



Vahid Shamsaee

Shamsaee, Kogure Renew Rivalry

Iranian futsal ace Vahid Shamsaee cannot wait to cross swords with archrival Japanese Kenichiro Kogure, who is also a good friend off the pitch, in the 10th edition of the AFC Futsal Championship in Bangkok May 11-18.

Shamsaee returned the Asian futsal title to the laden Iranian trophy cabinet last year with a stellar show which saw him finding the net 11 times, one less than Kogure whose team Shamsaee beat in the final, but good enough for the Most Valuable Player of the Tournament gong and the AFC Futsal Player of the Year accolade.

"I consider Kogure a very high class player and we meet each other only once a year," the 32-year-old Shamsaee told *afc.com* a day before Iran start their campaign in Bangkok for a record ninth Asian title in 10 years.

"This once-in-a-year meeting is a good

time for me to see how much he has improved," the all-time AFC Futsal Championship top-scorer said tongue-in-cheek.

"I also meet him during this time off the pitch and we exchange notes on what is happening with our lives," said Shamsaee about the 2006 AFC Futsal Player of the Year.

Recalling Iran's win over Japan last year in front of Japanese fans in Osaka, Shamsaee could not hide his pride at avenging a humiliating semifinal ouster at the hands of their archrivals in Tashkent in 2006.

"Iran has always had close contests with Japan but we have lost just once. Last year was memorable as we reclaimed the crown in front of 8,000 fans on their home ground and this was a great boost to us. I hope we can repeat it again in Bangkok," said Shamsaee.

Lest Iran's rivals had any doubt about the

eight-time champions' motivational levels, Shamsaee put them at rest, saying, "We want to make it nine out of 10 at the end of this glorious futsal decade as the tournament becomes biennial from now on the AFC Futsal Championship will be played once in two years from 2010 onwards. We have prepared for this edition with friendly games against top teams like Portugal."

Shamsaee noted that Japan continued to their main challengers for the title though there was a marked improvement in the performance of China and Tajikistan.

"China performed well in the KL5 tournament recently but I think Japan is our serious rivals. Our target is the title in Bangkok and a place in the FIFA Futsal World Cup later this year," said Shamsaee, setting the tone for yet another round of intense sparring with their archrivals for the Asian honors.

Klinsmann's Eye On League Final

New coach Jurgen Klinsmann will be an interested observer when Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich face relegation-candidates Duisburg on Saturday as he looks to finalize his squad for next year.

After the title was won by Bayern last weekend, it only remains to be decided who will be playing in Europe next season or in the second division, but Klinsmann has been in Munich this week making plans, AFP wrote.

With Ottmar Hitzfeld quitting as Bayern's head coach this summer to take charge of the Swiss national side after Euro 2008, Klinsmann's first day in charge is July 1 and he has yet to resolve several question marks hanging over the squad.

Klinsmann met the Bayern board of directors on Monday to unveil his vision of fast, attacking football, and will talk with Germany striker Lukas Podolski who will face Duisburg in the absence of broken-nose victim Miroslav Klose.

"Lukas must stay here next season, he has continually improved himself this season," said Hitzfeld, but Podolski would be third-choice striker behind Klose and the league's top-scorer Luca Toni.

Klinsmann must also resolve the situation with defenders Philipp Lahm and Willy Sagnol.

Stepanek Beats Federer

Roger Federer's preparations for the French Open suffered a further blow when he was beaten in straight sets in the quarterfinals of the Rome Masters by unseeded Czech Radek Stepanek on Friday.

Stepanek will face Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic after Spain's Nicolas Pietrangeli withdrew from their quarterfinal with a wrist problem with the score at 6-1 1-0 to the Serb, Reuters reported.

World number one Federer, struggling for consistency on clay ahead of the year's second Grand Slam later this month, was the second big gun of the day to fall to an unseeded player after his Swiss compatriot Stanislas Wawrinka won an entertaining tussle with American James Blake 6-7 7-6 6-1.

Wawrinka will meet Andy Roddick in the semis after the American sixth seed pulled out some massive serves in a final-set tiebreaker on the way to beating Spain's Tommy Robredo 6-3 4-6 7-6.

Federer was comfortable on his service games in the first set of the quarterfinal, taking four to love, but he failed to force any break points. Stepanek wrapped up the ensuing tiebreak 7-4 with an ace as the Swiss lost a set for the first time in the tournament.

A fired-up Stepanek saved two break points in the first game of the second set and then snapped the top seed's serve immediately after.

Rosicky Out Of Euro 2008

Czech Republic's injured captain Tomas Rosicky announced Friday that he will not be taking part in next month's European Championships due to a recurring knee injury.

"I'm not capable of starting the European Championships. My injury requires an operation. I will go for it at the start of next week," Rosicky told a special news conference.

"I'm maybe enduring the worst period in my career. I lost out on most of the season with Arsenal. I was really looking forward to the championships," he added.

The announcement comes a month after local football chiefs raised the alarm over the Arsenal midfielder star's Euro chances because of a painful knee injury which has stopped him playing since the end of January.

Speculation has mounted locally that manager Karel Bruckner would be forced to try and tempt Juventus midfielder Pavel Nedved to return to the national team after his international retirement declared soon after the 2006 World Cup.

"The ball is now with Pavel," commented Czech and Moravian Football Federation spokesman Lukas Tucek. "He must decide if he wants to return."

News in Brief

Sepahan vs Saba Battery

In the 32nd round of IPL, Persepolis will meet Barq of Shiraz at Tehran's Azadi Stadium. This is while Esteghlal faces Pas in Hamedan. In the pick of the week Sepahan of Isfahan hosts Saba Battery.

Fixture for other games:

Naft - Zob-e Ahan
Abu Moslem - Shirin Faraz
Rah Ahan - Malavan
Pegah - Saipa
Sepasi - Esteghlal of Ahvaz
Peykan - Mes

Doha Super GP for Haddadi

Iranian discus thrower Ehsan Haddadi won the gold medal at the Super Grand Prix event, which is being held in Doha, Qatar.

The 22-year-old Haddadi also won the 30-thousand-dollar prize after he threw the discus 67.20 meters on Friday evening, Press TV reported.

Haddadi won the title competing with seven best discus throwers of the world.

The Asian discus record holder, Haddadi, expressed satisfaction with his performance and hoped he could win a medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

Polish discus thrower Piotr Malachowski came second with a record of 66.26 meters, while the Hungarian discus thrower Zoltan Kovago stood third with 64.70 meters.

Iran's First Int'l Cycling Tour Underway

Iran on Saturday launched its first international cycling tour with eight foreign and five local teams.

Cycling Federation of Iran (CFI) said that the five-day tour features teams from Germany, Japan, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Qatar, Switzerland and Uzbekistan.

On Saturday, some 70 cyclists pedaled from Qom, 135 kilometers south of the capital Tehran, on the Qom-Tehran highway.

Winner of the Qom-Tehran stage was the Iran's Mehdi Sohrabi.

Known as the "Presidential Tour" with a modest prize money of \$5,000 it is aimed at introducing cycling in Iranian sports.

Iran has one of the leading cycling teams in Asia with Qader Mizbani and Hossein Asgari as the two stars.

Boozer Leads Jazz To Beat Lakers

Carlos Boozer scored 27 points and tied a career playoff-high with 20 rebounds to lead Utah to a 104-99 victory Friday night, cutting Los Angeles' lead in the Western Conference semifinals to 2-1.

The Jazz handed the Lakers their first loss of this season's playoffs and got back into the series by doing at home what they couldn't do on the road. The Jazz hit exactly half their shots and forced the Lakers into 18 turnovers, looking very little like the team that stumbled through two straight losses in Los Angeles to open the series.

"We competed very hard, much better than we did over there. That's what happens with a young team," Utah coach Jerry Sloan told AFP. "We made mistakes but we kept playing hard. Before, we made mistakes and we felt sorry for ourselves. Tonight we kept playing hard."

The Jazz took the lead early in the second quarter and never gave it up. Utah held off a late push by the Lakers and league MVP Kobe Bryant, who had 34 points, seven assists and six rebounds but could not carry the team alone. Nobody else scored more than 13 points for Los Angeles.

Sorenstam Takes Lead at LPGA

Swedish superstar Annika Sorenstam notched her second straight round without a bogey on Friday to seize a three-shot lead in the 2.2 million-dollar LPGA Michelob Ultra Open in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Sorenstam, who notched seven birdies in the first round, had five on Friday in a five-under 66 that left her at 12-under 130.

The former world No. 1 shrugged off two rain delays to put her in position for a second tournament triumph in three weeks.

She beat Paula Creamer in a playoff two weeks ago at the Stanford International Pro-Am.

Sorenstam teed off at No. 10 and birdied Nos. 12, 16 and 18. She added two more after the turn at three and seven.

"It was a long day," Sorenstam told AFP. "When I was looking at the score, I could hardly remember what I did on the back nine, which is my front nine."

Jurgen Klinsmann



Tomas Rosicky

