

Immoral
Iranians
punished

AFP, Tehran

Two Iranian footballers have felt the wrath of the country's national federation for "immoral" on-field behaviour which included one player pinching the other's bottom, Iranian state television revealed.

Defender Mohammad Nosrati was suspended for an "indefinite period" after YouTube pictures of a live televised match showed him pinching the bottom of Persepolis teammate Sheys Rezaei during a goal celebration against rivals Damash Gilan.

In another YouTube video Rezaei is shown hugging another, unidentified teammate to celebrate Persepolis's winning goal in the final minutes of a 3-2 win.

Rezaei suffered the same fate as Nosrati as Iranian football officials took a dim view of the players' intimate approach to celebrating goals.

"Nosrati and Rezaei have been suspended for an indefinite period from all football-related activities for their immoral behaviour," said the federation's disciplinary chief Ismail Hasanzadeh, quoted by Iranian state television.

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION
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need for another first-
class cricket tournament?

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Ba treble fires Magpies

AFP, Stoke-on-trent

Demba Ba fired Newcastle into third place in the Premier League as the Senegal striker bagged a hat-trick in a 3-1 win over Stoke at the Britannia Stadium on Monday.

Alan Pardew's side have been the surprise package of the season and this may well have been their most impressive performance to date as Ba condemned Stoke to only their second defeat in their last 14 home league matches.

Ba scored twice in the first half and, although Jonathan Walters reduced the deficit with a second half penalty, the former West Ham forward completed his second hat-trick of the season from the spot to ensure the Magpies maintained their unbeaten start to the campaign.

Newcastle are now just one point behind second placed Manchester United and three ahead of fourth placed Chelsea.

While it may be slightly premature to talk of Newcastle as serious contenders for a top-four finish, a few more results like this will put them firmly in the race for the Champions League.

Pardew, who deserves great credit for revitalising a club seemingly in turmoil after the departures of Andy Carroll, Kevin Nolan and Joey Barton, suffered a pre-match setback when key midfielder Cheik Tiote was ruled out with a knee injury.

Newcastle hadn't won a league match at Stoke since 1985 but, even without Tiote, they travelled to the Potteries in confident mood after such an impressive start.

Their upbeat mood was clear to see in a vibrant spell that brought the opening goal in the 12th minute.

It must have been an especially bitter pill for Stoke to swallow as the goal bore all the hallmarks of their own route one style and came from a player who was close to joining them in the close-season before a failed medical

scuppered the deal.

Newcastle goalkeeper Tim Krul launched a huge punt downfield and Leon Best flicked on to Gabriel Obertan, who found himself in space behind left-back Marc Wilson.

Obertan's cross was perfect for Ba and he rose to head home his sixth league goal in five matches.

Stoke were almost gifted an equaliser when Krul, under no pressure, dropped Andy Wilkinson's high cross and was relieved to see the ball roll behind and not across his goalline.

Tony Pulis's team had conceded just one goal at home this season, but the hosts lost defenders Wilson and Ryan Shawcross to injury before half-time and Newcastle increased their lead in the 40th minute.

Matthew Upson could only help Fabricio Coloccini's lofted pass on to Best on the right of the penalty area and his shot fell perfectly for Ba to stab home.

PHOTO: AFP
Newcastle United forward Demba Ba (R) celebrates his third goal against Stoke City during their Premier League clash at the Britannia Stadium on Monday.



MU aim to raise their game

AFP, Paris

The Champions League group stage has reached the halfway mark but Manchester United and Manchester City are aware they have to raise their game after fluffing some of their early lines.

United are at least armed with the experience of three wins - including two in recent memory in Europe's premier club competition as they look to overhaul Group C leaders by putting Romanian minnows Otelul Galati in their place at Old Trafford.

United edged out the Eastern Europeans in the pair's last outing but the last time the Red Devils' stepped out at their 'Theatre of Dreams' in the Champions League the outcome came close to being a nightmare as Switzerland's Basel held them to a 3-3 draw.

Those dropped points following on from an earlier stalemate in Lisbon leaves United second in the table two points adrift of Benfica and only one clear of Basel - who nevertheless still have to travel to Portugal.

Manchester City do not have United's experience of toughing things out on European evenings where even the top sides can wobble after hitting unforeseen bouts of turbulence.

But Roberto Mancini's side will hope they got their wobble in early - held at home by Napoli and losing to Bayern Munich on an evening which led to the exile from the first team of Carlos Tevez.

And the Blue Moon has been rising ever since with Mancini's men having destroyed United in last week's Manchester derby but equally significantly edged out Villarreal thanks to an injury-time goal from Sergio Aguero to reignite their European dreams.

An ideal scenario would now see City complete the double over Spanish rivals who have yet to register a point and hope that Bayern can send Napoli packing in Bavaria, thereby allowing the Blues to leapfrog the Italians by two points.

A draw then in Italy on matchday five would put City on the brink of qualification - even if Bayern will provide a stiff final group test in Manchester.

With Tevez still seemingly in City's out-tray for his Munich misdemeanours the enigmatic Mario Balotelli is reaping the rewards of more playing time - witness his brace in the humiliation of United - and he is likely to start at Villarreal after completing a three-match European suspension.

FIXTURES

Bayern Munich (GER) v Napoli (ITA), Villarreal (ESP) v Manchester City (ENG), Inter Milan (ITA) v Lille (FRA), Trabzonspor (TUR) v CSKA Moscow (RUS), Manchester United (ENG) v Otelul Galati (ROM), Benfica (POR) v Basel (SUI), Lyon (FRA) v Real Madrid (ESP), Ajax (NED) v Dinamo Zagreb (CRO)

While Bayern and City's group looked tough when the draw was made 2010 champions Inter Milan ensured by losing their opening match at home to Trabzonspor that if they went through to the last 16 they would do it the hard way.

Despite dismal league form - Inter's home loss to Juventus at the weekend left them in the bottom four - new coach Claudio Ranieri has managed to turn things around in Europe and two straight wins have lifted the Nerazzurri into top spot in Group B.

Inter now meet French champions Lille, who include Joe Cole, their summer loan signing from Liverpool but who have gleaned only two points to date - notably throwing away two more in

allowing CSKA Moscow to come back from two goals down to rescue a draw in France.

A win for the Italians will put them even more firmly in the box, particularly if the match in Turkey between Trabzonspor and CSKA produces a decisive outcome to leave the loser five points off Inter.

Elsewhere Wednesday, Real Madrid, who have endured a decade since their record ninth triumph in 2002 in the days of Zinedine Zidane, will be out to push season French campaigners Lyon towards the exit with a win at the Stade Gerland.

Jose Mourinho's side have yet to drop a point to open up a five-point lead over both Lyon and Ajax, who face Dynamo Zagreb, three defeats already to their name.

Real have injury doubts concerning Kaka and Alvaro Arbeloa following the weekend win over Real Sociedad which left the meringues top of La Liga.



Manchester United star Wayne Rooney (C) smiles during a training session at their Carrington complex yesterday on the eve of their Champions League match against Otelul Galati.

Barca dominate list

Football

AFP, Paris

FIFA and France Football magazine on Tuesday unveiled the 23-man shortlist for the 2011 Ballon d'Or, with Wayne Rooney the sole Englishman nominated alongside eight players from Champions League winners Barcelona.

Lionel Messi is favourite to win the award for the third year running, while Xavi Hernandez and Andres Iniesta, who completed last year's podium, are again named.

In total, seven Spanish internationals are shortlisted.

Brazilian teenage sensation Neymar -- of Santos -- is the first player based outside of Europe to be shortlisted since Boca Juniors' Juan Roman Riquelme in 2007.

In the coach of the year category, ten names were shortlisted with the chance to succeed Jose Mourinho, last year's winner.

A panel of journalists, as well as the coaches and captains of FIFA's 208 member associations will vote for the winners, who will be announced at a gala in Zurich, Switzerland on January 9 next year.

The 23 nominees for the Ballon d'Or:
Eric Abidal (FRA/Barcelona), Karim Benzema

(FRA/Real Madrid), Sergio Aguero (ARG/Manchester City), Iker Casillas (ESP/Real Madrid), Cristiano Ronaldo (POR/Real Madrid), Daniel Alves (BRA/Barcelona), Samuel Eto'o (CMR/Anzhi Makhachkala), Cesc Fabregas (ESP/Barcelona), Diego Forlan (URU/Inter Milan), Andres Iniesta (ESP/Barcelona), Lionel Messi (ARG/Barcelona), Thomas Muller (GER/Bayern Munich), Nani (POR/Manchester United), Neymar (BRA/Santos), Mesut Ozil (GER/Real Madrid), Gerard Pique (ESP/Barcelona), Wayne Rooney (ENG/Manchester United), Luis Suarez (URU/Liverpool), David Villa (ESP/Barcelona), Xabi Alonso (ESP/Real Madrid), Xavi Hernandez (ESP/Barcelona).

The ten nominees for coach of the year:
Vicente Del Bosque (ESP/Spain), Sir Alex Ferguson (SCO/Manchester United), Rudi Garcia (FRA/Lille), Josep Guardiola (ESP/Barcelona), Jurgen Klopp (GER/Borussia Dortmund), Joachim Loew (GER/Germany), Jose Mourinho (POR/Real Madrid), Oscar Tabarez (URU/Uruguay), Andre Villas-Boas (POR/Chelsea), Arsene Wenger (FRA/Arsenal).

Grenada stun Sevilla

AFP, Madrid

Sevilla lost 2-1 at home to Granada on Monday night, their first league defeat of the season, to lose touch with the leaders at the top of La Liga.

With late second-half goals from Alexandre Geijo and Mikel Rico, Granada turned around a game that Sevilla were leading from the first minute after an opener from Manu del Moral.

The defeat still leaves Sevilla in fifth position on 17 points, but they are now eight points behind leaders Real Madrid and seven off second-placed Barcelona.

Real Madrid moved top on Saturday thanks to a 1-0 away win at Real Sociedad with Gonzalo Higuain scoring the winner for his 10th league goal of the season.

Lionel Messi starred for Barcelona, now the only team to remain unbeaten, scoring a first-half hat-trick in a 5-0 weekend thumping of Mallorca.

Levante drop to third after finally losing their first game of the season, 2-0 away to Osasuna after a remarkable run of seven straight victories.

Del Moral got Sevilla off to a great start after only 38 seconds on Monday, pouncing on a parried save by Granada keeper Roberto Fernandez from a Martin Caceres shot, to put Sevilla ahead.

What followed was one way traffic as Sevilla swamped their smaller Andalusian neighbours for most of the evening.

However, Granada have already shown enough grit this season to make a fair fight of what will be a struggle for survival.

what to WATCH

BTW

Bangladesh v West Indies

Second Test, Day 5

Live from 9:30am

TEN Cricket

Zimbabwe v New Zealand

Only Test, Day 2

Live from 2:00pm

ESPN

Sportcenter India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm

DAY'S EVENT

what to WATCH

Bangladesh v West Indies

Second Test, Day 5

Live from 9:30am

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur

National Cricket League

(Four-Day Match, Day 4)

Rajshahi v Chittagong

Venue: Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, Chittagong

Barisal Divisional Stadium

Venue: Barisal Divisional Stadium