

Iran's Kazemi calls for patience on new coach Manolopoulos

Sports Desk

As Iran's basketball team has embarked on a new era under Giannis Manolopoulos, captain Arsalan Kazemi says the Greek head coach will need some time to implement his tactical ideas. Manolopoulos, who was appointed to the role in August, got off to a disappointing start to his reign last week as Iran fell to a 78-77 defeat against Qatar in a FIBA Asia Cup qualifier in Doha – a first victory for the home side over the three-time Asian champion in 19 years.

In his first press conference after taking the job, Manolopoulos had pinpointed "the high number of turnovers" as Iran's Achilles' heel in recent major tournaments, and the vulnerability was on full display again in Al Gharafa Sports Club Hall. "We had 21 turnovers [against Qatar's 15] and that is what eventually cost us the defeat," Kazemi said of his team's latest setback, adding: "You can't expect to win a basketball game with such a disappointing figure. The Qatari players capitalized on all of our turnovers, taking the ball and scoring with ease. We will have to work on the weakness."

The Iranian skipper still showed faith with the new head coach to turn things around.

"He is a decent coach and knows all about the game. He

has some finer details in mind, which he's been drilling into the players during training sessions. I believe we need to be patient with him to fully implement his ideas and get to know our national team inside and out, which will take some time," Kazemi said.

Kazemi also believes the Iranian team "needs to revise its preparation methods and plans to move towards the modern-day basketball."

"Unfortunately, we often think that two or three weeks of training would be enough for the team. But in reality, long camps could be exhausting and frustrating for the players. I'm not talking about the European teams, which have completely different conditions, but most of the Asian sides have changed their approach.

"All teams in Asia, from Syria and Palestine to China and Japan, prioritize friendlies over training camps. They play in multiple friendly matches before every qualification window, which leads to more team cohesion. We were the only team in continent to play in the recent qualification window without any friendly games and that clearly impacted our performance against Qatar. I hope that will change for the future games," added the Iranian captain.

Iran's first game in the second window of the Asia Cup qualifiers was called off after Kazakh-



stan refused to travel to Iran over "safety concerns" and was punished with a forfeit loss (20-0) by the international governing body of the sport.

"I'm sure we would have won the game with the support of the Iranian fans anyway,

while it would have been a great opportunity for us to gel as a team and for the new coach to get to know his players better," said Kazemi.

Despite the defeat to Qatar, Iran retained the top spot in Group E of the qualifiers with seven

points – one clear of Qatar, with India and Kazakhstan level on five points.

With the top two progressing to the finals in Jeddah next August, Iran is in pole position to advance ahead of the home game against India and the visit



Iran captain Arsalan Kazemi (1) goes up for a basket during a loss to Qatar in the FIBA Asia Cup qualifiers in Doha, Qatar, on Nov. 25, 2024.
● FIBA

to Kazakhstan in February's final qualification window.

Scores killed in clashes between fans at football match in Guinea



FRANCE 24 – Scores of football fans, including children, were killed in a stampede and as security forces tried to quell clashes during a football match at a crowded stadium in southern Guinea's largest city, according to local media and a coalition of political parties.

The stampede broke out on Sunday afternoon at the Nzerekore city during the final of a local tournament between the Labe and Nzerekore teams in honor of Guinea's military leader, Mamadi Doumbouya, Guinea's Prime Minister Amadou Oury Bah said on the X platform.

The Guinean government said on Monday that around 56 people were

killed and more were wounded in a crush after violence broke out over a contested goal.

"The government condemns the incidents that marred the match between Labe N'Zerekore," Bah posted on Facebook, reiterating a "call for calm so as not to impede hospital services from aiding the injured."

Local media reported that security forces tried to use tear gas to restore calm after the chaos that followed a disputed penalty.

"This (the disputed penalty) angered supporters who threw stones. This is how the security services used tear gas," the local Media Guinea reported. It said several of those killed were children while some

of the injured being treated at a regional hospital are in critical condition.

Videos that appeared to be from the scene showed a section of the stadium shouting and protesting the refereeing before the clashes broke out as fans poured onto the field.

People were running as they tried to escape from the stadium, many of them jumping the high fence.

Videos also showed many people lying on the floor in what looked like a hospital as a crowd gathered nearby, some assisting the wounded.

The National Alliance for Alternation and Democracy coalition called for an investigation. It said the tournament was organ-

ised to drum support for the "illegal and inappropriate" political ambition of the military leader.

Guinea has been led by the military since soldiers ousted President Alpha Conde in 2021. It is one of a growing number of West African countries, including Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, where the military has taken power and delayed a return to civilian rule.

Doumbouya overran the president three years ago, saying he was preventing the country from slipping into chaos and chastised the previous government for broken promises. He has, however, been criticized for not meeting the expectations that he raised.

Liverpool 'close to perfection' in Man City win, says Slot

REUTERS – Liverpool had to put in a near-flawless performance to defeat old rivals Manchester City who have so often thwarted their league title ambitions, manager Arne Slot said.

The Reds thoroughly deserved to beat Pep Guardiola's side 2-0 to take a nine-point lead in the Premier League in what was Slot's 18th win of 20 games in charge of Liverpool.

"If you want to win against City you have to be perfect in every part of the game. We came close to perfection," he said, as jubilant fans chanted his name around Anfield as they did midweek after beating Real Madrid in the Champions League.

"Playing against Real Madrid, against Manchester City, teams that are so good and have won so many trophies, coming out and winning against them. We're really happy with these two wins but we also understand we want to achieve more than this."

Emphasizing his injury worries in defence, with only five senior players available, Slot said there was still a long way to go before Liverpool had a trophy in their hands.

"If you want to win any-



thing, it's all about consistency. These teams, like Real Madrid, like City, are all capable of getting the same winning streak that we have, so let's not get carried away by a few wins," he said.

Defenders out

Ahead of a busy December and New Year's fixture list, Slot said defenders Ibrahima Konate and Conor Bradley would remain out for a few weeks, while Kostas Tsimikas was unlikely to be available for another week. Having taken over from the enormously popular Jurgen Klopp, Liverpool's new manager was feted by the crowd throughout Sunday's game and thanked them for giving energy to his team. He lamented that Liverpool did not seal the game earlier, with chance-after-chance going begging, but

said that at least made it a great game for neutrals.

"The amount of chances we miss made it tight at the end. But maybe that's nice for matches like this," he said, adding that he had enjoyed watching past Liverpool-City encounters for that same reason.

"I don't think anyone, including me would have predicted this," he said, referring to his amazing start at Anfield and praising the excellent state Klopp left the club in.

"It has been a good week, but let's not get carried away too much ... I saw Arsenal yesterday (beating West Ham 5-2) and City, they will come back ... Arsenal and City are able to win every game from now till the end. Chelsea are able to win every game. It makes the Premier League so interesting."