

# Three Iranian Stars Among World Soccer 500



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Three Iranian strikers Mehdi Taremi, Sardar Azmoun and Ali Alipour have been listed in the World Soccer 500. The famous football magazine has selected the Iranian trio among the top 500 most influential players in the world.

### Taremi - Rio Ave

Iran is not exactly renowned as a hotbed of football talent, so Taremi's arrival in the Primeira Liga aroused curiosity. The striker's exceptional goalscoring record in his home country and then in Qatar suggested he could do well in Europe. The regularity with which he found the net and his all-round quality for the national team left Iran's former Portuguese coach Carlos Queiroz in little doubt that he could thrive at a higher level.

### Azmoun - Zenit Saint Petersburg

Talented Iranian striker, who has struck goals galore in an eight-year stint in the Russian Premier League with Rubin Kazan, Rostov and now Zenit. Regularly linked with the Premier League, and could be ready for the move soon.

### Alipour - Persepolis

The striker's goals have helped Persepolis to win the last four Iranian league titles. The 25-year-old is linked with a move to Europe almost as much as he scores.

## Iranian Referees to Officiate at 2020 AFC Cup

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iranian referees Payam Heydari and Farhad Moraveji will officiate at the 2020 AFC Cup.

In the Eastern Zone, the Vietnam Football Federation (VFF) has been confirmed as host for ASEAN Zone Groups F and G matches.

The event has been scheduled for September 23 to 29, 2020.

Heydari will officiate at the event as referee and Moraveji will assist him in the competition.



## Lewandowski on His Way to Breaking Ronaldo's Record



BERLIN (Xinhua) - The bag of Robert Lewandowski was packed in no time before the Pole boarded the plane heading for Portugal's capital Lisbon this Sunday afternoon.

A brief smile went over the face of the 31-year-old Bayern Munich striker as the Bavarians took off to attend the 2019/20 Champions League quarterfinals.

Spanish giants Barcelona are waiting for their "tournament opener" in the last-8-round this Friday evening.

The striker admitted he couldn't be happier to finish the season's last chapter with another successful episode.

But Lewandowski wouldn't be Lewandowski if he did not take steps to hide his true intentions.

In Bayern's training camp in Lagos, 300 kilometers away from Lisbon, the forward might nevertheless think about his desire to win the campaign for the first time and break the record of superstar Cristiano Ronaldo.

The Portuguese scored 17 goals in 2013/14 in the shirt of Real

Madrid, taking the Spaniards all the way to the trophy.

Having scored his goals number 12 and 13 in this season's campaign when Bayern crushed Chelsea 3-1, the attacker is approaching Ronaldo's all-time best in rapid strides.

Never before had a player scored that many goals for a German club in the Champions League. 53 goals in 44 games of all competitions make him Europe's current leading striker.

Three goals and five assists in both games against Chelsea give proof of his outstanding form.

Teammate Leon Goretzka spoke about the "phenomenon Lewandowski" by praising his attitude. "He always told me to stay calm and focused," Goretzka reported. Goretzka admitted to having been worried, but "Lewa" told him to concentrate on the duel against Chelsea and forget about the unusual circumstances.

This season's key to success is to keep in mind that only one game will decide the next round, Lewandowski concluded.

## Warren, Pacers Hand Lakers Another Loss

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - T.J. Warren scored 39 points as the in-form Indiana Pacers inflicted a 116-111 defeat on LeBron James and his stuttering Los Angeles Lakers, who have lost three in a row as the NBA playoffs approach.

Indiana's win ensured the NBA's top regular-season record will belong to the Milwaukee, despite the Bucks losing 136-132 to Dallas in overtime.

The Bucks (55-15) won't have the home court advantage that usually comes with the top mark.

All games are being played in a quarantine bubble at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, due to the coronavirus pandemic that halted the season in March.

The Pacers improved to 4-1 since the restart, closing with a 13-5 run to beat the Western Conference top seed Lakers, who fell to 2-4 in the bubble and 51-18 overall.

That was despite 31 points, eight rebounds and seven assists from three-time NBA champion James -- the only LA starter in double figures. Anthony Davis went 3-of-14 from the floor for only eight points.

Dallas ended with a 7-0 run to force overtime at 119-119, then scored



Indiana's T.J. Warren, left, scored 39 points against Kyle Kuzman, right, and the Los Angeles Lakers in the Pacers 116-111 NBA victory Saturday

the first nine in the extra period on the way to victory.

Slovenian guard Luka Doncic had an impressive triple double for Dallas with a game-high 36 points, a career-high 19 assists and 14 rebounds.

Giannis Antetokounmpo and Brooks Lopez each scored 34 to lead Milwaukee.

Indiana and Miami, likely first-round playoff foes fighting for the fourth seed, meet Monday and Friday.

The Lakers open the playoffs against the winner of a six-team fight for the last playoff spot in the West.

Phoenix improved to 5-0 in the bubble, the team's longest win streak since 2014, by beating Miami 119-112. The Suns (31-39) moved a half-game behind ninth-place Portland in the West playoff fight.

Devin Booker led Phoenix with 35 points while Bahamas big man Deandre Ayton added 18 points and 12 rebounds.

Paul George scored 21 points despite being rested in the final minutes as the Los Angeles Clippers beat Portland 122-117, hurting the Trail Blazers' playoff bid.

The Clippers, already resting star Kawhi Leonard for load management, improved to 47-22, second in the West.

C.J. McCollum scored 29 to lead Portland, which also had 22 points from Damian Lillard and reserve Gary Trent Jr. and 21 from Carmelo Anthony.

Rodney McGruder, a 26 percent shooter from three-point range, connected from beyond the arc to put the Clippers ahead 118-117 with 26 seconds remaining. Lillard missed two free throws and LA sank four free throws in the final seconds to seal the victory.

Lillard responded by saying, "Paul George is a guy sent home by me last year in the playoffs so they know. The reason they reacting like that is because of what they expect from me."

The Blazers (32-39) fell 1.5 games behind eighth-place Memphis.

Denver, third in the West, kept pace with the Clippers by outlasting Utah 134-132 in a double overtime thriller.

Nikola Jokic sparked the Nuggets with 30 points and 11 rebounds. Jamal Murray had 23 points and 12 rebounds in his bubble debut. Donovan Mitchell led Utah with 35 points.

## Messi Helps Barca Sink Napoli, Face Bayern Next



MADRID (Dispatches) - FC Barcelona booked their place in the quarterfinals of the UEFA Champions League with a 3-1 win over Napoli at the Camp Nou Stadium on Saturday night.

Barca went into the game with the advantage of a 1-1 away draw in the first leg, but with question marks over their form in the last 11 weeks of Spain's domestic season.

To further complicate matters, Barca coach Quique Setien was without midfielders Sergio Busquets and Arturo Vidal through suspension, although Frenkie De Jong returned after injury.

Napoli sounded a warning in the second minute of the game when Dreis Mertens hit the outside of the post, but Barca took the lead in the 15th minute after Clement Lenglet powered home a header

from Ivan Rakitic's corner.

It was 2-0 in the 23rd minute when Leo Messi's persistence took him through three challenges before curling a left foot shot past David Ospina into the corner of the Napoli goal.

Messi thought he had added a third in the 30th minute, but his goal was ruled out by VAR after the ball had brushed his arm after he'd controlled it on his chest.

The disappointment didn't last long as Messi's quick thinking saw him nip in behind Napoli defender Kalidou Koulibali who accidentally kicked him on the Achilles heel to concede a penalty.

## Pirlo Named Juventus Manager



ROMA (AP) - Juventus have decided to elevate their U-23 team coach Andrea Pirlo to head coach of the senior squad on Saturday, just hours after sacking Maurizio Sarri.

Sarri was relieved of his post on Saturday afternoon, after Juve's Champions League exit at the Round of 16 to Lyon. As a player, in Pirlo's four

years at the center of the Juventus midfield, he won four league titles, a Coppa Italia and two Italian Super Cups.

The 41-year-old had just returned to Turin last month to start his coaching career by taking over the U-23 team, but the new appointment means he will steer the first team even without having managed a single match.

## Van Aert Edges Alaphilippe to Win Milan-San Remo

SAN REMO, Italy (Dispatches) - Belgian rider Wout van Aert has edged defending champion Julian Alaphilippe in a two-man sprint finish to win the Milan-San Remo classic for the first "monument" victory of his rapidly developing career.

Alaphilippe attacked on the Poggio climb shortly before the end of the 305-kilometer (190-mile) route and Van Aert caught him on the descent.

The race - one of cycling's five single-day "monuments" - was originally scheduled for March.

It was the second win in a week for Van Aert, who also won the Strade Bianche race last weekend.

Van Aert, who rides for the Jumbo-Visma team, required 7 hours, 16 minutes to complete the lengthy route ending along the Italian Riviera.

Alaphilippe finished with the same time while Michael Matthews of Australia crossed third with the main pack, two seconds behind.

The next "monument" race in the revised schedule is the grueling and hilly Lombardia next Saturday.

