

Iran names 25-man squad for CAFA Nations Cup

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee named 25 players for the CAFA Nations Cup in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Central Asian sides Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan will be joined by guest team Oman in the inaugural tournament – starting today in Bishkek.

Iran is drawn alongside Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan in Group A of the event. Qalenoee's men will get their campaign underway against Afghanistan in Bishkek's Dolen Omurzakov Stadium on Tuesday before taking on the cohost three days later.

The winner of the group will play the top team of the other group for the ultimate prize at the Milliy Stadium in Tashkent on June 20.

Mehdi Qayedi received a first international call-up by Qalenoee – who replaced Portuguese Carlos Queiroz after last winter's World Cup in Qatar – following an impressive season with Persian Gulf Pro League giant Esteghlal, but his teammate Seyed Hossein Hosseini has been omitted for the trip to Bishkek.

Sepahan striker Shahriyar Moghanlou – the leading marksman in the recent-



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ly-finished Iranian top flight with 13 goals – has also been left out of the squad despite being part of the team in March's friendlies against Russia and Kenya – making way for Tractor frontman Morteza Asadi and Shahab Zahedi, who plays for Hungarian club Puskas Akademia. Leverkusen forward Sardar Azmoun has also

been named in the list after missing the games in March, while Ali Qolizadeh, Ahmad Nourollahi and Shoja Khalilzadeh will be Iranian absentees at the CAFA Nations Cup due to injury.

The tournament will be part of Iran's preparation for next January's AFC Asian Cup in Qatar, where Team Melli will be chasing a

first trophy since 1976.

The following is Iran's full squad for CAFA Nations Cup.

Goalkeepers: Alireza Beiranvand (Persepolis), Payam Niazmand (Sepahan), Hossein Pourhamidi (Aluminium Arak)
Defenders: Ehsan Hajsafi (AEK Athens), Morteza

Pouraliganji (Persepolis), Majid Hosseini (Kayserispor), Hossein Kan'anizadegan (Al Ahli), Sadeq Moharami (Dinamo Zagreb), Ramin Rezaeian (Sepahan), Vahid Amiri (Persepolis)
Midfielders: Saeed Ezza-tollahi (Vejle BK), Rouzbeh Cheshmi (Esteghlal), Mohammad Karimi (Sepahan), Omid Nourafkan (Sepahan), Saeed Mehri (Esteghlal),

Alireza Alizadeh (Golgo-har Sirjan), Mehdi Torabi (Persepolis), Mehdi Qayedi (Esteghlal), Mohammad Mohebbi (Esteghlal), Alireza Jahanbakhsh (Feyenoord), Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh (Charleroi)
Strikers: Sardar Azmoun (Bayer Leverkusen), Mehdi Taremi (Porto), Reza Asadi (Tractor), Shahab Zahedi (Puskas Akademia).

Inter stand in way of City's treble chance in Champions League final



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AFP – Manchester City are huge favourites heading into today's Champions League final against Inter Milan in Istanbul as Pep Guardiola's side aim to finally get their hands on the greatest prize in European club football, and complete a historic treble.

City have been building towards this moment ever since the transformative 2008 takeover of the club by the Abu Dhabi United Group. They have become England's dominant force, winning seven Premier League titles in the last 12 seasons and following their latest triumph by claiming the FA Cup last weekend.

It has happened just as they have become the club with the greatest revenues in world football according to analysts Deloitte, with income of 731 million euros (\$788m) last season. Question marks surround their success, given that City were charged in February by the Premier League with 115 alleged breaches of its financial rules between 2009 and 2018.

In Europe, meanwhile, City were banned for two years from UEFA competitions in February 2020 for "serious financial fair play breaches", but that sanction was overturned later by the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Now they can match the achievement of Alex Ferguson's Manchester United in 1999 by beating Inter at the Ataturk Olympic Stadium and securing a treble.

Beaten finalists in 2021, City lost in last year's semi-finals to Real Madrid, but the addition of Erling Haaland appears to have taken Guardiola's team to a new level.

The Norwegian has scored 52 goals since arriving from Borussia Dortmund, and City land in Turkey having been beaten just once in their last 27 games.

That 1-0 defeat at Brentford came on the last day of the Premier League season, after the title had been secured.

City have not lost in Europe this season and dished out heavy beatings to RB Leipzig, Bayern Munich and Madrid in the knockout rounds.

So there is surely nothing to fear in the final against the third-best team in Italy, except perhaps their own past demons in crucial Champions League games.

Yet as Guardiola eyes what would be the third Champions League of his career, City cannot overlook the threat of an Inter team who qualified from their group ahead of Barcelona before seeing off Porto, Benfica and city rivals AC Milan.

They have maybe not faced a team of City's calibre, but they have a clear Cup pedigree, having recently retained the Coppa Italia.

"I mean, they're in the Champions League final for a reason," warned John Stones, whose move from central defence into midfield has been key to City's outstanding form.

"They've got incredible play-

ers, we can all see that. How they played in a big occasion, in a derby game in the Champions League semi-final, is never easy. We know what we're up against."

'No fear' for Inter

Inter know what they are up against too, not least veteran 37-year-old forward Edin Dzeko. The Bosnian played for City between 2011 and 2016.

He has scored 14 goals this season and has been an excellent foil for Inter's star forward, Lautaro Martinez.

Simone Inzaghi's side may not have as many superstars as City, but they have a grizzled back line, dangerous wing-backs and a hard-working midfield in which Nicolo Barella excels.

"We're talking about a football match, there's no fear," said Inzaghi, who was appointed in 2021 after the Nerazzurri had won Serie A under Antonio Conte. Defender Alessandro Bastoni added: "You are scared of murderers, not football players. It would be a mistake to talk about fear."

Inter are in their first final since winning the trophy under Jose Mourinho in 2010, the last victory in the competition for an Italian side.

They have lifted the trophy three times before, while City's only European silverware to date remains the Cup Winners' Cup, which they won in 1970 by beating Poland's Gornik Zabrze 2-1 in the final.

Swiatek sets up Muchova showdown for French Open crown

REUTERS – Defending champion Iga Swiatek was pushed hard by Beatriz Haddad Maia at the French Open on Thursday, but the top seed soaked up the pressure to overcome the Brazilian 6-2 7-6(7) and reach a third final in four years at Roland Garros.

She will play today the unseeded Karolina Muchova, who saved a match point before overcoming second seed Aryna Sabalenka 7-6(5) 6-7(5) 7-5 to end the Belarusian's hopes of becoming world number one.

Swiatek, who lifted the Suzanne Lenglen Cup last year and in 2020, was put through the wringer by Haddad Maia but held her nerve in a tense tiebreak to see off the 14th seed's challenge.

"She has a really nice game for clay courts with a lot of top spin," Swiatek said of Haddad Maia, who beat the Pole in their only other meeting in Toronto last year.

"She can also play flat and aggressive. She's a fighter. For every match, she played fierce." Sabalenka would have taken over top spot in the rankings by winning the title in Paris, but the Australian Open champion wasted her opportunity at 5-2 in the third set against Muchova and bowed out after losing the last five games in a row.

That made Muchova only the third player ranked outside the top 40 to reach the Roland Garros final after Jelena Ostapenko (2017) and Swiatek (2020) – both of whom won the title.

Muchova, who fought back from the mid-2000s into the top 50 after an injury in 2021, was at her skilful best to subdue the big-hitting Sabalenka.

"I don't really know what happened," Muchova said. "The atmosphere, the people pushing me in all the match. I just keep fighting and it worked. I really don't know what happened. I am so happy."

Meanwhile, there was light at the end of the tunnel for Japan's Miyu Kato after a difficult few days, as she put her women's doubles disqualification behind her to claim the mixed doubles crown with Germany's Tim Puetz.

The pair rallied to beat Canada's Bianca Andreescu and New Zealander Michael Venus 4-6 6-4 (10-6) in the final. Kato and her Indonesian partner Aldila Sutjiadi had been disqualified from the women's doubles in the third round when Kato hit a ball down the court between points, inadvertently striking a ball girl. That led to the Asian pair's disqualification, leaving Kato in tears.

"It's been challenging mentally after the disqualification. I want to thank everyone for the heartfelt messages of support," Kato said. "I was able to use all the positive energy so I could be here today. Thanks to Aldila and all the Indonesian fans. I'm doing my best so we can one day return and claim the women's double title."