

Bahrain to Host Asian Qualifiers in Group C



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has confirmed the centralized venues for the Asian Qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023 matches.

The matches are scheduled to take place from May 31 to June 15, 2021.

China PR will host Group A which comprises leader Syria, Philippines, Maldives and Guam with Kuwait con-

firmed as the host for Group B which includes Australia, Jordan, Nepal and Chinese Taipei.

Bahrain will stage the matches in Group C which features table-topper Iraq, Iran, Hong Kong and Cambodia, while Saudi Arabia has been selected to hold the matches in Group D, which includes the likes of Uzbekistan, Singapore, Yemen and Palestine.

Meanwhile, FIFA World Cup 2022 host Qatar, will welcome Group E opponents Oman, Afghanistan, India and Bangladesh with Japan set to provide the stage for the matches in Group F comprising Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Myanmar and Mongolia.

The United Arab Emirates have been selected as the host for Group G, which consists of ASEAN challengers Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia while Korea Republic will stage the matches for Group H, which include leader Turkmenistan, Lebanon, DPR Korea and Sri Lanka.

Atalanta, Lazio Warm Up for CL With Wins in Serie A

ROME (Reuters) — Atalanta and Lazio warmed up for Champions League games with victories in Serie A on Friday.

Atalanta defeated visiting Spezia 3-1 with two goals from Mario Pasalic, while substitute Felipe Caicedo scored a late winner for Lazio to beat last-placed Crotone 3-2.

Atalanta moved into fourth place and the final Champions League spot while Lazio remained seventh.

Atalanta will try to overturn a 1-0 first-leg deficit when it visits Real Madrid in the round of 16 on Tuesday. Then Lazio needs to make up for a 4-1 first-leg loss



Atalanta's Mario Pasalic, right, scores during the Italian serie A soccer match between Atalanta and Spezia at the Gewiss stadium in Bergamo, Italy, March 12, 2021.

when it plays at Bayern Munich on Wednesday.

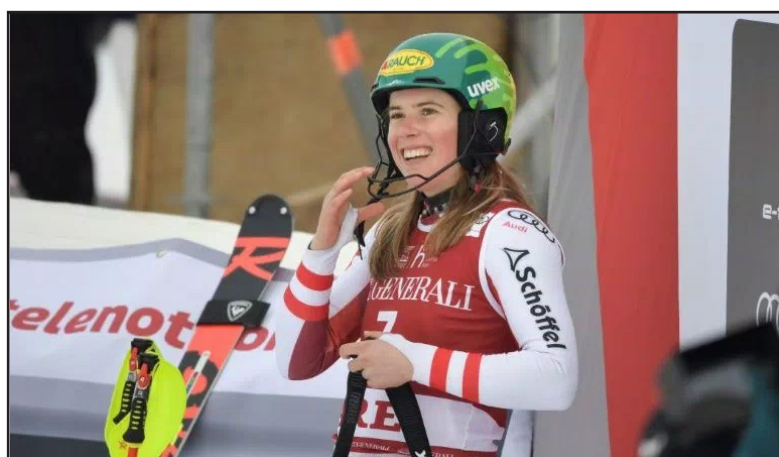
Luis Muriel also scored for Atalanta, which got all of its goals in the second half.

Roberto Piccoli, who is on loan from Atalanta, pulled one back for Spezia nine minutes from time.

Sergej Milinkovic-Savic and Luis Alberto also scored for Lazio, while Simy Nwankwo had a brace for Crotone.

With his 10th and 11th goals of the season, Simy matched Obafemi Martins for most goals by a Nigerian in a single Serie A campaign. Martins also scored 11 for Inter Milan in 2004-05.

Liensberger Wins Are Slalom, Shiffrin Left Chasing Record



Austria's Katharina Liensberger

VIENNA (AFP) - Austria's newly-crowned world champion Katharina Liensberger won the second World Cup slalom in Are on Saturday after Mikaela Shiffrin made a costly error in her bid for a record-equalling discipline victory.

Liensberger, who upstaged Shiffrin and overall women's World Cup leader Petra Vlhova at the Cortina world champs last month,

timed a combined total of 1min 47.93sec over the two runs for her maiden win on the circuit.

Shiffrin, who was fastest down the first leg, was second at 0.72sec, her 47th podium finish in her last 51 slalom starts (36 wins).

But it was still not the elusive victory that would have seen the 25-year-old American claim a 46th World Cup slalom win to equal the

record of most World Cup wins in a single discipline, by Swedish legend Ingemar Stenmark in the giant slalom.

Switzerland's Wendy Holdener was third, at 0.72sec, as the race for the slalom's small crystal globe heated up: Liensberger, on 590, is now just 22 points behind Vlhova, with Shiffrin third on 575, followed by Michelle Gisin (431) and Holdener (415).

There was drama for Vlhova, who scraped through to the second run in 27th of the 30 qualifiers after recovering well from an early error.

The Slovak, almost three seconds behind Shiffrin, laid down a fantastic second run to eventually finish eighth, bagging 32 points, to go with the 100 she earned for winning Friday's opening slalom in the Swedish resort.

That extended her lead in the overall standings from Lara Gut-Behrami to 96pts, the Swiss speed specialist having opted out of the two slaloms in Sweden.

Vlhova's 54.94sec second run remained the fastest of the field and allowed her to sit in the lead as contenders failed to bother her.

As it narrowed down to the top 10, Norway's Kristina Riis-Johannessen eventually snatched the top spot by two-hundredths after Gisin fluffed her lines.

In sunny conditions on compact snow, another Norwegian, Kristin Lysdahl, and then American Paula Moltzan made their first-run advantage count.

Gisin's teammate Holdener, fourth fastest in the first run, then claimed temporary first place, Germany's Lena Duerr failing to knock her off the pedestal.

Liensberger, starting with a 0.73sec advantage, piled on the pressure, turning that into a 1.65sec lead, with just Shiffrin to race.

The American kicked out of the start hut 0.19sec up on the Austrian, but a mistake halfway down the course cost her dearly and she crossed the line in second.

Kuzma Leads Lakers' Late Surge for 105-100 Win Over Pacers



Los Angeles Lakers guard Dennis Schroeder, left, drives against Indiana Pacers forward Domantas Sabonis during the first half of an NBA basketball game Friday, March 12, 2021, in Los Angeles.

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Kyle Kuzma scored 15 of his 24 points in the fourth quarter, LeBron James added 18 points and 10 assists, and the Los Angeles Lakers rallied late for a 105-100 victory over the Indiana Pacers on Friday night.

Montrezl Harrell had 17 points and Kuzma added 13 rebounds as the defending NBA champions returned from the All-Star break with just their fourth win in 11 games.

Los Angeles trailed by 12 points early in the fourth quarter before Kuzma led a strong rally to keep the Pacers winless against the Lakers at Staples Center since November 2015. Kuzma went 5 for 8 with two 3-pointers and four rebounds in the fourth.

Malcolm Brogdon scored 23 of his 29 points in the first half for the Pacers, who opened a three-game road trip with their 11th loss in 16 games. Domantas Sabonis added 20 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists, but Indiana

wilted down the stretch.

"I thought there was a four-minute stretch there where we let it get away from us," Pacers coach Nate Bjorkgren said.

The Pacers still had the ball at midcourt down 103-100 with 9.9 seconds left, but Kentavious Caldwell-Pope stole Brogdon's inbounds pass and hit two free throws to ice it.

"They knew the play," Brogdon said. "They switched to deny it. I just threw a bad pass."

Brogdon lit up the Lakers for 18 points in the first quarter. Indiana had an 86-74 lead early in the fourth, but the Lakers made a 22-4 run and seized the lead on Kuzma's back-to-back 3-pointers.

Los Angeles won without starters Anthony Davis and Marc Gasol. Davis missed his 10th consecutive game and will be out for at least two more weeks with leg injuries, while Marc Gasol is still out under the NBA's health and safety protocols.

Zidane Leaves Door Open for Ronaldo Return



Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo shoots on goal during the Italian Serie A football match Juventus vs Spezia on March 02, 2021 at the Juventus stadium in Turin.

MADRID (Reuters) - Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane left the door open for Cristiano Ronaldo to return to the club, three years after he left to join Juventus.

Juventus' defeat to Porto in the Champions League has led to a flurry of stories in the press that the Italian giants are looking to sell the 36-year-old, who has netted 20 goals in Serie A this season.

With Real Madrid struggling for goals at times this season, it is no surprise the club is being linked with interest in a return for the forward who scored a record 450 goals in 438 appearances for them and speaking to the press ahead of Saturday's La Liga game at home to Elche, Zidane implied he would be delighted to see Ronaldo come back.

IOC Approves Set of Reforms for Games, Host Cities

TOKYO (Dispatches) - The International Olympic Committee has unanimously approved a set of 15 reforms it hopes will again turn the Olympics into an attractive prospect for fans, cities and sponsors through reduced cost, an increased digital presence and new revenues streams.

The IOC has seen its key product - the summer and winter editions of the Olympics - lose some of its shine in recent years, failing to ignite enthusiasm among potential host cities, scared off by the size and cost of the world's biggest multi-sports event.

"The coronavirus crisis has changed our world in fundamental ways," IOC President Thomas Bach told the organization's session.

"The world will never again be like it was before. Even once we have finally overcome the health crisis, we will face the far-reaching social, financial, economic and political consequences."

A previous set of reforms, 'Agenda 2020', was passed in 2014 but did not stop the exodus of cities midway through bidding processes for the 2018, 2020 and the 2022 editions of the Games.

