

Iran Basketball Team to Meet Japan, China



TEHRAN – Iran basketball team is to face Japan and China in the coming days in the sixth and final window of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 Asian Qualifiers.

Led by Saeid Armaghani, the Iranian players are scheduled to meet Japan on 23 Feb. and China on 26 Feb.

Two days prior to the Iran-Japan match, the tickets have been sold out. The match will be held in Takasaki Arena Stadium in Japan.

Iran sit third in Pool F and will most likely advance to the World Cup if they defeat Japan.

Real Madrid Come From Two Down to Earn 5-2 Win at Liverpool



Real Madrid's Karim Benzema (second right) celebrates after scoring his side's fifth goal during the Champions League, round of 16, first leg soccer match between Liverpool and Real Madrid at the Anfield stadium in Liverpool, England, on Feb 21, 2023.

LIVERPOOL (Reuters) - Holders Real Madrid produced a stunning comeback from two goals down to earn a devastating 5-2 victory at a shell-shocked Liverpool in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie.

Two goals each from Vinicius Jr. and Karim Benzema turned what had looked like being an unpleasant evening for Real into a stylish romp that left Juergen Klopp's side flat on the canvas and facing a monumental task to reach the quarter finals.

It was Liverpool's heaviest home defeat in Champions League history, eclipsing a 3-0 loss to the same opponents in 2014.

In a re-run of last year's final, the first half was played at a ferocious pace, with the hosts racing into a fourth-minute lead through a superb Darwin Nunez flick - the quickest goal Liverpool have ever scored at Anfield in the Champions League.

The stadium erupted 10 minutes later when an horrendous miscontrol from Real goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois let Mohamed Salah in for the second, with the Egyptian now Liverpool's all

time top goalscorer in European competition.

Yet just as they did on several occasions en route to their 14th European Cup crown last season, Real quickly turned things around, with Vinicius scoring one sublime strike and one fluke goal after another goalkeeping mistake to level the match by halftime.

A bullet Eder Militao header completed the turnaround for Real early in the second half, sapping all the life out of Anfield in the process.

The hosts' misery was not done there, however, as Benzema's double ensured Liverpool shipped five goals at home for only the third time this century in all competitions.

Klopp said in the run-up to the match that he had been unable to rewatch last season's final, which Real won 1-0, until this weekend, insisting doing so was torture, relieving how Liverpool had their chances to claim victory in the Paris showpiece.

Fourteen minutes in at Anfield and some form of redemption seemed to be on the cards for the Liverpool manager.

IOC on Russian Athletes Row: Games Cannot Exclude, Divide

BERLIN (Reuters) - The Olympics cannot be divisive and exclude athletes, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said on Wednesday, defending its plan to allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to qualify for the Paris 2024 summer Olympics.

In a statement to mark the first anniversary of Russia, Ukraine war, on Feb. 24 last year, the IOC said the Games had a unifying character that promoted

peace. The Olympic body is facing a mounting backlash after setting out a path last month for athletes of both Russia and Belarus to earn slots for the Olympics through Asian qualifying and to compete as neutrals, with no flags or anthems.

Athletes from those countries were banned from many international competitions in after Russia launched what it calls its "special military

operation" in Ukraine, but some international federations are now allowing them back following the IOC guidance.

"The Olympic Games cannot prevent wars and conflicts. Nor can they address all the political and social challenges in our world," the IOC said in its statement.

"This is the realm of politics. But the Olympic Games can set an example for a world where everyone re-

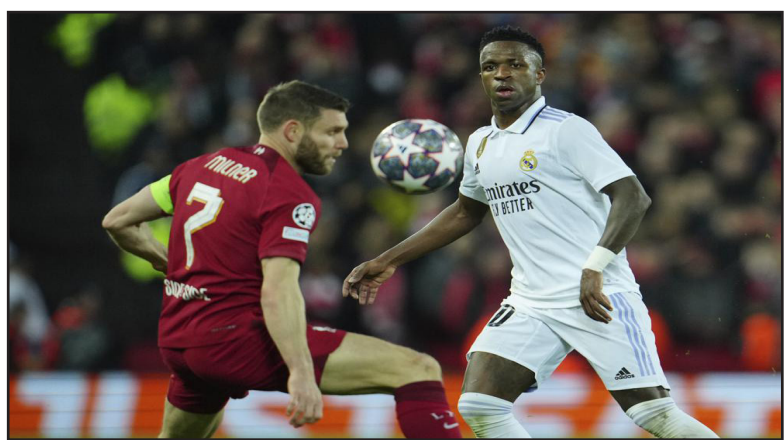
spects the same rules and one another."

"They can open the door to dialogue and peace-building in ways that exclusion and division do not."

Ukraine has also threatened to boycott the Olympics over Russia's participation.

"Our mission has always been to promote peace through sport. The IOC remains committed to this mission to unite the entire world in peaceful competition to this day," the IOC said.

Spanish League Files New Complaints for Racist Insults



Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior, right, passes the ball past Liverpool's James Milner during the Champions League, round of 16, first leg soccer match between Liverpool and Real Madrid at the Anfield stadium in Liverpool, England, Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2023.

MADRID (AP) — The Spanish league filed three more complaints for racist insults during matches on Wednesday, including two aimed

at Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior.

The league said one Mallorca fan was identified for twice insulting

players — once against Vinicius and another against Villarreal midfielder Samu Chukwueze. Both Vinicius and Chukwueze are Black.

It said police have taken a statement from the individual, who was identified by Mallorca's security officials.

The third complaint was against an Osasuna fan who insulted Vinicius, though the person has yet to be identified.

The league has filed eight complaints to authorities for racist insults or chants against Vinicius, with three of them being shelved by prosecutors and another three being accepted for processing before courts.

Authorities have yet to find those responsible for hanging Vinicius' effigy from a bridge in Madrid before the derby against Atletico Ma-

drid last month.

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp defended Vinicius ahead of his team's 5-2 loss to Madrid in the Champions League on Tuesday, when the Brazil forward scored twice.

"I hope he's not fussed by any idiots who say something about him," Klopp said.

There has been little punishment for hate attacks against soccer players in Spain, though recently Valladolid suspended 12 season ticket holders while investigating their alleged use of verbal abuse against Vinicius.

The first trial against a fan who racially insulted a player in Spain is expected to begin this year following remarks by an Espanyol supporter against Athletic Bilbao forward Iñaki Williams a few years ago.

Dominic Thiem Loses at Rio Open, Falling to 1-2 in 2023



RIO DE JANEIRO (AFP) — Dominic Thiem is once again fighting through his matches and enjoying himself, but confidence is admittedly still lacking for the 29-year-old.

Thiem lost in the first round of the Rio Open, falling to Thiago Monteiro 6-1, 3-6, 7-6 (2).

The former world No. 3 and 2020 U.S. Open champion, who came in ranked at No. 96 after battling right wrist and abdominal injuries, fell to 1-2 on the year. He missed the Australian Open and got his first win last week at Buenos Aires, Argentina.

"I was not convinced enough. It is a so-so leg of confidence. A leg of one match this year," Thiem said. "Today was a little bit better than I did in Buenos Aires. But still when I step in it is too many

mistakes. I need to find the right timing again, find myself closer at the baseline again."

Thiem, who won the Rio Open in 2017, dropped the first set against the 83rd-ranked Monteiro in 27 minutes, with the Austrian making a series of unforced errors.

Thiem righted himself in the second set, relying on his forehand and his patience on the baseline. After a back-and-forth third set, the Brazilian won the tiebreaker comfortably to close out the 2-hour, 46-minute match.

Monteiro will next face either second-seeded Cameron Norrie or Juan Manuel Cerundolo in the clay-court tournament.

Defending champion and second-ranked Carlos Alcaraz faces Mateus Alves in the first round.

Tokyo Olympic Medalist Weightlifter Son Banned for Doping

ASTANA, Kazakhstan (AP) — A weightlifter from Kazakhstan who won a bronze medal at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 has been banned for eight years for doping.

The Weightlifting Federation of the Republic of Kazakhstan (WFRK) said Wednesday that Igor Son, who won the bronze in the men's 61-kilogram category in Tokyo, was among six weightlifters from the country to receive doping bans.

It was first reported in March 2022 that they had tested positive in samples taken by Kazakhstan's anti-doping authorities. It's the second career doping ban for Son, who served a seven-month sanction in 2015.

The WFRK said the positive



FILE - Igor Son of Kazakhstan competes in the men's 61kg weightlifting event, at the 2020 Summer Olympics, on July 25, 2021, in Tokyo, Japan.

test would not lead to Son being stripped of his Olympic medal.

"This out-of-competition testing was undertaken after six months following the international competitions where (the

athletes) had taken part, so there is no issue of disqualifying their results or returning their medals. I especially want to emphasize this in relation to the Olympic award of Igor

Son," WFRK general secretary Aldiyar Nuralinov said in a statement.

Kazakhstan has a long history of doping in elite-level weightlifting. The Central Asian nation has been stripped of medals from the 2008, 2012 and 2016 Olympics for various breaches of anti-doping rules.

National teams can lose future Olympic places if they have repeated doping cases — a sanction which has applied to Kazakhstan in the past — or be barred from competitions. Nuralinov said that would not happen in this case because Son and the other athletes tested positive in national-level tests within Kazakhstan and not at international events.