

Iran to Play Russia in Friendly Football Match



TEHRAN – Iran national football team will meet Russia in a friendly match in October 2025.

Iran will first compete in the 2025 CAFA Nations Cup and then play Russia in October.

Team Melli are currently focused on the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers, where the Persians lead Group A with 16 points, out of six matches.

Iranian men’s and women’s football teams have played their Russian counterparts in recent years.

In March 2023, the national men’s football teams of Iran and Russia shared spoils at a friendly match in Tehran.

The national football teams of Iran and Russia played in a friendly match on at Azadi Stadium in Tehran in presence of about 7 thousand spectators.

The match ended in a 1-1 draw.

Both teams scored their goal on a penalty kick.

The two teams had other opportunities to score more goals in both half times, but they had to share the spoils in the end.

Forward Mehdi Taremi equalized the match for Iran in the minute of 47.

This was the first test for the new Iranian head coach of the national Iranian football team or Team Melli Amir Ghalenoei.



PARIS (Reuters) - Aryna Sabalenka has been voted the WTA Player of the Year for the first time after the Belarusian won two Grand Slam titles and secured the year-end world number one ranking, the governing body of women’s tennis said.

After successfully defending her Australian Open trophy in January, Sabalenka won the U.S. Open crown in September for her third Grand Slam title and leapfrogged Iga Swiatek to top the world rankings a month later.

She also won tournaments in Cincinnati and Wuhan to end her 2024 campaign with four titles.

International tennis media also voted for Paris Olympics gold medallists Sara Errani and Jasmine Paolini as the year’s top doubles team, while American Emma Navarro was named the season’s most improved player.

Ranked 38th at the end of 2023, Navarro broke into the top

10 in September after winning her first title in Hobart and making six semi-final appearances, including at Flushing Meadows, during the season.

Lulu Sun won the Newcomer of the Year award following the New Zealander’s run to the quarter-finals at Wimbledon as a qualifier, which helped her climb to 40th in the world after being ranked outside the top 200 in January.

Former world number two Paula Badosa, who ended her 2023 season early due to a back problem that cast doubt about her future in the game, was named Comeback Player of the Year.

After returning to the tour this season, the Spaniard won the Washington title and also matched her best Grand Slam performance by reaching the U.S. Open quarters to finish the year ranked 12th.

Messi Excluded as Bellingham, Real Dominate FIFPRO Honor

PARIS (AFP) - Six players from Champions League winners Real Madrid and four from Manchester City feature in this year’s FIFPRO World 11 announced on Monday by the global players’ association, with Lionel Messi absent for the first time in almost 20 years.

The 2024 FIFPRO World 11 is the first edition since 2006 to exclude Messi. The Argentinian, who holds the all-time record with 17 selections, was replaced in the front row by Erling Haaland, Kylian Mbappe and Vinicius Jr.

Jude Bellingham topped the men’s overall voting, with the Real Madrid and England midfielder receiving 11,176 selections from his peers.

Liverpool defender Virgil van Dijk was the sole player outside of Real and City included in the men’s team of the year.



Argentina’s Lionel Messi

English players led the 2024 Women’s World 11 with five selected: Lucy Bronze, Mary Earps, Alex Greenwood, Lauren James, and Keira Walsh.

Bronze’s seventh selection tied her with Wendie Renard for the women’s appearance record. Zambian Barbra Banda became the first African player in the Women’s

World 11. Men’s World 11 Goalkeeper: Ederson (Manchester City, Brazil) Defenders: Dani Carvajal (Real Madrid, Spain), Virgil van Dijk (Liverpool, Netherlands), Antonio Rudiger (Real Madrid, Germany) Midfielders: Jude Bellingham (Real Madrid, England), Kevin De Bruyne

(City, Belgium), Toni Kroos (Real Madrid, Germany), Rodri (City, Spain)

Forwards: Erling Haaland (City, Norway), Kylian Mbappe (Paris St Germain/Real Madrid, France), Vinicius Jr (Real Madrid, Brazil)

Women’s World 11 Goalkeeper: Mary Earps (Manchester United/Paris St Germain, England)

Defenders: Lucy Bronze (Barcelona/Chelsea, England), Olga Carmona (Real Madrid, Spain), Alex Greenwood (City, England)

Midfielders: Aitana Bonmati (Barcelona, Spain), Alexia Putellas (Barcelona, Spain), Keira Walsh (Barcelona, England)

Forwards: Barbra Banda (Shanghai Shengli/Orlando Pride, Zambia), Linda Caicedo (Real Madrid, Colombia), Lauren James (Chelsea, England), Marta (Orlando Pride, Brazil)

Jalen Green Scores 31 to Lead Rockets Past Clippers 117-106



Houston Rockets guard Jalen Green, right, shoots as Los Angeles Clippers guard Kevin Porter Jr. defends during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Sunday, Dec. 8, 2024, in Inglewood, Calif.

INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP) — Jalen Green scored 31 points, Amen Thompson added 22 and the Houston Rockets defeated the Los Angeles Clippers 117-106 on Sunday night.

The Rockets ended a two-game skid without starter Fred VanVleet, who missed his first game of the season because of a right knee contusion.

Bones Hyland led the Clippers with 22 points off the bench, making a team-best five 3-pointers, and Ivica Zubac added 21 points and 12 rebounds. Kevin Porter Jr. had 19 points in his first career start for the team.

The Clippers lost their second straight at home after they suffered a 28-point drubbing at the hands of Minnesota on Wednesday. They kept it close in the first quarter before the Rockets took control.

Milano Cortina 2026 Calendar Revealed Online

GENEVA (Xinhua) -- Milano Cortina 2026 revealed the official competition calendar for the 2026 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games online.

A total of 116 Olympic gold medals are at stake from Feb. 6-22, 2026, across several regions in Italy.

Milan will host figure skating, speed skating, short track and ice hockey. Cortina d’Ampezzo will stage women’s Alpine skiing, curling, bobsleigh, skeleton and luge, while Val di Fiemme will host cross-country skiing, ski jumping and Nordic combined competitions.

Biathlon will be held in Anterselva, while men’s Alpine skiing and ski mountaineering will be staged in Bormio. Freestyle and snowboarding competitions will be held in Livigno.

Five Olympic gold medals will be up for grabs on Feb. 7, 2026, the first medal day, with the men’s downhill in Bormio and the snowboard big air in Livigno.

Of the 2,900 Olympic athlete quota spots, 47 percent are female. More than 600 athletes will compete for 79 Paralympic titles from March 6-15, 2026.

The Para ice hockey tournament will be held in Milan, while wheelchair curling, Para Alpine skiing and Para snowboard events will be held in



Cortina. Para cross-country skiing and biathlon competitions will be held in Val di Fiemme.

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NFF Criticizes FIFA’s ‘Flawed, Inconsistent’ World Cup Bidding Process

OSLO (Reuters) - The Norwegian Football Federation (NFF) on Tuesday said it will vote against FIFA’s awarding of hosting rights for the 2030 and 2034 World Cups by acclamation, adding that it had formally criticized the process in a letter to the world governing body.

Votes are due to be held at FIFA’s virtual extraordinary Congress on Wednesday to approve the 2030 and 2034 World Cups, though each has only a single bid, which are both expected to be confirmed by acclamation.

A combined bid from Morocco, Spain and Portugal is the sole one for 2030, while Saudi Arabia is the lone bidder for 2034. FIFA announced both bidders in October last year.

“Ahead of the Congress, the Norwegian Football Federation has expressed concerns on several occasions about FIFA’s process for awarding the 2030 and 2034 World Cups,” the NFF said in a statement.

“The NFF will formally criticize the bidding process in a letter to FIFA and request that this be recorded in the Congress minutes.

“If a vote by acclamation is held, the NFF will vote against it. The NFF cannot endorse a process it considers flawed and inconsistent with the principles of FIFA’s own reforms.”

The NFF also requested that its criticism be officially recorded by FIFA.

FIFA did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

“The vote is not about who gets the 2030 and 2034 World Cups – that has already been decided,” NFF President Lise Klaveness said.

“The Congress is primarily about providing feedback on FIFA’s allocation process. The board’s assessment is that the process does not align with the principles of a sound and predictable governance system.

“By abstaining from acclamation, we are sending a deliberate signal that we cannot support FIFA’s approach.”

Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay submitted a joint bid to host the 2030 World Cup in 2022. However, FIFA announced in 2023 that Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay would instead each host one match of the 2030 World Cup to mark the tournament’s centenary, before the action moves to Morocco, Spain and Portugal.

Australia and Indonesia were in talks over a joint bid for the 2034 World Cup but dropped out before Saudi was announced as the sole bidder.

Klaveness added that the lack of an open process undermined trust in FIFA as the “global custodian of football”.

“FIFA’s own guidelines for human rights and due diligence have also not been adequately integrated into the process, increasing the risk of human rights violations,” she added.

“Based on the mandate from our General Assembly in 2021, we have consistently advocated for FIFA to strengthen itself as a rules-based and predictable steward of international football.

“We must remain consistent in this matter as well.”

Amnesty International and the Sport & Rights Alliance (SRA) last month called on FIFA to halt the process to pick Saudi Arabia as hosts of the 2034 tournament unless major human rights reforms are announced before the vote.

The country denies accusations of human rights abuses and says it protects its national security through its laws.