

# Iran Not A Surprise Now, Slobodan Kovac Says



*Iranian national volleyball coach Slobodan Kovac*

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iranian national volleyball coach Slobodan Kovac said that from now on Team Melli is not a surprise for the world.

“From this moment onwards, we are not surprise for any other volleyball teams in the world. We’ve reached a high level and we have to stay in the level as Brazil stayed in the highest level for many years,” Kovac said in the news conference on Monday.

“I am so happy to be here for one more year. I just promise

to work hard. We got good results last year and won the Asian Championships. Iran came fourth in the World League and finished in sixth place in the world championships,” the Serbian coach added.

“I am not talkative and just talk into the field. The Iranian players are working hard as well and want to learn.”

“I will invite so many players to the national team and finally select 14 players for the FIVB Volleyball Men’s World Cup in Japan,” Kovac said.

Iranian national volleyball team has been drawn with Russia, USA and Poland in the 2015 FIVB Volleyball World League.

“Russia and Poland are Olympics and world champions but we can play in their levels especially in our home games. Olympic berth will not be presented to anyone. We have to work hard to achieve that. The FIVB Volleyball Men’s World Cup in Japan is our first chance. It’s an uphill task since just two teams will qualify for the 2016 Olympic Games,” he added.

## Tianjin Teda Linked With Naft Defender Pouraliganji

BEIJING (Persian League) - Chinese football club Tianjin Teda is going to sign Naft international defender Morteza Pouraliganji.

The Iranian club, who is participating in the AFC Champions League in the current season, has agreed with the transfer and Pouraliganji will join the Chinese team within the two days.

Tianjin ended 7th last year and is coached by former Persepolis coach Arie Haan.

Pouraliganji was a key member of the Iranian football team in the 2015 AFC Asian Cup in Australia.

He scored a vital goal against Iraq in the quarter-final, where



*The logo of a Chinese football (soccer) club of Tianjin Teda F.C..*

Team Melli lost in penalty shootout.

## Third Place at the Asian Cup Can Help Push UAE Football to Greater Heights

ABU DHABI (AFC) - AFC President Sheikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifah has reaffirmed the leading position the United Arab Emirates holds in Asian football, while hailing the nation’s recent footballing achievements.

On Saturday, Sheikh Salman met with HRH Sheikh Hazza Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Honorary President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) FA and the UAE National Security Advisor, UAE FA President Yousef Al Serkal, UAE FA vice president Mohamed Thani Al Rumaithi, UAE Judo Association President Mohamed Bin Thalob and UAE Higher Council of Youth vice president Mohammed Ibrahim Al Mahmoud.

Sheikh Salman thanked Sheikh Hazza for the warm welcome, and underlined the key role Sheikh Hazza plays in supporting the development of football improvement throughout the UAE.

Sheikh Salman also congratulated Sheikh Hazza for the third-placed finish achieved by the UAE at the 2015 AFC Asian Cup in Australia, saying that the result reflects both the continuous improvement of the national team and the efforts the UAE FA

made to prepare the team for the continental finals.

The AFC President added that he was sure that the UAE’s success in Australia would provide renewed impetus for the national team to garner even more success, especially given the qualified technical staff and highly capable players they have at their disposal.

Sheikh Salman also discussed the AFC programs and initiatives aimed at developing all aspects of the game in Asia, stressing that the unity of Asia’s footballing family would be the main guarantee of success.

Sheikh Hazza praised the vital role being played by the AFC, under the leadership of Sheikh Salman, to raise the standard of football in Asia, hailing the achievements the AFC has made at all levels in such a short period of time and adding that the improved standards were reflected during the Asian Cup where the level of competition was extremely high.

Sheikh Hazza also confirmed the UAE’s support for Sheikh Salman to continue leading the AFC, praising the work done by Sheikh Salman since he assumed the role of AFC President.

## African Dream Project Kicks Off in Gambia

BANJUL (FIVB) - The Gambia Volleyball Federation (GVBF) has adopted the African Dream Project, a development programme initiated by FIVB President Dr. Ary S. Graça Fº.

The programme focuses on promoting volleyball in schools. It will see centres set up that will be used to develop and identify athletes at a young age and provide them with the tools to develop as volleyball players.

Gambia Volleyball Federation President Mr Yunusa Barry thanked Dr. Graça for the support the programme provides.

“The African Dream Project is a stepping stone for the development of volleyball in our country and will aid in the promotion of the game at a grassroots level,” Barry said. “Gambia is expected to become a major power of the game in the near future, as we have a lot of young people with the talent and strength to play the sport.

“We are tasked with the mis-

sion of discovering new players who will join our talent centers. This federation would not be able

Sports, congratulated the executive of the Gambia Volleyball Federation and extended his sincere thanks



*Children attend the launch of the African Dream Project in Gambia*

to take on this project alone, and stakeholders like the Ministry of Sports and Education and the national Olympic Committee will also be involved.”

Interior Minister Ousman Sonko, who deputised for the Minister of

to the FIVB president. Sonko urged coordinators and coaches to select kids based on their potential, regardless of tribe, race, religion or origin. He reminded coaches that: “To whom much is given, much is expected,” and called for all to

make good use of the project.

Sonko advised children to dedicate themselves to the project and maintain discipline. He concluded by officially launching the project.

Four centers have been set up across the country.

1. Banjul (Banjul City Council) - Alagie Ceesay (Coordinator), Ebri-ma Niass (Coach)
2. Serre Kunda East (Kanifing Municipality) - Alfousainey Jarju (Coordinator), Alagie Babou Joof (Coach)
3. Brikama (West Coast Region) - Lamin A. Jammeh (Coordinator), Pa Barrow (Coach)
4. Farra Fenni (North Bank Region) - Yankuba Manjang (Coordinator), Pa Amat Jeng (Coach)

The launch was attended by representatives from the Gambia National Olympic Committee, the Ministry of Youth and Sport, the National Sports Council, other national federations and by members of the press.

## Journey Set to Begin on Asia’s Long and Winding Road

ZURICH (FIFA) - The thirteenth edition of the AFC Champions League kicks-off this week with the opening match day in the group stage on Tuesday and Wednesday across the globe’s broadest continent. This season has witnessed an expanded competition with a greater diversity of nations represented. Including the preliminary rounds, 143 matches will be played over a lengthy nine-month competition.

For the first time since 2008 a Vietnamese club will feature in the 32-team group stage with V-League champions Becamex Binh Duong granted auto-

matic passage. They are joined in the east side of the draw by Thailand’s Chonburi United and clubs from traditional powers Japan, Korea Republic, China PR and Australia. The west side has a more familiar feel with the big five again represented – Saudi Arabia, Iran, Uzbekistan, United Arab Emirates and Qatar. Last week perennial AFC Cup challengers Al Qadsia narrowly failed to become the first Kuwaiti side to reach the group stage for seven years with an unlucky extra-time defeat at Saudi Arabia’s Al Ahli

The tournament will conclude

in November with a two-legged final and the victor to represent Asia at the 2015 FIFA Club World Cup.

The group to watch Every football tournament must seemingly have a “group of death”, but few could argue the moniker is apt for this year’s Group H. In Western Sydney Wanderers, Kashima Antlers, Guangzhou Evergrande and FC Seoul, the group comprises the reigning champions, the J-League’s most successful club, and both the 2013 winners and runners-up. Despite their status as holders, the Wanderers are

desperately out of form having won just once in 16 A-League matches this season. They will hope to catch Kashima cold on the opening matchday with the J-League season commencing after the opening two continental dates. The powerhouse meeting for the round will surely be at the home of Guangzhou, now coached by 2006 FIFA World Cup™-winning captain Fabio Cannavaro, where Evergrande will be looking to reprise their win in the 2013 continental final over FC Seoul.

The other attractions While the headlines may be

grabbed by Guangzhou Evergrande and Co, Group G could prove to be the most intriguing. Topping the bill are the J-League’s best supported club, Urawa Red Diamonds, but Korea Republic’s Suwon Bluewings, Chinese capital club Beijing Guoan and Brisbane Roar - the A-League’s brightest hope - will offer stiff competition.

Over on the west side of the continent, much focus will be on Saudi powerhouse Al Hilal who will aim to finally become Champions League holders following their tense loss in last year’s decider. The Riyadh side will fancy

their chances in Group C which also features preliminary round qualifiers Al Sadd, and two sides with less experience at this level - Iran’s Foolad and Uzbekistan’s Lokomotiv Tashkent.

Group A will draw much attention with Tehran giant Persepolis winning their way into continental competition for the first time in three years, with the cavernous Azadi stadium their home. Providing the opposition are Uzbekistan’s Bunyodkor, who only finished fourth last year following years of domestic domination, plus Saudi Arabia’s Al Nassr and Qatar kings Lekhwia.