

Moharrami ruled out for months with torn ligament



AFC

Sports Desk

Iranian fullback Sadeq Moharrami is set to be sidelined for at least six months, likely to miss the rest of the season, after suffering a torn knee ligament while on international duty at the AFC Asian Cup.

The Dynamo Zagreb player sustained the injury in the closing stages of the first half against the United Arab Emirates in Al Rayyan, Qatar, last Tuesday, when he collided with Emirati defender Hareb Abdullah and was replaced by Ramian Rezaeian. Iran went on to win the game 2-1, courtesy of a Mahdi Taremi's double against Yahya Al Ghassani's late consolation for the UAE, and progress to the round of 16 as the Group C winner with maximum points.

Moharrami's injury comes as a massive blow for Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee, whose team is chasing a first Asian Cup trophy in 48 years and will face Syria in the first knockout round on Wednesday.

Syria manager Hector Cuper will have his own injury woes to deal with as skipper and prolific striker Omar Khribin is a doubt for the last-16 clash after an injury during a training session.

Sabalenka overpowers Zheng to retain Australian Open crown



Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka celebrates with the women's singles trophy at the Australian Open in Melbourne, Australia, on January 27, 2024. GETTY IMAGES

REUTERS - Aryna Sabalenka continued to be an irrepressible force at the Australian Open as she powered to a 6-3 6-2 victory over Chinese 12th seed Zheng Qinwen on Saturday to successfully

defend her title and add a second Grand Slam trophy to her cabinet. The Belarusian second seed has barely put a foot wrong at what has turned into her happiest hunting ground as she became the

first woman to retain the Melbourne Park crown since compatriot Victoria Azarenka in 2013. "It's been an amazing couple of weeks and I couldn't imagine myself lifting this trophy one

more time," Sabalenka said. "I want to congratulate you Qinwen on an incredible couple of weeks here in Australia. I know it's really tough to lose in the final but you're such an

incredible player. "You're such a young girl and you're going to make many more finals and you're going to get it." Sabalenka came into the match without dropping a set at the year's first

major and stayed perfect to join Ash Barty, Serena Williams, Maria Sharapova and Lindsay Davenport in the elite club of players to have managed the feat since 2000.

Zheng, who had saved four set points, showed she was slowly growing in confidence in her second meeting with Sabalenka by firing up her own big forehand amid the rallying cry of "Jia You" from her compatriots in the crowd. A clean crosscourt winner earned Sabalenka a break point in the opening game of the second set and Zheng's double fault handed it to her on a platter.

The 21-year-old first-time finalist, bidding to match her idol Li Na - the Melbourne Park champion 10 years ago and first Asian and Chinese player to win a major - saw her hopes fade after two more errors on serve left her 4-1 down.

Sabalenka shrugged of shaky service game to close out the most one-sided final since Azarenka beat Maria Sharapova 6-3 6-0 in 2012 by smashing a forehand winner.

"It's my first final and I'm feeling a little bit pity, but that's how it is," said Zheng. "I feel very complicated because I could have done better than I did in this match."

I'll miss him but I'll sleep better, Guardiola says of Klopp's quit decision

REUTERS - Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola said he will miss his old sparring partner Juergen Klopp when the Liverpool manager calls time on his reign at the end of the season. Klopp stunned the football world on Friday when he announced this would be his last season at the Anfield club he took over in 2015 and led to multiple trophies.

Asked after his side's 1-0 FA Cup fourth-round win at Tottenham Hotspur if the news had been a shock, Guardiola said: "I am a little bit, he's an absolutely incredible manager and I know I don't know him closely but he's an incredible person. "I had a feeling that he's leaving part

of us too at Man City as Liverpool have been our biggest rival in his years. "Personally he has been my biggest rival from when he was at Dortmund and I was at Bayern Munich. He will be missed, personally I will miss. I am pleased because without him I will sleep a little bit better the night before we play against Liverpool! But I wish him all the best."

City have jostled with Liverpool in several epic title races since Guardiola and Klopp both took charge and look set to go toe-to-toe again this season with the sides first and second in the standings. "He doesn't admit it but he will be back," Guardiola, whose City side are seeking a fourth successive league ti-

tle, said. "All the managers will (feel tired) when you've done many years, I feel it completely.

"I felt it at Barcelona so I understand it completely."

Klopp, who has won the Champions League, Premier League, Club World Cup, FA Cup, League Cup and Super Cup during his spell in charge, said he had made the decision because his energy for the job was waning.

"I think the Premier League is going to miss his charisma, personality and the way his teams play," added Guardiola. "They have always been a pleasure to watch how positive they are in their approach. They try to win every game. I wish him all the best."



JASON CAIRNDUFF/ACTION IMAGES

Doncic equals fourth-highest NBA scoring total



BBC - Luka Doncic equalled the fourth-highest scoring performance in NBA history with 73 points as the Dallas Mavericks defeated the Atlanta Hawks. The 24-year-old Slovenian broke the Mavericks' record score of 60 he set against the New York Knicks in 2022. Only the legendary Wilt Chamberlain (100 and 78) and Kobe Bryant (78) have scored more in 77 years of the NBA. "It was just exciting. Sometimes I couldn't believe it," Doncic said after the Mavericks' 148-143 victory.



Mavericks guard Luka Doncic (77) attempts a shot during an NBA victory over the Hawks at State Farm Arena, Atlanta, GA, US, on January 26, 2024. JASON GETZ/AJC

Doncic notched 10 rebounds and seven assists. He connected on 25 of 33 shots from the floor - including eight three-pointers - and made 15 of his 16 free throws.

Chamberlain also had two scores of 73 in 1962 while David Thompson reached the figure in 1978.

Doncic became the 10th player in the NBA to score at least 70 points in a game after Joel Embiid beat the Philadelphia 76ers' franchise record on Monday. It is the highest score since Los Angeles Lakers legend Bryant scored 81 points against the Toronto Raptors in 2006. Chamberlain's century haul came for the Philadelphia Warriors against the New York Knicks in 1962.

Doncic ranked the performance "probably at the top" of his career as the

game coincided with the fourth anniversary of Bryant's death in a helicopter accident.

"We all loved Kobe. It feels special to be in that conversation with those names," Doncic added.

Doncic's display helped his side end a run of three straight defeats as Mavericks coach Jason Kidd hailed a "special" performance.

Kidd said: "His ability to make shots, create shots, find open guys, he did that at a high level tonight. I've said this before, we can't take him for granted.

"Sometimes we are a little bit tough on him because of the wins and losses, but what he does on the court is different than anybody else.

"Every night is special. He always does something."