

# Inter's Taremi backed by Qalenoey to reach double figures for the season

## Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoey has tipped Inter striker Mahdi Taremi to build on his sublime performance against AC Milan in the Italian Super Cup final to add to his goal haul with the Nerazzurri colors.

Taremi, whose contribution since joining Inter in July had been limited to a goal from the spot in 20 games, provided Argentine skipper Lautaro Martinez with an assist and then found the net himself in Riyadh's Al Awwal Park on Monday.

The Iranian controlled Stefan de Vrij's long ball with a delicate touch behind the Milan backline and drilled his shot into the bottom corner to give his team a two-goal lead in the early stages of the second half in the Derby della Madonnina.

Milan pulled off a sensational fightback for a 3-2 victory as Taremi was denied a first taste of silverware with Inter, but his coach in the national team is confident the occasion will still be a watershed in the Iranian's career in the Italian top flight.

"The control and the composed finishing for his goal sums up what Taremi is all about as a striker," Qalenoey told La Gazzetta dello Sport.

"Inter fans must trust him. Now that he has broken the curse [of scoring from open play], I'm sure he can reach double figures for the season," the coach said of his fellow-Iranian, who became Porto's third all-time



Inter striker Mahdi Taremi celebrates his goal during a 3-2 defeat against AC Milan in the Italian Super Cup final at Al Awwal Park, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Jan. 6, 2025. [inter.it](https://www.inter.it)

leading marksman with 91 strikes in 182 outings before leaving the Dragons in the summer.

"There are dozens of games left, and he will also provide several assists. Taremi is a team player and contributes to the success of

his teammates on the pitch. "I'm sorry about the Super Cup defeat, but a derby goal will be remembered forever. The game was a turning point, and from now on it will be a different story for him," added the Team Melli head coach.

Asked about Taremi's best trait as a striker, Qalenoey said: "The sense of responsibility towards his teammates."

"Taremi knows how to stimulate those around him. He has always done so since his days at Porto,

where he scored in droves. He works hard on the pitch and is a committed player. Mahdi is an asset for every coach, and [Inter boss] Simone Inzaghi realized that from day one."

Many in the Italian football be-

lieve Taremi's qualities resemble those of former Inter forward Edin Dzeko, but Qalenoey says the Iranian is "even a more complete player than the Bosnian."

"Taremi can play as both a center-forward and as a second striker. From a technical point of view, he is even better than Dzeko. He knows how to play between the lines and drop deep to help with the buildup play and feed the strikers."

Assessing Taremi's debut campaign in the Inter shirt, Qalenoey said: "His season should be divided between the Champions League and Serie A. He has been a starter in all of Inter's six European games, and has a goal and double assists under his belt. In the domestic league, however, he has found less opportunity as Inzaghi likes to rotate his strikers. It is not easy to adapt to Italian football, but he will soon start scoring on a regular basis."

Asked if he has any suggestions for Inzaghi, the Iranian coach said: "He's one of the best coaches in Europe and doesn't need my tips. All I can say is that Taremi is someone who needs to be the focal point of the project to perform at his best."

## Djokovic wants to 'focus on tennis' after poisoning claim



ISSEI KATO/REUTERS

BBC - Novak Djokovic says he wants to "focus on tennis" after claiming in a magazine interview he had been "poisoned" when detained in a Melbourne hotel.

Local reporters unsuccessfully demanded further explanation as the 37-year-old Serb walked out of a pre-Australian Open news conference which ended in bizarre fashion. Djokovic, a record 10-time

men's champion at Melbourne Park, was deported from the Australian city in 2022 after arriving without a vaccination against Covid-19.

The deportation came when he failed to overturn a decision from the Australian government to cancel his visa on public health grounds.

In an interview with GQ magazine, published on Thursday, Djokovic said he had

"some health issues" when he returned to Serbia.

"I realised that in that hotel in Melbourne I was fed with some food that poisoned me," he added.

"I had a really high level of heavy metal. Heavy metal. I had the lead, very high level of lead and mercury."

The Australian Border Force has not responded to the accusations.

"For privacy reasons, we

cannot comment on individual cases," the Department of Home Affairs told BBC Sport.

Djokovic's news conference on Friday had been wrapped up by a moderator before the player said he would answer another question from an Australian reporter.

She asked Djokovic if he had evidence to support his claim the food he was served while detained in the Park Hotel caused the heavy metal levels.

"I've done that interview many months ago," he replied.

"I would appreciate not talking more in detail about that, as I would like to focus on the tennis and why I'm here."

Djokovic flew to Australia at the end of December and told Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper this week he still feels "trauma" when he arrives in the country.

One Australian academic, speaking to the Guardian, external said Djokovic's claim was a "wild accusation".

"It's possible but very unlikely given how long he was locked up," said Damian Manganja, research fellow in food policy at the George Institute for Global Health.

"These meals were probably made in mass amounts and there haven't been other reports as far as I know."

## Iran to play in March's futsal tourney in Brazil

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The Iranian national futsal team will play in a four-team tournament in Brazil - also featuring the host, Afghanistan, and France - in March's international break.

The event will be a first for Iran since last September's Futsal World Cup in Uzbekistan, where Vahid Shamsaei's side won the group with maximum points but suffered a last-16 exit after a 4-3 defeat against Morocco.

Iran will begin the tournament in Brazil against the home side, which lifted a sixth World Cup trophy last year, before taking on Afghanistan.

Beaten by Iran in the 2024 Asian Cup, Afghanistan secured a surprise berth for the showpiece in Uzbekistan before falling to a 3-1 loss to Paraguay in extra time in the round of 16.

Iran's final game in Brazil will be

against World Cup semifinalist France - a repeat of the controversial encounter between the two sides in the World Cup, which the Asian powerhouse won 4-1 to finish atop the group.

France, however, faced tanking allegations after the game, as a defeat would have meant a much easier passage through the knockout phase for the runner-up in the group.

The French recorded only six shots on goal over the course of the entire match, scoring a consolation after Iran had eased to a 4-0 lead, while their goalkeeper Thibaut Garros clearly moved away from the ball in the buildup to Iran's opening goal.

While even a win against Morocco would have seen Iran play Brazil in the quarterfinals, France defeated Thailand and Paraguay to reach the last four on its World Cup debut.



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