

# Saipa Advances to Playoffs

Iran's Saipa secured top spot in Group B to secure their place in the AFC Champions League. Saipa has 11 points and Al-Kuwait five points from a total of five games.

League playoffs start with a 1-0 win over Al-Kuwait on Wednesday evening, AFC reported.

Victory over the Kuwaitis means Ali Daei's team cannot be surpassed as the top team of its group with second-placed Al Quwa Al Jawiya holding an inferior head-to-head record against the Karaj-based club.

Kianoush Rahmati's unstoppable long-range shot in the 24th minute was the only goal of the game, although Saipa could have scored another goal in the last nine minutes of the match. Over 10,000 people were in Karaj's Enqelab Stadium to cheer up Saipa.

Chinese referee San Bao Ji gave yellow cards to Alo Traoreh, Kazem Borjloo and Issa Traoreh, all of whom are Saipa players.



Saipa players training

# Capello Will Meet FA Demands

England coach Fabio Capello believes he will be able to meet the Football Association's demand to see the national team reach at least the semifinals of the next World Cup or Euro 2012.

The English FA revealed their vision for the next four years on Tuesday in a wide-ranging 52-page document which set out a number of policy initiatives for both the men's and women's national teams and grassroots football.

One of the targets is England making the last four of the next World Cup or European Championships after their failure to qualify for Euro 2008.

But Capello insisted he is optimistic he will be able to deliver the targets laid down by the FA.

"I am not under any pressure—I came here to become England manager with the view and the intent of doing things and I think we can achieve good things because we have got a good team," Capello told Sky Sport.

"You need to work all the time knowing that the road is long and you need to improve from one day to the next with the view of achieving the important targets that we have set.

"First and foremost we must realize the past is past. I am confi-



England coach Fabio Capello

dent, I have a good team and I can work on it in order to achieve the targets I have been set.

"I need to see what players can give me so in the France game we wanted to experiment and to test various players.

"So I have been experimenting and I will be experimenting in the next couple of games and the important thing is to get ready for the qualifying campaign."

The FA will appoint an international performance director who will oversee all national teams below the England men's senior side.

But Capello admitted he was party to the discussion of the position, who will be his boss, with FA chairman Lord Triesman and chief executive Brian Barwick.

"This person will be in charge of researching, gathering information. Looking at the outside world—the football world in particular," Capello said.

"But also the sports world in order to gather the best possible information and everything we might need to help us achieve our targets. "This was something that was thought out in a meeting with the chairman and chief executive and it is aimed at giving us the best possible means to obtain what we want."

# Henry Not to Leave Barca

Thierry Henry has insisted he will stay for at least another year with Barcelona despite a mixed first season in Spanish football.

"As for my future, non, I do not want to leave," he told Le Parisien newspaper. "I still have three years to run on my contract here at Barcelona and I will still be here next year."



Thierry Henry

The French international striker joined Barcelona at the end of last season after years of success at Arsenal in the English Premier League but he has struggled to nail down a regular first team place.

The Catalan side meanwhile has failed to win a trophy for the second straight year and coach Frank Rijkaard is widely believed to be on his way out at the end of the season.

Henry will be a key figure for France at next month's Euro 2008 championships in Austria and Switzerland.

He is his country's all-time record goalscorer with 44.

# MVP Award For Bryant

Kobe Bryant kept saying he couldn't have won his first Most Valuable Player award without the many contributions of his teammates, AP said.

"This is not an individual award," he said Tuesday. "The special thing about this award is we have done it together."

Finally, Luke Walton was moved to raise his hand and ask what seemed like a fair question, "Are you going to be getting your teammates any sort of gifts?"

Bryant replied, suppressing a grin. "That's a typical spoiled athlete nowadays."

"Whatever happened to a handshake and a pat on the back?"

Everyone laughed, of course. And, why not? It's been a dream season for the Los Angeles Lakers after the chaos that existed just six months ago, when Bryant was booed on opening night and there were daily updates concerning a possible trade destination.

"It's been an emotional roller-coaster. It's been a heck of a journey," he said at a news conference attended by his teammates, club officials, his wife and two daughters. "It's Hollywood. It's a movie script. The perfect ending would be for us to hold a championship trophy at the end of it."

"I can't thank these guys enough. These are my guys, these are my brothers. Let's get ready for tomorrow."

The Lakers try to take a 2-0 lead against Utah in their Western Conference semifinal on Wednesday night. Bryant will receive the MVP trophy from commissioner David Stern before the game.

# Federer Beats Canas in Rome

Roger Federer was in fine form as he saw off old foe Guillermo Canas in straight sets at the Rome Masters.

The top seed won 6-3 6-3 and faces Potito Starace or Ivo Karlovic next.

It was a significant win for Federer, who suffered back-to-back defeats against Canas early last year and had a 2-3 record against the Argentine, BBC reported.



Guillermo Canas

Earlier, Andy Roddick got his clay-court season off to a solid start with a 6-1 6-4 win over fellow American and good friend Mardy Fish.

"I feel pretty good," said Roddick. "I enjoy the challenge of clay."

"It's probably my toughest surface so that makes the wins that I do get much more satisfying."

Juan Carlos Ferrero saw off Nicolas Pietrangeli 6-7 (5-7) 6-3 6-4 in the first round to set up a clash with defending champion Rafael Nadal.

Croatian wildcard Mario Ancic defeated Spain's Feliciano Lopez 6-4 6-4 and will meet fourth seed Nikolay Davydenko of Russia in the second round.

## News in Brief

### Mahdavia Stays in Eintracht



Eintracht Frankfurt's Iranian fielder said emphatically Tuesday he would not leave Commerzbank-Arena until his contract expires in 2010.

"In the second half of the season due to injury I have seldom played in Eintracht. Therefore I was forced out of the main arrangement, however, I did well in the first half," Mehdi Mahdavia said in a telephone interview with MNA from Frankfurt.

"Media sorely slammed us after being beaten by Stuttgart in the 31st week of Bundesliga. They may be right and we don't expect someone to pay tribute to us after this heavy loss. I was summoned to the match when we were three goals behind. Eintracht was beaten 4-1 and we ought to get better results in the remaining matches," he said.

Iran's national team captain added, "I have previously said that after being drawn against Syria and Kuwait we have a difficult task in the 2010 World Cup Qualifiers. With more preparation for the upcoming matches Iran can qualify for the next round."

### Iran Wrestlers Head for Russia



Iran's freestyle wrestling team has left Tehran for Russia to participate in the Aliyev Cup scheduled for the weekend.

According to IRNA, the Iranian wrestling team left Tehran on Wednesday morning.

The Iranian team includes Saeed Ahmadi in the 60-kg category, Iman Mohammadian and Meisam Mostafa Jokar in the 74-kg category, Reza Yazdani in the 84-kg category, and the seven-time Asian champion Alireza Heidari in the 96-kg category.

The competition will be held at Ivan Yarygin wrestling gymnasium in Makhachkala city in Russia on May 10-12.

Iranian wrestlers Mahdi Hajizadeh and Saeed Dardashtpour could not attend the competition due to passport and national ID problems.



### Argentina Tops FIFA Ranking

Argentina remains atop the largely unchanged FIFA world rankings.

With just 20 international games affecting the monthly list released Wednesday, Argentina stayed ahead of rival Brazil, with Italy, Spain and Germany rounding out the top five, AFP reported.

Argentina's lead over Brazil was trimmed from 10 to two points as rankings points from older matches were either devalued or lost.

The only change in the top 20 was Cameroon's jump over Mexico to 16th. This is while Iran's place didn't change and remains 51st.

The Czech Republic, France, Greece, Portugal and the Netherlands filled out places six through 10, and no team in the top 50 rose or fell by more than two places.

### Olympic Tickets Sold Out

China's final trenches of Olympics tickets earmarked for domestic customers sold out a month ahead of schedule, organizers said.

After tens of millions went online and queued at banks for the last 1.38 million tickets, all seats at venues in the capital and for equestrian events in Hong Kong had been snapped up, the organizing committee said on its website.

Only tickets for Olympic football matches at Shanghai, Shenyang, Tianjin and Qinhuangdao were still available to domestic buyers with sales period ending on June 9.

Beijing had allocated around 75 percent of the seven million tickets in total to its vast domestic audience, with the rest made available overseas through each country's national Olympic committee.

Huge numbers of Chinese went online or lined up at bank of China outlets on Monday to buy tickets, but fans and official media complained of long delays due to the high demand.

A second phase, on a similar first-come, first-served basis, was launched in late October but had to be suspended for a month after excessive demand crashed the computer sales system.

Beijing, the venue for the vast majority of events, and its co-host cities will stage the games from August 8-24.