

American Rubin Williams has stepped in to be Carl Froch's latest opponent in Nottingham on Saturday. He replaces Russia's Dennis Inkil who pulled out of their bout for a second time on March 17.



Sepahan players celebrate victory.

Sepahan in Syria

Saipa One Step Away From Next Round

The fifth round of Asian Champions League continues today with 14 teams in seven groups.

Iranian teams in the league, namely Sepahan and Saipa, meet rivals from Syria and Kuwait, Mehr News Agency reported.

Sepahan is in Group A. All teams in this group have the chance to advance to the next round in today's matches. Sepahan should win its matches against Syria's Al-Ittihad and Uzbekistan's Kurvchi, the top team in Group A, to advance to the playoffs.

Sepahan must defeat Al-Ittihad to make up for its defeat in the home game and also maintain its second rank in Group A. Sepahan has

displayed that it can defeat the Syrian rival even in Aleppo. It defeated Al-Ittihad 4-0 in a champions league match in Aleppo in 2006-7. Memories of this victory can boost Sepahan's morale in its match in Aleppo today.

Meanwhile, Saipa only needs one win to advance to the next round. It is not tough for Saipa to defeat Al-Kuwait at the Enqelab Stadium in Karaj.

Saipa's Ali Daei in his confrontation with Al-Kuwait's Rodion Gacainin needs a victory to be relieved from extra pressure and to concentrate more on the national team. In addition to being club coaches, Daei and Gacainin are coaches for Iran and Kuwait national

teams, respectively.

In a press conference in Tehran on Tuesday, Daei said, "We expect a tough match. Al-Kuwait is a good team and it needs to beat us in order to advance to the next round."

According to ISNA, Al-Kuwait's manager, Ahmad Abdullah noted, "We only need to win to remain hopeful about advancing to the next round. Even a draw does not help us. Therefore, we will play for winning."

Of course, nothing is predictable in football, but I believe that if we can maintain our concentration we can break through the coordination between Saipa's midfielders and strikers and control the game."

Torres Better Next Year

Fernando Torres has enjoyed one of the most prolific debut seasons in Premier League history, but Liverpool goalkeeper Jose Reina believes his Anfield team-mate will be even better next season.

Torres has taken English football by storm following his £21 million club record move from Atletico Madrid.

The Spaniard has scored 23 league goals to equal former Manchester United forward

Ruud van Nistelrooy's record for a foreigner playing their first season in England's top division.

But Reina is convinced his compatriot's first year in England has been a learning process that will reap greater rewards next term.

"You have to remember that this is Fernando's first season in England so he will improve and get even better," Reina told AFP.

"He always wants to learn and he will improve because he's hungry. As a player you are always learning and always looking to get better and believe me that will be Fernando's goal next season.

"English football is different but he has adapted really well—better than anyone could have expected. You only need to look at the number of goals he has scored."

Super Aguri Out of F1

The Super Aguri team has withdrawn from the Formula One World Championship because of a lack of funding.

The Japanese team has wound up their racing activities with immediate effect and will not compete at this weekend's Turkish Grand Prix.

Super Aguri have been struggling for survival since the collapse of a takeover deal by the Dubai-based Magma Group in April.

It means British driver Anthony Davidson is now without an F1 drive.

Team founder Aguri Suzuki, who broke the news in Japan, told BBC, "Regrettably I must inform you that the team will be ceasing racing activities."

"The loss of financial backing put the team into financial difficulties.

"With the help of Honda, we somehow managed to keep the team going, but we find it difficult to establish a way to continue the activities in the future so I have concluded to withdraw.

"I have been very happy that I was able to achieve a miracle and become a team owner."

Super Aguri's prospects looked bleak when they were denied access to the Istanbul circuit ahead of this weekend's Grand Prix pending talks over their survival.

Team founder Aguri Suzuki and backers Honda were expected to meet on Tuesday, while the team's trucks and motor home were not allowed into the paddock.

Nani Apologizes for Red Card Shame

Manchester United winger, Nani, has pleaded with his team-mates to forgive him for his needless red card against West Ham.

Nani was sent off in the first half at Old Trafford on Saturday after head butting West Ham defender Lucas Neill.

The Portuguese player faces a three-match ban, ruling him out of United's crucial final Premier League game against Wigan, and could also be hit with a fine by United.

He claimed he was provoked by Neill but admitted he should have been able to control himself, Reuters reported.

"I recognize that my action was a thoughtless one, but it was provoked, but that's exactly what happened," he said.

"I regret having done what I did and I have to be thankful for the fact that my team-mates secured a win which was extremely important to us.

"I want to publicly ask for forgiveness, firstly of my team-mates, who were forced into a greater effort during more than 60 minutes, secondly of my manager and coaches, and thirdly of the United fans who have given me so much affection."

Nani also apologized for leaving Old Trafford in a rage before the end of Saturday's game.

News in Brief

Khaledi in Hall of Fame



Iranian wrestling referee Mehdi Khaledi has been included in the 2008 Wrestling Hall of Fame.

The new member of the Hall of Fame had already won the FILA golden whistle. He will be awarded on August 21 in Beijing's Landmark Hotel, MNA reported.

All members of the Wrestling Hall of Fame will take part in the ceremony.

Astana Ban in Place

Tour de France organizers will stick by their ruling to bar 2007 champion Alberto Contador and his Astana team from this year's race despite the Giro d'Italia's decision to let them enter the Italian event.

Italian organizers changed their minds last week and afforded Contador's team a spot in the Giro, which starts Saturday.

But the Amaury Sport Organization, which owns the Tour de France and other stage races including Paris-Nice, said Tuesday it will not change its decision to bar the team from all its events in 2008 following a series of doping violations. "Our management took a decision. We will wait for one year," ASO spokesman Christophe Marchadier said. "One year to wait and see, and we will have another look next year." ASO excluded Astana because of serious doping violations at the last two tours.

Last year, Alexandre Vinokourov was caught blood-doping during the race and Andrej Kashechkin tested positive for the same offense in an out-of-competition test in Turkey a month later.

In 2006, several riders on the team—then known as Liberty Seguros—were kicked out on the eve of the Tour after being linked to the Operation Puerto blood-doping scandal in Spain.

No Visa for Moscow Final



Fans traveling to Moscow for the Champions League final between Manchester United and Chelsea on May 21 will be able to use match tickets as entry visas, UEFA announced on Monday.

European football's ruling body made the announcement on their website after holding discussions with the Russian authorities. In recent days it was reported that tickets could not be used as travel visas.

UEFA underlined that fans will have to show a valid match ticket, a valid passport and a completed immigration form upon entry to Russia.

"Following high level discussions involving the UEFA President Michel Platini, the Russian Government and UEFA are pleased to confirm that all supporters will be able to use their match ticket as a visa entry to the Russian Federation for a period of 72 hours," said the statement.

"The visa exemption applies to all ticket holders coming to Russia for the final in the period between May 19 and 23."

UEFA added that supporters traveling to Russia without visas will be "asked to keep their ticket up to departure from Moscow".

"Anyone overstaying the 72-hour entry period will then have to pay the fee for a regular visa when leaving the country."

Guardiola Named Barcelona Coach

Former club captain Pep Guardiola will replace Frank Rijkaard as Barcelona coach at the end of the season, Spanish media reported on Tuesday.

Newspapers said that Barcelona's delegate commission, which includes club president Joan Laporta and sporting director Txiki Begiristain, had met on Monday and recommended that Guardiola should replace Rijkaard as first team coach.

Barcelona-based daily Sport said the decision would be ratified by the rest of the board and made official at the end of the season.

The club has said it will not comment on possible changes until the season is over.

Rijkaard, whose contract runs to 2009, has denied reports he will step down as coach in the wake of the team's failure to win any silverware over the past two seasons.

He was part of the Spain side that won the gold medal in the Barcelona Olympics and won 47 caps for the senior national team.

Guardiola left Barcelona in 2001 to join Serie A side Brescia but his career in Italy was disrupted when he tested positive for nandrolone in November 2001.

He served a four-month ban but strenuously denied any offence and went through the courts to clear his name, finally winning his case in October last year.

After spells in Qatar and Mexico, Guardiola announced his retirement as a player in Nov. 2006. He was appointed coach of Barcelona's B side last June.



Fernando Torres



Nani