

# Two Iranians to Vie for Best AFC Champions League Player



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Persepolis goalkeeper Hamed Lak and ex-Persepolis defender Shoja Khalilzadeh were shortlisted for the Best AFC Champions League Player. The-AFC.com has invited the fans to cast their votes in Asia's

Choice – Fan Awards: Best AFC Champions League Player in 2020, with 60 percent of the votes to be directly supplied by fans, and the winners to be revealed on January 24.

In the most of unique seasons,

Asia's elite clubs delivered a compelling, high-quality competition, culminating in a gripping final in Doha.

Hamed Lak – Persepolis FC (IRN)

Persepolis' progression through

the competition was built on keeping clean sheets, and they couldn't have wished for a more reliable last line of defense than goalkeeper Hamed Lak.

Having only joined the club in September, Lak was superb, conceding only four goals in eight matches – three scored directly from penalties, and the other put in on the rebound after the Iranian shot-stopper had saved an initial Júnior Negrao spot-kick in the final.

Shojae Khalilzadeh - Persepolis FC (IRN)

A defensive colossus, and the scorer of the two goals himself, Persepolis center-back Khalilzadeh produced an exemplary tournament, helping the Tehran giant go six consecutive matches without conceding in open play.

Unfortunately for Persepolis, Khalilzadeh moved to Qatar Stars League club Al-Rayyan in October, ruling him out of the December final.

## Atletico Extend Lead at Top of La Liga



Saul Niguez scored his first goal of the season for Atletico

MADRID (Dispatches) - Atletico Madrid stretched their advantage at the top of La Liga to four points with a 2-0 win over Sevilla.

Diego Simeone's side took the lead when Angel Correa fired in after receiving a pass from England's Kieran Trippier - back in the team after his 10-week ban for betting breaches was suspended.

Saul Niguez ensured victory in the 76th minute with a thumping effort.

It was a first defeat in 10 games in all competitions for in-form Sevilla, who are sixth in the table.

Atletico now have 41 points from 16 games, four clear of second-placed Real Madrid, who have played two games more.

They were made to work hard for their win with the visitors producing 13 efforts on goal compared to their five. However, Atletico keeper Jan Oblak only had to make two saves of note.

Simeone's men made the most of their chances, with forward Luis Suarez also coming close to scoring, only to be denied by the brilliance of Sevilla keeper Bono.

## Milan Beat Torino on Penalties to Reach Italian Cup Quarterfinals

MILAN (Reuters) - Zlatan Ibrahimovic got his first start in over seven weeks but AC Milan had to battle into the Italian Cup quarterfinals with a 5-4 win on penalties over Torino after Tuesday's match ended 0-0 after extra time.

Hakan Calhanoglu slotted in the winning penalty with Tomas Rincon missing from the spot for Torino in the San Siro after a stalemate following 120 minutes of play.

Ibrahimovic had made a brief late appearance last weekend in a 2-0 win over Torino in Serie A, having been sidelined with a left thigh injury since scoring a double against Napoli on November 22.

On Tuesday, the 38-year-old Swede played the first half



AC Milan forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic got his first start after 51 days since injury.

before being substituted off for Calhanoglu.

Ex-Milan coach Marco Giampolo's Torino gave the hosts

more of a battle than last Saturday, with both sides missing chances in a clash between two former five-time former winners.

Ciprian Tatarusanu was in the Milan goal in place of Gianluigi Donnarumma with defender Matteo Musacchio playing for the first time in nearly a year.

Tatarusanu did well to deny Simone Zaza and Amer Gojak, while Torino counterpart Vanja Milinkovic-Savic kept out Rafael Leao and Davide Calabria from a distance.

Milan's Brahim Diaz had the best chance to finish off the game four minutes from time, but the Spanish forward sent over the bar on front of goal.

On the bench, Donnarumma even picked up a red card for protesting a penalty was not awarded for a clumsy Milinkovic-Savic intervention on Leao with 20 minutes to go.

## Al Rajhi Wins, Al-Attiyah Beats Peterhansel in 10th Stage of Dakar



JEDDAH (Dispatches) - Starting fourth in the 342km loop between Neom and Alula, Al-Rajhi snatched the lead from fellow Saudi Arabian driver Yasir Seaidan at the second waypoint and never looked back, claiming a second stage win of 2021.

With Al Rajhi out of reach, Al-Attiyah and Peterhansel were locked in a tight scrap for the best of the rest honors, with the X-raid Mini driver holding the initial advantage. But Toyota's Al-Attiyah was able to overturn his advantage by the eighth waypoint, eventually securing second place by a slender margin of 49s.

Reigning champion Carlos Sainz dropped as low as 17th in the early part of the stage, losing over six minutes to the leaders, but recovered enough to finish fourth, 4m12s down on Al-Rajhi.

Jakub Przygonski rounded off a strong day for the Overdrive team in fifth, beating the

factory Toyota of Giniel de Villiers by just over a minute.

Vladimir Vasilyev was seventh on a Mini 4x4, ahead of the Century cars of Mathieu Serradori and Brian Baragwanath. Nani Roma completed the top 10 on the sole remaining Bahrain Raid Xtreme entry.

Seaidan, who led the rally at the first checkpoint, was forced to stop at the 190km mark and is yet to complete the stage.

Przygonski and Roma have consolidated fourth and fifth position respectively, ahead of the top PH Sport Peugeot of ex-WRC driver Khalid Al Qassimi, who finished 15th in Wednesday's stage.

Vasilyev just sits one minute behind Al Qassimi in seventh, while de Villiers has jumped the privateer Ford of Martin Prokop to move up to eighth, with Optimus driver Christian Lavieille remaining 10th.

## Ski World Cup Slaloms in Austria Switched Because of Covid-19



Slalom specialist Alexis Pinturault competes leads the World Cup

VIENNA (Dispatches) - Two men's skiing World Cup slaloms this weekend which were moved to Kitzbuehel earlier this week were on Wednesday switched to Flachau after a suspected cluster of the UK coronavirus variant emerged in the Austrian Tyrol.

"For safety reasons, we don't want the races...to take place in Kitzbuehel this weekend," the Tyrol regional governor Guenther Platter told a press conference.

The races were originally scheduled for Wengen, but after racing at the Swiss resort was cancelled on Monday because of a rise in virus cases in the

area, Kitzbuehel agreed to take two of its three races, a pair of slaloms this weekend.

The races will now be held in Flachau, in the neighbouring state of Salzburg.

Platter said these were being cancelled after the discovery of a suspected cluster of 17 cases of the more infectious variant of the coronavirus which originated in the UK.

Platter said the decision had been taken "so as not to leave ourselves open to the accusation that we weren't being careful".

France's Alexis Pinturault leads the 2020-21 World Cup overall standings.

## Court Shuts FIFA Out of Case Investigating Infantino

ZURICH (Reuters) - Global soccer body FIFA has failed to win access to case files compiled by the special prosecutor named last year to handle an investigation into its president Gianni Infantino and his dealings with Switzerland's former attorney general.

Special prosecutor Stefan Keller in July opened criminal proceedings over undocumented meetings Infantino and former top prosecutor Michael Lauber held while Lauber's office investigated alleged corruption in world soccer.

Infantino and Lauber, who has since resigned, have denied any wrongdoing. FIFA's ethics committee cleared Infantino in August of any code breaches.

In a verdict released on Tuesday, the Federal Criminal Court rejected FIFA's request for access to files in the investigation as a third party directly involved in the proceedings.

FIFA, which complained that opening a criminal case against its president had damaged its reputation, had argued that Keller was unauthorised to start such proceedings and appealed against his decision to deny FIFA's bid to see case files.



FIFA President Gianni Infantino looks on during the awards ceremony after the AFC Champions League finals football match between Iran's Persepolis and Korea's Ulsan Hyundai on Dec 19, 2020 at the al-Janoub Stadium in the Qatari city of Al Wakrah.