

## Nat'l Futsal Team Upset Kuwait

## Iran Secure Beach Football World Cup Berth

Iranian beach football team defeated China 4-1 in the Asian Beach Football World Cup 2008 qualifiers on Saturday to rank third and secure a berth in the 2008 World Cup in Marseille, France, in July, MNA reported.

Farid Boloukbashi scored twice while Moslem Mesigar and Hassan Abdollahi each scored one goal.

The UAE beat Japan in the final match to win the Asian berth for the second consecutive year.

The UAE, Japan and Iran will represent Asia in the World Cup. The competitions were held in the Jumeirah Beach Park, UAE. The Iranian squad returned home on Sunday.

Meanwhile, Iranian national futsal team on Sunday crushed Kuwait 12-0 in its first match in the 2008 AFC Futsal Championship.

Iran, a hot favorite to win the competition, had a 5-0 lead in the first half.

Vahid Shamsaei, the team's superstar as well as Asghar Hamsanzadeh, Mohammad Taheri and Majid Raeesi each scored two goals while Mohammad Keshavarz, Javad Asghari-Moqaddam, Mohammad Reza Heidarian and Mohammad Hashemzadeh each scored one goal.

Iran is known as Asia's futsal king by winning eight of the past nine continental championships. This year's continental indoor competition, held in Thailand during May 11-18, also serves as the qualifying tournament for the FIFA Futsal World Cup Brazil 2008 slated for Sept. 30-Oct. 19, with 16 teams vying for four



Iran players celebrate victory

berths at the global event.

Iran faces China today. Iran, China, Kuwait and Tajikistan are in Group D.

## News in Brief

## Raf'ati Keen on Refereeing In Iran

Iranian-German referee Babak Raf'ati said that he is interested in refereeing an important match in Iran.

"Nobody asked me yet to referee in Iran, but I would like to work in international matches. Iran is my homeland and it's clear I'd like to referee an important match there. I am looking forward to being invited to the country by Iran's Football Federation (IFF) to supervise a football game," he said.

Raf'ati was recently named FIFA's international referee after working for three years in Bundesliga.

"I am so glad to be a FIFA referee. Undoubtedly, managing the big games will be excellent but it takes time and I hope to attain this success as soon as possible," he told Deutsche Welle.

## Gold Medal for Iranian Wrestler

Iranian wrestler Mohammad Reza Akbari won the gold medal in the Greco-Roman Championship in Istanbul, Turkey on Friday.

The 96-kg weight class wrestler defeated his Turkish rival in the final and clinched the championship, MNA reported.

Azad Shabani, 50 kg class, lost to Turkey's freestyle wrestler and took the bronze medal.

Heavyweight Komeil Qasemi also bagged the bronze medal after being beaten by Georgian participant in the 90-kg freestyle class.

## Sepahan Still No.1

In the 32nd week of Iran's Premier League, Persepolis and Barq-e Shiraz drew 1-1 at Tehran's Azadi Stadium where over 70,000 people watched the match.

Mohsen Khalili scored for Persepolis in the 43rd minute. Alireza Nikbakht and Khalili, who were together throughout the match, could have scored a few times. Farid Abedi scored the equalizer for the Shirazi team in the 58th minute. Persepolis now have 53 points and stand second in the league's table.

Meanwhile, in the most important match of the week, Isfahan's Sepahan, one of the two Iranian teams in Asian Championship League, and Saba Batri drew 2-2. Anlavich scored a goal for Saba in the early minutes of the match, but Emad Reza, Sepahan's Iraqi star, scored the equalizer in the second half. Sepahan took the lead in the 73rd minute when Hossein Kazemi scored the second goal. Four minutes later, Feyyadoun Fazli scored for Saba to tie the match.

Sepahan is still the number one team of the league with 55 points and Saba rank third after Persepolis with 52 points.

In another match, Esteghlal and Hamedan's Pas drew 1-1 at Hamedan's Qods Stadium.



Omid Reza Ravankhah scored for Esteghlal and Mohammad Gholami for Pas.

Results of other games:  
Abu Moslem 1 - Shirin Faraz 0

Rah Ahan 2 - Malavan 0  
Pegah 1 - Saipa 0  
Sepasi 2 - Esteghlal Ahvaz 2  
Peykan 1 - Mes 1  
Naft 1 - Zob-Ahan 1

## Milan Coach Exults

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti lauded his own team as they seek a place in next season's Champions League at their trip to Napoli on Sunday.

Ancelotti's side has overturned a four-point gap to Fiorentina in the race for fourth place into a one-point lead over the last two weeks.

Milan thrashed Livorno 4-1 and then beat Inter 2-1 in the Milan derby last weekend. In the meantime, La Viola conceded an injury time equalizer against Sampdoria and then lost at Cagliari as they picked up only one point from six.

All this has Ancelotti brimming with confidence ahead of the last two weeks of the season, AFP reported.

"We're better than everyone else at the moment," he said. "Napoli has always been formidable at home but we have the motivation."

"Of course they want to end their season well in front of their own fans but our motivation will be very important because this match will decide our future."

With his concentration firmly on Sunday's match, the coach dismissed all transfer speculation linking his team to strikers.

"Amauri, I think a lot of him but it will be difficult to bring him here. It's not true that (Didier) Drogha is close to joining us and I've nothing new to say about Ronaldinho," he said. "Like Amauri it will be difficult to bring him here."

## Roddick, Stepanek Out of Rome Masters

The biggest losers at the Rome Masters on Saturday were the fans.

One after the other, Andy Roddick and Radek Stepanek quit shortly after their semifinal matches began.

According to AP, Roddick pulled out with a back problem after falling behind 3-0 in the first set against Stanislas Wawrinka. Stepanek stopped while trailing Novak Djokovic 6-0, 1-0 after appearing affected by the heat. Total elapsed time for the two matches: a wimpy 49 minutes.

"You don't want to have these kind of situations at big events," said Djokovic, who joined the chorus of players complaining that the schedule is too tough.

"The players are not getting injured for nothing, you know. There is a big reason why they're having these difficulties. I understand that because I was in that situation many times."

At the Monte Carlo Masters last month, Djokovic pulled out of his semifinal match against top-ranked Roger Federer with a sore throat.

Stepanek called for a trainer after the first set and had ice applied to his neck. He retired after one game in the second.

"I started feeling bad for the first time after practice this morning, and then I ate lunch and was feeling a little better," Stepanek said. "Once the match started, however, I started feeling worse and worse. I was dizzy and weak and couldn't play."

## Ribery Ready For French Captaincy

Bayern Munich midfielder Franck Ribery insisted Saturday that his successful first season in Germany has given him the confidence he needs to be a team leader with France during Euro 2008.

"All my successes in Munich have given me confidence. I've progressed on the pitch as in daily life. I'm better than before with the French team. I'm now a leader," he said in an interview with the German daily *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*.

Ribery, 25, has often been compared in the German press to former French legend Zinedine Zidane.

But he insisted, "The truth is that no one can play like Zidane."

The former Marseille player also revealed that France's 2006 World Cup loss to Italy had made him "even hungrier" for success.

"The league, the European championships, the Champions league, I really want to win everything," he said.

And he admitted he had still not come to terms with Bayern's heavy 4-0 loss to Zenit St. Petersburg in the UEFA Cup semi-final, second leg.

"That continues to really bug me even if we achieved the Cup/Bundesliga double," he added.

## Hansa Rostock, Duisburg Relegated

Hansa Rostock and Duisburg were relegated on Saturday after a dramatic afternoon of Bundesliga action.

Home defeats at the hands of Bayer Leverkusen and Bayern Munich, respectively, sealed the fate of the pair—and at one stage it looked as if Nurnberg would join them.

Thomas von Heesen's men lost 1-0 at Hertha Berlin, but a late Borussia Dortmund equalizer at Arminia Bielefeld means they live to fight another day, Ticker reported.

## Superb Massa Secures Turkish Pole

Felipe Massa of Ferrari won pole position for the Turkish Grand Prix for the third straight year on Saturday.

The two-time defending race champion will start first on the grid for Sunday's race at the Istanbul Speed Park after clocking a best lap time of 1 minute, 27.617 seconds.

"I think I put together a very good lap. It proved to be enough to be on pole," Massa told AP. "I'm so happy here, to be on pole for the third time here. It's a fantastic track for me."

Heikki Kovalainen of McLaren will start second after finishing less than 0.2 seconds behind Massa. Kovalainen's best career qualifying position comes less than two weeks after a violent crash at the Spanish GP that left the Finn in the hospital.

"It's been a bit of a roller coaster obviously the last couple of weeks," Kovalainen said. "A big accident in Spain and I have been lucky to survive without any injuries. Coming here I felt very confident with the car. It's a pleasure to start from front row."

## Garcia Slips to Hand Perry Lead

Sergio Garcia blundered with a double bogey at the infamous short 17th to relinquish the lead at the halfway stage of the Players' Championship.

Garcia had regained his overnight lead but took five at the tricky island green on the way to 73 for five under, one stroke behind leader Kenny Perry.

According to BBC, German veteran Bernhard Langer, 50, shot a 67 to share second with Garcia and American Paul Goydos at Sawgrass.

Ernie Els, Phil Mickelson and England's Ian Poulter ended on one under.

Poulter dropped four shots in the final six holes for a 74 and said he was "extremely disappointed".

Luke Donald was the next best Briton but he had to work hard to stay in the tournament, adding a 72 to his opening 75 for three over.

"Yesterday was definitely worse than today," he said. "I only hit four fairways and seven greens in regulation yesterday. Today I hit a lot more greens but I'm still making too many mistakes. I'm working really hard and waiting for something to click, but still struggling a bit." The star of round two was definitely Langer, who made the best score of the day despite struggling physically.

