

Iran's Tayebi, Palma win UEFA Futsal Champions League



Mallorca Palma Futsal's Hossein Tayebi kisses the UEFA Futsal Champions League trophy in Palma, Spain, on May 7, 2023.
● UEFA



Mallorca Palma Futsal players and coaching staff celebrate lifting the UEFA Futsal Champions League trophy after the shootout victory over Sporting CP in Palma, Spain, on May 7, 2023.
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Sports Desk

A shootout victory over Sporting CP in the final saw Spanish side Mallorca Palma Futsal become the fifth European club to lift the UEFA Futsal Champions League trophy on its debut at the event. Despite making a cameo

appearance in the final due to injury, Iranian international Hossein Tayebi played an integral role in Palma's title run as he bagged seven goals – including a double in the last-four 4-3 victory over Benfica – en route to Sunday's game, becoming the club's top scorer in the competi-

tion. Tayebi's Iranian teammate in Palma Moslem Oladqobad did not play a part in the final. Mario Rivillos gave Palma a 14th-minute lead in front of a sold-out home crowd at Velòdrom Illes Balears, firing home into the roof of the net to conclude a keep-

er Luan Muller's run into the opposition box. Zicky drew two-time champion level in the 33rd minute, pouncing when Diego Cavinato's shot from an Alex Merlim long corner was parried by Muller. The score stayed the same until the end of the extra time and Tayebi opened

the account for the home side in the shootout before Muller saved Pany Varela's effort to lead Palma to a 5-3 win. "I'm speechless. Not even in my wildest dreams did I think this would happen one day. What a night! Every single player left it all out there and it's simply

amazing that we can lift the trophy and say we are the champions. I just hope I don't wake up tomorrow and it was all a dream," said Muller, who was named the Player of the Tournament. Benfica defeated Sporting Anderlecht 4-3 for the bronze medal earlier in the day.

Alcaraz set to reclaim No. 1 spot after Madrid triumph



Carlos Alcaraz celebrates with the Madrid Open trophy after winning the final against Jan-Lennard Struff in Madrid, Spain, on May 7, 2023.
● JUAN MEDINA/REUTERS

REUTERS – Carlos Alcaraz is raring to get to Italy next week to compete in the Rome Masters for the first time in his career and reclaim the world number one spot from Novak Djokovic.

After retaining his title in Madrid on Sunday by beating lucky loser Jan-Lennard Struff 6-4 3-6 6-3, Alcaraz only has to show up and play in Rome to leapfrog Djokovic. Rankings are based on points claimed at each tournament, which expire every year. To maintain the points won at an event a player must at least match the tally from the previous year.

Alcaraz skipped the Rome Masters last year due to an ankle injury so has no points to defend while Djokovic won in Rome last year and thus cannot improve his overall points total.

With only five points set to divide the two players in the next set of rankings Alcaraz will move above the Serbian into top spot even if he loses at the first hurdle in Rome.

After an injury-plagued start to the season, Alcaraz said he is 100% and thinking big, motivated to keep improving his game as he builds up for the French Open, which starts on May 28.

"I am an ambitious guy and I'm going full for the win in Rome," Alcaraz told a news conference on Sunday.

"What I am achieving is something big. I just have won my 10th title, my fourth Masters 1000, back-to-back titles here in Madrid and very close to reclaiming the number one world spot.

"It's a special moment and I'm very proud of what I am accomplishing. The work I'm putting in."

The Spaniard, who turned 20 on Friday, has enjoyed a spectacular start to his career by winning the U.S. Open last September to become the youngest man to top the rankings.

On Sunday, he had to play his best to beat a relentless Struff and clinch his fourth title of the season, adding to triumphs in Buenos Aires, Indian Wells and Barcelona.

"I know I have an ability to play good in the important moments," Alcaraz said. "I am a player who grows under pressure, in the big stage, and I like to do different things in those moments. To adapt to what my opponents bring to me."

Harden's 3 helps 76ers tie Celtics; Booker, Suns top Nuggets

ASSOCIATED PRESS – James Harden hit the go-ahead 3-pointer with 18 seconds left in overtime and scored 42 points to help the Philadelphia 76ers stave off a wild Boston Celtics comeback in a 116-115 victory on Sunday that evened their playoff series at 2-2.

Marcus Smart's potential winner was a tick too late and the Celtics now head home for tonight's Game 5. The 76ers are guaranteed to return home for Game 6 on Thursday.

The Sixers were on the brink of defeat numerous times over the final 17 minutes, none more than when Joel Embiid crashed into Smart on a driving, one-handed bank shot with 1:49 left but was whistled for an offensive foul. The play was reviewed and the call stood. Boston kept its 112-111 lead with 1:49 left in OT.

Embiid, the NBA MVP, kept his composure and eventually got to the line to sink two free throws with 59 seconds left and the season in the balance. Embiid had 34 points and 13 rebounds. Harden added nine assists and eight rebounds.

Jayson Tatum struggled to score early but finished with 24 points, 18 rebounds, six assists and four blocks. Jaylen Brown scored 23 points and Smart had 21.

Suns 129 Nuggets 124

Devin Booker had 36 points and 12 assists, Kevin Durant also scored 36 points and Phoenix beat Denver to even their Western Conference semifinal playoff series at two games apiece.

Backup guard Landry Shamet made four crucial 3-pointers in the fourth quarter to keep the Suns ahead. Denver lost despite

a huge game from MVP runner-up Nikola Jokic, who poured in 53 points on 20-of-30 shooting.

Jokic used his physical play to knock down several big buckets, even ripping the ball away from Suns owner Mat Ishbia at one point after the ball went out of bounds, which earned the Nuggets All-Star a technical foul.

The series returns to Denver for Game 5 tonight. The Suns took a 98-92 lead into the fourth quarter after a scoring flurry from Booker, who had 17 points in the third. Phoenix wouldn't trail in the fourth, though Denver didn't go quietly.

Booker – averaging 36 points on 60% shooting in these playoffs – was hot once again, shooting 14 of 18 from the field, including 3 of 4 on 3-pointers. Shamet finished with 19 points, shooting 5 of 8 on 3s.



Sixers guard James Harden (1) shoots the game-winning three-point basket against Celtics in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference semifinal playoffs in Philadelphia, PA, US, on Sunday, May 7, 2023.
● YONG KIM/THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Chinese premier urges IOC to oppose politicisation of sports



● DENIS BALIBOUSE/REUTERS

REUTERS – China wants to work with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to oppose the politicisation of sports, Premier Li Qiang said, amid demands on the sporting body to exclude athletes from Russia in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine.

Premier Li made the comments at a meeting with IOC head Thomas Bach in Beijing over the weekend, according to the state-run Xinhua news agency.

Li's comments come with the IOC under immense pressure from 35 governments, including the United States, Britain and France, to exclude athletes from Russia and its ally Belarus because of the war.

The IOC said in January it was open to including the athletes from the two countries in the Olympics as neutrals and sug-

gested Asia as a possible qualifying pathway to circumvent bans from European regional competitions.

The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) has already offered to let Russian and Belarusian athletes compete at the Asian Games in China this year.

"Li said that China is willing to work together with the IOC to oppose the politicisation of sports and to make greater contribution to the Olympic movement," Xinhua reported.

Bach said China plays an important role in maintaining world peace and promoting mutual development and IOC is willing to strengthen cooperation with China to promote the development of the Olympic movement. Xinhua gave no specific details on what points Li raised with

Bach.

Countries including Canada, the United States and Britain held a diplomatic boycott of the Winter Olympic Games in Beijing last year over concerns about China's human rights. China at the time called the boycotts "political posturing" and a smear campaign.

Beijing has also been angered by the playing of a Hong Kong protest-linked song at some events including the World Ice Hockey championships in Bosnia in February and the Asian Rugby Sevens series tournament in Incheon last November.

Hong Kong's government said it deplored the playing of the incorrect song and has since issued a set of guidelines to sports teams in the city to ensure the right anthem is played.