

MALAGA SUSPEND COACH OVER LEAKED VIDEO

Spanish club Malaga have suspended coach Victor Sanchez del Amo, while they investigate an explicit video showing his semi-naked body that was posted on the internet. The club released a statement saying that "based on the recently discovered events that have not yet been verified" they "immediately" suspended Sanchez del Amo "until a complete investigation is carried out." Sanchez del Amo, a 43-year-old former Real Madrid and Spain winger, responded with a statement that said he had been "subjected to a crime against my privacy with harassment and extortion. The matter is in the hands of the police," he said. "Sharing or disseminating intimate content of any person without consent is a crime." Malaga, who just missed promotion last season, are 16th in the 22-team Spanish second division.



Senegal and Liverpool forward Sadio Mane waves to the audience after receiving the African Footballer of the Year award in Egypt on Tuesday. Mane beat competition from fellow Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah and Manchester City's Riyad Mahrez to scoop the top award. PHOTO: REUTERS

Mane crowned Africa's best

AFP, Hurghada

Liverpool star Sadio Mane was crowned on Tuesday as Africa's 2019 Player of the Year for the first time at an awards gala in Egypt.

The 27-year-old Senegalese striker was up against his Liverpool teammate Mohamed Salah, the Egyptian who won the award the last two years, and Algerian Riyad Mahrez of Manchester City.

"I am really happy and at the same time I am really proud to win this award," said Mane at the ceremony organised by the Confederation of African Football in the Egyptian Red Sea city of Hurghada.

"It's a big day for me." Mane became the second star from Senegal to be named African Player of the Year after El Hadji Diouf, who was the continent's best player in 2001 and 2002.

He scored 34 goals and produced 12 assists in 61 appearances in 2019, according to CAF statistics.

Salah's tally stood at 26 goals and 10 assists in

55 matches while Mahrez accounted for 14 goals and 18 assists in 48 games last year.

The key Senegalese player shared the 2018/19 Premier League Golden Boot award with Salah and Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang from Gabon.

"I would love to thank all the Senegalese people. They have been for me all the time, they push me," said Mane, extending sincere gratitude to people from his village Bambali.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino as well as former Argentinian player Juan Sebastian Veron and Brazil's Cafu attended Tuesday's event.

Some of Africa's former star players including Senegal's Diouf, Egypt's Ahmed Hassan and Algeria's Rabah Madjer were also at the ceremony.

Neither Salah nor Mahrez, who was playing for Manchester City, were present on Tuesday.

Mane, Salah and Mahrez played for their respective countries in the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations.

Salah's Egypt crashed out of the competition shortly after it kicked off but Mane and Mahrez faced off in the final.

Algeria claimed the title following a 1-0 victory over Senegal in Cairo.

At the ceremony, other male awards went to Algerian coach Djamel Belmadi, Algerian Youcef Belaili for African Interclubs Player of the Year and Algeria's national team.

The award for the youth category was given to Morocco's Achraf Hakimi of Borussia Dortmund. Female awardees included Nigerian Asisat Oshoala, who won the African Women's Player of the Year prize for the fourth time.

South African national team boss Desiree Ellis was also voted top coach for the second consecutive year.

Cameroon's women's team was selected as the continent's best after reaching the last 16 of the World Cup.

The Egyptian Football Association also won the Federation of the Year award.

The CAF Team of the Year featured Salah, Mane and Aubameyang as well as Mahrez and Ajax duo Andre Onana and Hakim Ziyech.

Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Idrissa Gueye was included alongside Kalidou Koulibaly, Hakimi, Joel Matip and Serge Aurier.

'Beating Palestine not impossible'

SPORTS REPORTER



Midfielder Sohel Rana believes Bangladesh have the ability to beat Palestine, a side they have never beaten before. The midfielder said this following the national team's first practice session yesterday ahead of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup, which will be held from January 15 to 25 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Out of 23 members, 14 went through an hour-long training session at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium under assistant coach Stuart Watkiss as head coach Jamie Day is supposed to take over charge after landing in Dhaka yesterday noon.

Seven Bashundhara Kings players were scheduled to join the camp last night while captain Jamal Bhuiyan is set to join today. Striker Nabib Newaj Jibon missed first day's training due to illness.

"I believe we have the ability to beat Palestine," Sohel said. "However, we all have to play well against them. We are confident that we will perform well."

Bangladesh previously played four times against Palestine, eking out a 1-1 draw in inaugural AFC Challenge Cup in 2006 before suffering three consecutive defeats including the latest one in the semifinal of the last edition of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup in Cox's Bazar in 2018.

Bangladesh, who have been drawn alongside Palestine and Sri Lanka in

Group A, will begin their campaign against Palestine on January 15.

"No doubt, Palestine are ahead of us but it is possible to post a win against them. In that case, we must make very few mistakes," said Sohel, who is set to play the tournament for the third time after missing out on the last edition.

The Abahani midfielder is drawing inspiration from the team's good performance in the World Cup qualifiers.

"We played a 1-1 draw against India after performing well against Qatar on home ground. We also played well against Oman except for some mistakes in the second half. Considering all things, I believe it is not impossible to win against Palestine," said Sohel, who also believes everyone is determined to put the nightmare of SA Games behind them.

"There was high expectation on the under-23 team in the SA Games, but the players could not meet that expectation. Coaches, officials and everyone else told the players to be mentally prepared to deliver good results in the Bangabandhu Gold Cup in a bid to erase the failure of SA Games. The players have also realised that they could not secure deserved position in the SA Games and they are now looking forward to doing something better like the 2015 edition of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup where we played in the final," said Sohel, who also believes the participating teams from Africa, especially Burundi, very good sides.



Assistant coach Stuart Watkiss (R) instructs the players during the national team's first practice session in Kamalapur yesterday. PHOTO: BFF

Kovacevic shot at in Athens

AFP, Glyfada

Former Serbia striker Darko Kovacevic was shot at on Tuesday evening outside his home in the Athens suburb of Glyfada, the Athens News Agency reported.

According to the report the 46-year-old former Serbia and Montenegro national team player suffered a knee injury and was taken to a local hospital, but it was not clear whether he was struck by a bullet or hurt himself falling.

Police are investigating the attack. They say unknown assailants shot from a car at Kovacevic as he was getting out of his car.

'Shanghai to host 2021 CWC'

AFP, Shanghai

Shanghai will host the opening ceremony and final of the expanded 2021 Club World Cup in China, state media said.

Eight Chinese cities will stage matches for the FIFA-organised tournament, which will for the first time involve 24 teams rather than the current seven.

Chinese sports authorities officially launched preparations on Tuesday for the Club World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup, Xinhua news agency said.

FIFA awarded the inaugural edition of the revamped Club World Cup to China in October, underlining the country's growing clout in football.



Not here for a walk: Zidane

AFP, Jeddah

Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane said his team is solely focused on lifting the Spanish Super Cup trophy ahead of this week's revamped four-team competition taking place in Saudi Arabia.

"We're not coming here for a walk," Zidane said at a news conference Tuesday, on the eve of his team's semifinal against Copa del Rey holders Valencia in Jeddah.

"It's the first edition in Saudi Arabia and the competition is a great hope. It's an important competition and we want to give our all to play a good match tomorrow (Wednesday)," said Zidane.

"It's a one-off match. It's not like playing in La Liga. We're both playing away and it's just one match. Everything changes but our mentality, it doesn't change."

Real and Valencia will be joined by Barcelona and Atletico Madrid in Saudi Arabia, amid controversy over a tournament held far from home in a country long-condemned for its record on human rights.

Spanish media reported only nine percent of the 12,000 tickets set aside for the four competing clubs had been purchased.

However, the three fixtures at the 62,000-capacity King Abdullah Stadium are expected to be sold out.

Barcelona play Atletico on Thursday with the winners of the two semifinals to meet Sunday in the final.

Real will be without the injured Eden Hazard, while neither Karim Benzema, their top scorer, nor Gareth Bale have made the trip due to fitness problems.

"There are no favourites. The four teams which are here are the four favourites to win it," said Zidane. "The only thing I'm thinking about is our match tomorrow. It's a semifinal, but for us, it will be a final."

Luka Jovic has scored just once for Real since his move from Eintracht Frankfurt in July but the Serbian is set to lead the attack in the absence of Benzema.

Job only half done for Guardiola

AFP, Manchester



Pep Guardiola warned Manchester City of Manchester United's powers of recovery after his side outclassed their city rivals 3-1 at Old Trafford to put one foot in the League Cup final.

The holders were rampant before the break as Bernardo Silva's wonder strike, Riyad Mahrez's cool finish and an own goal from Andreas Pereira put City well on course for a third straight final.

United's captain for the evening Marcus Rashford restored some pride for the hosts to reduce the deficit 20 minutes from time, but they face a huge task when the sides meet again for the semifinal, second leg on January 29.

However, Guardiola remains wary after Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men recovered from losing 2-0 at home to Paris Saint-Germain in last season's Champions League last 16 to progress.

"It's a good result, but it is not over because it is United," Guardiola told Sky Sports.

"Last season is a good example against PSG. Hopefully in front of our fans we can make a good game and reach the final."

United have shown their ability to win at the Etihad already this season as they tore City apart on the counter-attack to shock the Premier League champions on home soil just a month ago.

But City restored their recent dominance of this fixture with a third consecutive win at Old Trafford and a fourth in five away derbies since Guardiola took charge.

The Catalan responded to the problems United posed his side last time out by deploying an extra midfielder with both City strikers Sergio Aguero and Gabriel Jesus left on the bench.

Guardiola's tactical plan worked to perfection as a fluid front four of Silva, Mahrez, Raheem Sterling and Kevin De Bruyne were too fleet of foot and thought for a United defence without the injured Harry Maguire.

"I enjoyed it a lot, especially because it worked," said Silva.



Manchester City's Riyad Mahrez (C) celebrates his goal against Manchester United with Kevin de Bruyne (L) and Bernardo Silva at Old Trafford on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

Federer record not on my mind: Nadal

AFP, Perth



World number one Rafael Nadal insisted Wednesday he isn't focused on matching Roger Federer's record Glam Slam haul at the Australian Open this month.

The 33-year-old last year won the French and US Open titles to move within one of his Swiss rival's record tally of 20.

Federer has sat on top of the all-time list since 2009 when he passed Pete Sampras' benchmark of 14 after winning a five-set thriller over Andy Roddick at Wimbledon.

A Nadal triumph in Melbourne could set the stage for him to set a new landmark at Roland Garros, where he will start hot favourite to add to his 12 French Open titles.

But the Spaniard downplayed the potential historical implications after steering Spain into the ATP Cup quarterfinals. "I honestly don't think much (about Federer's record)," Nadal said.

"My only goal is to keep playing good tennis, keep enjoying this sport and being happy. And if that happens and I stay healthy then the goal is to keep producing chances in the events that I'm going to play."

Nadal's immediate focus is leading Spain's title charge at the inaugural ATP Cup.

Unbeaten Spain qualified for the knockout stages in Sydney after sweeping Japan in Group B in Perth with Nadal yet to drop a set from his three matches.

The 19-time Grand Slam winner beat Yoshihito Nishioka 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 in two hours and seven minutes.

Sharapova handed Aus Open wildcard

AFP, Melbourne

Five-time Grand Slam winner Maria Sharapova said it was "very special" after being handed an Australian Open wildcard Wednesday as she attempts to resurrect her career after an injury-plagued 2019.

The 32-year-old, who won the tournament in 2008, has slipped down the rankings to 147, outside automatic qualification, and was bounced out of the Brisbane International this week in the first round.

But the Russian remains a big name and she will line up at Melbourne Park for a 16th time since her debut in 2003.

"To be in the draw of the Australian Open is incredible," Sharapova said.

"I've had wonderful experiences there, from holding the championship trophy to losing some very tough finals as well -- there's been a lot of ups and downs in Australia."