



Salehi Eying Olympic Medals

Mohammad Salehi is one of the six Iranian weightlifters invited to Beijing Olympics preparatory camp.

Speaking to ISNA, Salehi said that he is preparing to win medals at the Olympics.

Salehi, who was a silver medalist in the Asian championship tournament, also noted, "In the Asian championship, I lifted 185 kg in snatch and 235 kg in clean and jerk. I believe it was a good tournament overall. I am almost satisfied about my performance, but it was not the ideal situation for me. I think if I participate in the Olympics, I can do better. I have lifted 195 kg in snatch and 245 kg in clean and jerk in the Olympics preparatory camp. Of course, I did not have to lift heavier weights in the Asian championship

and what I lifted was sufficient. Furthermore, my hand ached a bit and I did not exert extra pressure on myself."

Salehi along with World champion Hossein Rezaeadeh, Sohrab Moradi, Asghar Ebrahimi, Mohsen Beiranvand, Rashid Sharifi and Mohammad Salehi have been invited to the Olympics preparatory camp. They all have a good chance of winning a medal in the Olympics.

Salehi recalled that he is only thinking of the Olympics for the time being.

"I am working hard to win a medal. It is true that I have been training hard to participate in the Beijing Olympics, but even if I fail to do so, it is not late for me and I can attend another Olympics competition in the future," he concluded.



Mohammad Salehi

News in Brief

Iranian Trio to Wrestle in Rome



Three Iranian Greco-Roman wrestlers are set to qualify for the Beijing Olympics in the competitions which are being held in Italy.

Greco-Roman Olympics Qualifying Tournament No. 1 will be held in Rome, Italy, on May 10-11.

According to MNA, Hamid Bavafa in 60 kg class, Ali Mohammadi in 66 kg and Farshad Alizadeh in 74 kg flew to Italy on Wednesday to win Olympic berths.

The top four wrestlers in each weight class will book place in Olympics, set for Aug. 12-21 in Beijing, China.

Taekwondo Gold for Iran



Iranian Taekwondo fighter, Amir Yarani, has won a gold medal at the 7th Taekwondo Junior World Championships held in Izmir in Turkey.

Yarani managed to overcome his Mexican rival Jorge Valles on Thursday evening, PressTV reported.

The Iranian Taekwondo practitioner had reached the final after defeating his opponent from Thailand 4-0.

Some 795 Taekwondo competitors from 84 countries attended the 7th World Junior Taekwondo Championships which began on May 7 and will end on May 11.

Sepahan's Hopes Dashed

Al Ittihad Aleppo fought back from a goal down to hand last year's AFC Champions League finalists Sepahan a 2-1 defeat on Wednesday evening, dashing the Iranian side's hopes of progressing to the knockout phase and sending Kuruvchi into the quarter-finals.

According to AFC, goals from Venezuelan pair Jonathan Perez and Jesus Gomez in four second half minutes denied Sepahan the win they needed to keep their chase of the Uzbekis alive going into the final round of matches.

The result means Kuruvchi cannot be overtaken at the top of Group A and Mirjalal Kasimov's team will go through to the last eight in their debut season in the continental championship.

Hadi Aghily had controversially put Sepahan in front in the 47th minute when his header was deflected towards the target and a goal was awarded despite Yahya Al Rached looking like he had cleared the ball before it had crossed the line.

Sepahan went close to doubling their advantage in the 57th minute when Abdulwahab Abuhail crashed his shot against the crossbar from 25 yards out before Mohammed Salehi pushed the rebound over the line, only for the assistant referee to raise his flag to rule the effort out.

Four minutes later, though, Al Ittihad pulled level thanks to a top class finish by Perez, whose right foot effort from just inside the penalty area seared into the top corner.

By the 65th minute the Syrian side was in front thanks to another high quality strike when Gomez was first to react after Masoud Hamami had saved Otabng Otudor's header to curl his shot high into the goal.



Mohsen Bengar of Sepahan (r) tackling an Al Ittihad player

As it was, though, Sepahan were incapable of securing the win needed to keep their challenge alive and Jorvan Vieira's side exited the tournament as they failed to match the heroics of last season.

Meanwhile, Al Ittihad Aleppo coach Tita Valeriu conceded his side had an element of luck as they battled back from a goal down to defeat last year's AFC Champions League finalists Sepahan 2-1 on Wednesday evening.

"I'm pleased with the performance of the team in what was a very open game," said Valeriu.

"In the first half our performance was not good while Sepahan controlled the play and although Sepahan took the lead we managed to score two goals which gave us the win. Today we were lucky and luck was what we have missed in the previous matches. We organized the defensive line and we made few mistakes and that was the main reason behind the victory."

In contrast to Valeriu, Sepahan coach Jorvan Vieira bemoaned his side's lack of fortune in the game, insisting the referee ruled out a goal he felt was perfectly legitimate. "We scored two correct goals and the referee denied us the lead early in the game which affected the players," said Vieira.

"We had several chances to score and it was strange how our strikers missed those chances. The result of the match between Kuruvchi and Al Ittihad had put pressure on our players. The game was very hard especially because Al Ittihad is not an easy team. We had a good game but we were affected by the pressure while Al Ittihad scored two goals in four quick minutes."

Hleb Will Leave Arsenal

Arsenal midfielder Aleksandr Hleb looks set to follow Mathieu Flamini out of the Premier League club, according to his agent.

The 27-year-old from Belarus has two years left on his contract and despite being offered a new deal he appears ready to leave, with Inter Milan the most likely destination.

"Aleksandr is preparing to make the most serious and important moves of his life," Hleb's agent Nikolai Shpilevsky was quoted in Belarusian newspaper Pressball on Friday.

"He is leaving Arsenal even though they want to offer him a new long-term contract and better conditions. Only time will tell if leaving is the right decision, but there's no way back now. Everything will be cleared up in the next two weeks."

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger warned Inter last month that he would report them to world governing body FIFA after newspaper reports quoted Inter coach Roberto Mancini as saying the Serie A leaders wanted to buy Hleb.

Hleb's departure would be a serious blow to Wenger who earlier this week lost Frenchman Flamini to AC Milan.

Aleksandr Hleb



Djokovic Struggles Into Quarters

World number three Novak Djokovic struggled into the last eight of the Rome Masters with a 6-3 3-6 6-3 win over Igor Andreev in round three.

The Serbian looked to be struggling physically when pegged back to one set all but found his form in the decider, BBC wrote.

Djokovic is on course for a semifinal with world number one Roger Federer, who beat Ivo Karlovic 7-6 (7-4) 6-3.

Russian fourth seed Nikolay Davydenko crashed out after losing 4-6 6-2 7-6 to Spain's Tommy Robredo.

Djokovic suffered with illness at Monte Carlo two weeks ago and looked uncomfortable early on against Andreev.

He faces Nicolas Pietrangeli next, after 12th seed Fernando Gonzalez pulled out of their match with a leg injury.

"I'm very relieved and satisfied to get through this one," said Djokovic. "He's one of the most difficult players to beat on this surface."

"I was trying to be aggressive and I think the patience was very crucial."

"I didn't know what to expect from my physical condition and I'm very happy."

"I'm a little bit tired but not as much in the last few weeks and recent matches."

Federer was made to work hard by his Croatian opponent, facing two break points in only his second service game.

Guardiola to Replace Rijkaard in Barcelona

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard will be replaced by Josep Guardiola at the end of the season, the Spanish soccer powerhouse announced Thursday.

The decision, announced by club president Joan Laporta after a board meeting Thursday, comes just a day after Barcelona suffered a humiliating 4-1 loss at the hands of bitter rivals and newly-crowned Primera Liga champions Real Madrid.

Guardiola, a former Barcelona player, is the current coach of the reserves and will officially replace Rijkaard on June 30.

Barcelona confirmed the decision in a statement on its website.

"Following the meeting of the club's board, president Joan Laporta appeared before

the media to announce the change of FC Barcelona's first team coach at the end of the season," the statement said. "Frank Rijkaard will cease to be the coach of Barca on June 30 and Josep Guardiola will be his substitute."

Barcelona, whose loss to Madrid means they cannot finish in the top two of La Liga, have two games remaining this season, at home to Real Mallorca this weekend and then at Real Murcia.

Frank Rijkaard



Celtics Take Lead Over Cavaliers

Paul Pierce scored 19 points and Boston's defense was again dominant as the Celtics beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 89-73 in the National Basketball Association playoffs.

Thursday's victory gave the Celtics a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference semi-final series.

"It was a total team effort," Pierce told AP. "We kept the turnovers down, we rebounded the ball, we made the extra pass and then we got the job done defensively. That's true Celtic basketball right there."

Ray Allen broke out of his slump with 16 points and Kevin Garnett chipped in 13 points and 12 rebounds as the Celtics took a commanding lead before the series shifts to Cleveland for game three on Saturday.

After notching the NBA's best road record in the regular season of 31-10, the Celtics are 0-3 on the road in the postseason.

"We're focused on trying to get this first one in Cleveland," Garnett said. "Defense obviously has to be there. We're going into a hostile building and they play very well at home. Some way, somehow, we have to carry this energy over."

As he did in game one, Cleveland superstar LeBron James struggled, finishing with 21 points on 6-of-24 shooting. Overall the Cavaliers shot 35 percent from the floor.

"They're very aggressive, they're very good," James said. "The shots that I normally make haven't fallen the last two games. The lay-ups that usually go down for me are just jumping out of the rim and the jumpers that usually go down for me are just not going down for me."

James, a five-time All-Star, also turned the ball over seven times. The 23-year-old is 8-of-42 from the floor with 17 turnovers in the series overall.

As in the series opener, when he made just two baskets, James was forced to take a host of jumpers and missed on many.

Massa Tops Turkish GP Practice



Ferrari's Felipe Massa narrowly beat McLaren's Heikki Kovalainen to set the pace in Friday's first practice session at the Turkish Grand Prix.

The Brazilian's best lap of one minute 27.323 seconds at Istanbul Park was just 0.133secs clear of the Finn.

Massa, who has won the last two races in Turkey, traded fastest times with Kovalainen throughout the session, BBC reported.

Lewis Hamilton was third fastest in his McLaren but champion Kimi Raikkonen managed only three laps in his Ferrari.

Raikkonen completed only one flying lap, more than a second off the pace Massa was setting at the time, before a gearbox problem consigned him to the pits for the rest of the 90-minute session.

The Finn was left at the bottom of the time sheets at the end of the session.

Both Ferraris took their time before emerging from the pits, but when they did Massa was immediately on the pace.

His first four-lap run was consistently quicker than Kovalainen's had been, and he ended it with a lap of 1:27.940.

He lowered that twice more, but did punctuate his session with a couple of lurid moments - a big opposite lock slide in turn seven, and running off the track in the demanding turn eight, 100mph double left-hander.