calderon



Iranian team's goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Persepolis Argentine coach Gabriel Calderon says the Iranian team's goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand is the best in Asia.

Beiranvand was among the final nominees for the 2019 AFC Player of the Year.

Akram Afif from Qatar won the award over the Iranian keeper.

"It's a great honor for us to see Beiranvand among the nominees. I believe that he is the best goalkeeper in Asia," Calderon said.

"In my opinion, Persepolis's fans should be proud of him for being in the list," the Persepolis coach added.

Ronaldo Crowned Italian League Player of the Year

MILAN (AP) -- Cristiano Ronaldo was named the Italian league's player of the year on Monday following his debut season at Juventus.

Ronaldo was at the Gran Gala del Calcio in Milan to collect his prize, instead of attending the Ballon d'Or ceremony in Paris where he was third in the voting for best player in the world.

The Juventus forward turned up about an hour before the main award was announced, arriving more than two hours after the other guests, and waited outside in the car until the moment came for him to go on stage to pick

up the prize for his place in the team of the season.

For the first time at the Italian ceremony there were also awards for female players. Roma and Italy forward Manuela Giugliano won the top prize.

All the awards are voted for by a mix of footballers, coaches, referees and journalists.

Ronaldo signed for Juventus from Real Madrid in July 2018 and helped the Bianconeri to their eighth successive Serie A title.

The 34-year-old Ronaldo scored 28 goals in all competitions for Juventus, including 21 in the league.



Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo poses with the trophies for best Italian Serie A player, during the Gran Gala soccer awards ceremony, in Milan, Italy, Monday, Dec. 2, 2019.

Ruiz Says Pressure All on Joshua Ahead of Saudi Rematch



"I was this close last time," said Anthony Joshua (AFP Photo/Fayez Nureldine)

RIYADH (AFP) - Heavyweight champion Andy Ruiz Jr has said that all the pressure will be on dethroned champion Anthony Joshua in their contentious showdown in Saudi Arabia.

Ruiz, who was born in the United States but fights as a Mexican, caused one of boxing's biggest upsets in New

York in June when he handed Joshua a first defeat to win the WBA, IBF and WBO crowns in New York.

The pair will fight the rematch on Saturday in Diriyah, close to the Saudi capital Riyadh, in a hotly-anticipated contest dubbed "Clash on the Dunes".

Messi Makes Record of Winning Sixth Ballon d'Or, Rapinoe Wins Women's Award

PARIS (Dispatches) - After becoming the first six-time winner of the Ballon d'Or, Lionel Messi said he's far from finished.

"I hope to continue for a long time," Messi said on Monday in Paris from behind a row of the trophies which honor the world's best soccer player.

"I realize that I am very lucky, even if, one day, retirement will come. It will be difficult. But I still have a lot of good years ahead of me. Time goes by very quickly, so I want to enjoy football and my family."

While the 32-year-old Messi won his sixth Ballon d'Or, United States captain Megan Rapinoe won her first.

Messi has received the Ballon d'Or previously in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2015.

Megan Rapinoe capped her



Lionel Messi



USWNT star Megan Rapinoe

incredible year by winning the Ballon d'Or Féminin, presented annually now to the top player in women's soccer.

She's the first United States women's national team player to win it, with Norwegian striker and Lyon star Ada Hegerberg winning the inaugural award last

year.

Rapinoe helped lead the USWNT to its fourth World Cup title last summer in France, scoring six goals and recording three assists to earn both the Golden Ball as the tournament's top player and Golden Boot as its top scorer.

Bucks Keep Streak Alive, Demolish New York Knicks 132-88

LOS ANGELES (AFP) - Giannis Antetokounmpo has scored 29 points as the Milwaukee Bucks stretched their winning streak to 12 games with a 132-88 demolition of the hapless New York Knicks.

The Eastern Conference leaders showed no mercy to the worst side in the division, outscoring the Knicks by 33-15 in the first quarter and showing no let-up through a one-sided encounter.

Antetokounmpo was on court for just 21 minutes, adding 15 rebounds and shooting 10-of-14 while leading the scoring.

The Greek star was backed by Khrist Middleton with 16 points and D.J. Wilson, who added 19



Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 29 points as the Milwaukee Bucks stretched their winning streak to 12 games

off the bench.

No fewer than six Milwaukee players finished in double digits, including Antetokounmpo's elder brother Thanasis who chipped in with 10 points from his 12 minutes on the court.

The win saw the Bucks improve to 18-3 at the top of the Eastern Conference, while the Knicks remained rooted to the bottom of the standings with just four wins against 17 defeats.

Spain to Visit Netherlands for Euro 2020 Warmup in March

MADRID (AP) - Spain will visit the Netherlands for a friendly at Johan Cruyff Arena in Amsterdam on March 29.

The game will be part of the teams' preparations for the 2020 European Championship.

It will be Spain's last match before their Euro 2020 opener against Sweden on June 15. All of its Group E games will be in the northern Spanish city of Bilbao. They will also face Poland and a playoff winner.

The Netherlands are in Amsterdam throughout Group C, opening against Ukraine on June 14 and facing Austria and a playoff winner.

Alaphilippe Confirms Tour of Flanders Debut in 2020

Brussels (Dispatches) - Julian Alaphilippe has confirmed he will make his debut at the Tour of Flanders in 2020, saying he needs "new challenges".

Alaphilippe won Milan-San Remo, Strade Bianche, and a second Flèche Wallonne this spring, but has yet to taste the cobbled Classics of northern Belgium.

Having hinted at a debut earlier in the year, Alaphilippe confirmed his plans to race the Tour of Flanders in 2020 while collecting the Velo d'or prize, with the possibility of other races in Flanders in the preceding week as part of a radically different spring programme.



Panache personified: Julian Alaphilippe (Deceuninck-QuickStep) wins stage 3 of the 2019 Tour de France in Epernay, and with it takes the yellow jersey as leader of

UEFA Chief Accuses British PM Johnson of Fuelling Racism

LONDON (AFP) - UEFA chief Aleksander Ceferin has accused British Prime Minister Boris Johnson of fuelling racism and insists European football's governing body is working hard to tackle the problem plaguing the game.

A number of high-profile incidents in recent weeks, including racist abuse hurled at England players in Bulgaria and chants aimed at Romelu Lukaku and Mario Balotelli in Italy, have under-



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson

lined the scale of the issue.

Johnson condemned the "vile" racist chanting during England's Euro 2020 qualifier in Sofia in October and called for UEFA to take tough action.

But the prime minister, currently fighting an election campaign, has in the past courted controversy with various comments, including suggesting Muslim women wearing burkas look like "letter-boxes".

Formula E Given FIA World Championship Status

LONDON (Reuters) - The all-electric Formula E series will have full FIA world championship status from the start of the 2020-21 season after approval by the sport's governing body, it announced on Tuesday.

The city-based series last month started its sixth season, with a cast of manufacturers including Porsche, Mercedes, BMW and Audi involved.

Recognition means there will be two single-seater FIA world championships, with Formula E alongside Formula One.

"The creation and development of Formula E has been a great adventure," FIA president Jean Todt said in a statement. "I am proud that today we confirm its FIA world championship status."

"Since its first race in Beijing in 2014 and with every ePrix thereafter, Formula E has proven that the concept of cutting-edge electric racing works."

Formula E founder and chairman Alejandro Agag said full championship status had always been the aim and it would add credibility.



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson