

Saudi Arabia confirmed as sole bidder for 2034 World Cup



● FIFA

THE GUARDIAN – Saudi Arabia has been confirmed as the sole bidder to host the 2034 men's World Cup, raising concerns over FIFA's ability to fulfil its human rights commitments.

After Australia decided against a bid, having been given a 25-day window by FIFA to express interest when the deadline was brought forward unexpectedly to 4pm GMT on Tuesday, the prospect of a second World Cup in the Middle East within 12 years is all but a formality. The lack of a competitive tender and the alacrity with which the process has been conducted, however, have prompted alarm among human rights groups. Amnesty International called on FIFA to pull the plug if human rights commitments were not fulfilled.

"Human rights commitments must be agreed with potential hosts before final decisions on holding the tournaments are made," Steve Cockburn, Amnesty's head of economic and social justice, said. "FIFA must now make clear how it expects hosts to comply with its human rights policies. It must also be prepared to halt the bidding process if serious human rights risks are not credibly addressed. "The best chance for FIFA to obtain binding guarantees to protect workers' rights, ensure freedom of expression and prevent discrimination linked to the World Cup is during the host selection process – not after the hosts have been confirmed and tournament preparation has begun."

Under the terms of its bidding process for the 2030 and 2034 men's World Cup finals tournaments, FIFA expects any host to conform with the terms of the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. This would require, in FIFA's words, "human rights and labour standards to be implemented by the bidding member associations, the government(s) and other entities involved in the organisation of the competitions, such as those responsible for the construction and renovation of stadiums, training sites, hotels and airports".

The Sports and Rights Alliance, which brings together a number of human rights organisations, argues that the lack of a competitive process has left FIFA with less leverage to enforce necessary change. Minky Worden, the director of global initiatives at Human Rights Watch, urged FIFA to be rigorous in its enforcement of its expressed principles. Saudi Arabia has until July 2024 to submit its full bid.

Iranian Oladghobad named AFC Futsal Player of the Year

Sports Desk

Iran's Moslem Oladghobad was named the Asian Futsal Player of the Year at the AFC Annual Awards 2022 in Doha, Qatar, beating international teammate Saeed Ahmad-Abbasi and Japanese keeper Guilherme Kurotomo to the prize.

Oladghobad, 27, bagged five goals – including a double against Thailand in the semifinals – to win the Most Valuable Player award in last year's AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Kuwait, despite Iran being denied a record-extending 13th continental title after a final defeat against Japan.

Having joined Palma de Mallorca in August 2022, the Iranian also enjoyed a glittering debut campaign with the Spanish top-flight side as he notched up five assists to help his team lift the trophy at the UEFA Futsal Champions League.

"I am so happy that I attended the AFC Annual Awards. Today, I am the representative of the entire Iran national futsal team and I want to share this award with all of them. I want to thank all the people who have helped me reach this stage and I want to especially thank my parents and my wife for their support," said Oladghobad after being awarded with the trophy on the stage by Mahdi Taj, the chairman of the Iranian Football Federation.

Oladghobad is the fifth Iranian to win the prestigious award since it was



Moslem Oladghobad (R) receives the AFC Futsal Player of the Year award from Mahdi Taj, the chairman of the Iranian Football Federation, at the AFC Annual Awards in Doha, Qatar, on October 31, 2023.

● AFC

first introduced in 2006, following legendary Vahid Shamsaei – winner of the prize on three occasions – Mohammad Taheri, Mohammad Keshavarz, and record four-time winner Ali-Asghar Hassanzadeh. Meanwhile, Iranian international striker Mahdi Taremi and young center-back Mohammad-Amin Hazbavi were also among the nominees at the ceremony, which took place after a two-year suspension due to coronavirus restrictions, but were left empty-handed in their

respective categories. Porto talisman Taremi lost out the Asian International Player of the Year award to South Korean defender Kim Min-jae – an integral part in Napoli's title-winning campaign in the Italian Serie A before joining Bayern Munich in the summer – while Japanese Kuryu Matsuki came out on top against Hazbavi and Lee Seung-won of South Korea in the AFC Men's Youth Player of the Year category. The major prize of the eve-

ning, the AFC Player of the Year award, went to Saudi Arabia and Al Hilal midfielder Salem Al Dawsari. Beating Australian Mathew Leckie and Qatar's Almoz Ali to the top honor, the 32-year-old superstar played a pivotal role in Al Hilal's 2021/22 Saudi Pro League and 2022/23 King's Cup triumphs, while he registered four goals and three assists as the club finished runner-up in the AFC Champions League. The midfielder's double and an assist in the

last-four 3-2 victory over Flamengo also helped Al Hilal become the first Saudi side to reach the final showdown of the FIFA Club World Cup, before a 5-3 loss to Real Madrid in February. Al Dawsari also found the net twice in the World Cup in Qatar, including a sensational strike against eventual champion Argentina which saw the Asian side pull off one of the biggest upsets in the history of the competition. Chelsea striker and Australia

captain Sam Kerr, meanwhile, won a second AFC Women's Player of the Year award after helping the Matildas reach the Women's World Cup semifinals on home soil in August. Japan's Hajime Moriyasu, who led his country to the last 16 of the World Cup thanks to massive victories over Germany and Spain for a top-spot finish in the group, received the award for the Men's Coach of the Year, with China head coach Shui Qingxia taking home the women's prize.



Spurs complete wild comeback vs. Suns

REUTERS – Keldon Johnson stole the ball from Kevin Durant and scored on a breakaway dunk with 1.2 seconds to play as the visiting San Antonio Spurs scored the final six points to beat the Phoenix Suns 115-114 on Tuesday in the first contest of a two-game set between the teams over a three-day span.

The Suns led by 18 points at halftime and by 13 heading into the fourth quarter. San Antonio did not relent, with a jumper by rookie phenom Victor Wembanyama cutting its deficit to 114-111 with 49 seconds left.

Johnson led the Spurs with 27 points while Wembanyama and Devin Vassell each added 18. Zach Collins scored 14 points and Tre Jones had 10 as San Antonio won for the first time on the road. Durant's 26 points paced the Suns. Eric Gordon scored 20, and Grayson Allen added 19. Jusuf Nurkic finished with 12 points and 12 rebounds.

**Knicks 109
Cavaliers 91**

Julius Randle posted a double-double for visiting New York, which pulled away in the second half to defeat short-handed Cleveland in the opener of a home-and-home set. Randle had 19 points and 10 rebounds for the Knicks, who outscored the Cavaliers 51-39 in the second half. The two teams are slated to play again Wednesday night in New York. Jalen Brunson also scored 19 points, and RJ Barrett scored 16 points. Donovan Mitchell scored a game-high 26 points for the Cavaliers, who played without Darius Garland, Caris LeVert and Jarrett Allen. Garland and LeVert were out due to hamstring injuries and Allen missed the game because of an ankle injury.

**Clippers 118
Magic 102**

Paul George overcame a poor start to record 27 points, seven rebounds and seven assists to help

Los Angeles post a victory over visiting Orlando. George missed all six of his first-quarter shots and was 2-for-10 before halftime. However, he made four 3-pointers and scored 14 points in the third quarter as Los Angeles gained control. Russell Westbrook scored 16 points in a period that saw the Clippers outscore the Magic 41-21. Paolo Banchero notched 15 points and four steals, Franz Wagner added 14 points and eight rebounds and Moritz Wagner had 13 points for Orlando, which lost its second straight game.

Spurs' Keldon Johnson (3) goes up for the game-winning basket against the Suns at the Footprint Center, Phoenix, AZ, US, on October 31, 2023.
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