

Iran Futsal Still Best Asian Team, Sixth in World



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran futsal team has remained unchanged in the latest Futsal World Ranking.

Iran is in sixth place in the world with 1609 points and is the best Asian team in the standing.

Spain and Brazil are first and second with 1808 and 1803 points, respectively.

Argentina remains third with 1694 points.

Russia and Portugal are fourth and fifth with 1642 and 1639 points, respectively.

Japan and Thailand are 16th and 17th in the ranking with 1368 and 1325 points, respectively.

Iran national futsal team is preparing for the AFC Futsal Championship, which is now scheduled to be staged in Kuwait from March 23 to April 3, 2021.

Alekno Named Iran Volleyball Head Coach



Russian Vladimir Alekno

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Russian Vladimir Alekno was picked as the new head coach of Team Melli by the Islamic Republic of Iran Volleyball Federation (IRIVF) on Wednesday.

He will coach Iran at the 2021 Men's Volleyball Nations League and Tokyo Olympic Games.

Alekno led Russia to a gold medal at the 2012 Olympic Games. The Russian coach had

previously helped his country to win a bronze at the 2008 Olympic Games.

Iran volleyball team was without a coach since parting ways with Igor Kolakovic in March.

In the Olympic Games, Iran has been drawn in Pool A along with Japan, Poland, Italy, Canada and Venezuela.

Pool B consists of Brazil, USA, Russia, Argentina, France and Tunisia.

Messi: I'm Tired of Being Blamed for Everything at Barcelona

BARCELONA (Dispatches)

-A frustrated Lionel Messi said he is tired of being blamed for problems at Barcelona after he was accused by Antoine Griezmann's former agent of making life difficult for the French striker at the La Liga club.

Eric Olhats had accused Messi of having too much control at the club, saying his "reign of terror" had made life difficult for Griezmann to adapt since his arrival last year.



Argentina's Lionel Messi gestures during the closed-door 2022 FIFA World Cup South American qualifier football match between Peru and Argentina at the National Stadium in Lima on Nov 17, 2020.

Messi returned to Barcelona from international duty with Argentina on Wednesday when he was accosted by reporters at the airport.

"The truth is that I'm a little tired of always being the problem for everything at the club," Messi was quoted as saying by Spanish media.

"On top of that, after a 15-hour flight, I had the tax authorities waiting for me. It's madness."

Nadal Overpowers Tsitsipas to Reach ATP Semis



Rafael Nadal of Spain celebrates defeating Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece during their tennis match at the ATP World Finals tennis tournament at the O2 arena in London, Nov 19, 2020.

LONDON (Reuters) - Rafa Nadal's hopes of winning the year-ending ATP Finals for the first time live on after the Spaniard beat defending champion Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-4 4-6 6-2 on Thursday.

The last round-robin match in the London Group had become a straight knockout with both men having lost to Dominic Thiem and beaten Andrey Rublev earlier in the week.

But it was Spaniard Nadal who always appeared the more likely winner despite a lapse which allowed Tsitsipas to extend the contest into a decider at a near-deserted O2 Arena.

After a flurry of service breaks at

the start of the third set, the 34-year-old Nadal showed all his experience to pull away and reach the semifinals for the first time in five years.

As group runner-up behind Austrian Thiem, he will face Daniil Medvedev for a place in the final with the Russian already assured of top spot in the Tokyo Group.

World number one Novak Djokovic plays Alexander Zverev on Friday with the winner to play Thiem in the other semi-final.

Nadal was untouchable on his serve in the first set, losing only five points, and the pressure told on Tsitsipas who was unable to unleash his attacking game.



cal and physical support" after they have given birth.

In a statement, FIFA president Gianni Infantino said the reforms were necessary at a time when women's football is growing, insisting the sport needed to "adopt a regulatory framework that is appropriate and suitable to the needs of the women's game."

FIFA Proposes Mandatory Maternity Leave for Women Players

ZURICH (Reuters) - FIFA plans to introduce a series of measures to protect pregnant footballers including mandatory maternity leave "of at least 14 weeks", the sport's world governing body announced on Thursday.

"We want to see more women play football but in the same time have a family," Sarai Bareman, FIFA's chief women's football officer, explained to journalists.

The body said it would put a series of reforms forward for approval by the FIFA Council next month, making them immediately applicable across all of its 211 member federations.

The mandatory 14-week maternity leave would see players guaranteed a minimum two-thirds of their contracted salary, while FIFA indicated a wish to make it harder for clubs to part company with pregnant players, saying "no female player should ever suffer a disadvantage as a result of becoming pregnant".

"The idea is to protect female players before, during and after child birth," said Emilio Garcia, FIFA's chief legal and compliance officer.

Under the proposals, if a player is laid off after becoming pregnant, clubs responsible face financial as well as "sporting" punishments.

Clubs must also reintegrate female players and provide "adequate medi-

Lack of Leadership Main Problem for Germany, Says Klinsmann

BERLIN (Dispatches) -- The German national team has a glaring leadership problem, says former German coach Jurgen Klinsmann.

"The lack of leadership is the biggest problem," the 56-year-old commented. It is the top priority for current coach Joachim Loew to address and solve, the former striker said.

"The team needs someone pointing the way after going 2-0 or 3-0 down," he added.

Klinsmann mentioned the example of Bayern's offensive midfielder Thomas Mueller as his club's driving force ahead of Joshua Kimmich.

The team hierarchy is, however, not the only cause for concern for Loew. The German is under pressure to rethink his decision of leaving out such an experienced player like Bayern's Mueller.

Eight months ahead of the European Championship, the German coach remains under fire following the disastrous 6-0 defeat against Spain.

The future of the 60-year-old seems to be hanging in the balance as reports speak of the 2014 World Cup winner having to present a convincing concept to turn things around within the next few weeks.

He seems determined to get the ship back on an even keel amidst discussions about a possible successor.

Former Leipzig coach Ralf Rangnick, Bayern's Hansi Flick, Paris manager Thomas Tuchel and Jurgen Klopp are mentioned among the candidates to succeed Loew. While Flick, Klopp, and Tuchel won't be available on short notice, Rangnick could be ready to take over before the winter break.

So far, the generation change after the 2014 World Cup seems to have failed.

Lukaku Double Sends Belgium Into Nations League Final Four



Belgium's forward Romelu Lukaku fights for the ball with Denmark's midfielder Pierre Højbjerg during UEFA Nations League football match between Belgium and Denmark at the Den Dreef Stadium in Leuven on Nov 18, 2020.

LEUVEN (Reuters) - Romelu Lukaku underlined his status as Belgium's key attacker with two goals to help his team book their place in next year's Nations League finals with a 4-2 home victory over Denmark.

Lukaku extended his record scoring form for his country with a second-half double as Youri Tielemans and Kevin De Bruyne also netted for Belgium.

Denmark scored through Jonas Wind after 17 minutes, heading home from close range, and Belgium gifted them a second with a comical own goal credited to Nacer Chadli four minutes from time.

Belgium finished five points clear at the top of League A Group 2 and will meet world champions France and former World Cup winners Italy and Spain in the final four next October.

The hosts got off to the perfect start when Tielemans fired them ahead in the third minute, beating his Leicester City team mate Kasper Schmeichel with a grass cutter from outside the penalty box that squeezed in between the Danish goalkeeper's outstretched arm and the post at Leuven's Den Dreef stadium.

Yet Wind's equalizer swung the first-half momentum to Denmark, who then created further chances.

Belgium got back on top, however, when Tielemans turned provider for Lukaku's first goal in the 56th minute with a quickly-taken free kick that caught out the Danish defence.

He played it through to De Bruyne, who moved it onto Lukaku whose shot was blocked by Schmeichel but then looped up off the keeper and bounced into the net.

Guardiola Extends Contract With Manchester City

LONDON (Xinhua) -- Manchester City confirmed on Thursday that Pep Guardiola has signed a contract extension to keep him at the club until the end of the 2022-2023 season.

The 49-year-old's current deal was due to end at the end of the current campaign but the new deal gives him the chance to improve on the two Premier League titles, one FA Cup and the two League Cups he has won with Manchester City since joining



Pep Guardiola has extended his contract with Manchester City until 2023.

from Bayern Munich in 2016, with the Champions League the club's main target.