

ACL knockouts might be played in neutral venues: Report



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Sports Desk

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) is considering neutral venues for the last-16 and quarterfinal rounds of the AFC Champions League (ACL), according to Saudi newspaper Al Eqtisadiyah.

The next two knockout rounds of the Asia's elite club competition will be played in September, ISNA reported.

Though the AFC had announced the knockout phase will be held through single-legged fixtures, the Saudi paper, citing a source familiar with the matter, wrote, "The AFC is still undecided over the remainder of the Champions League due to the coronavirus pandemic."

Al Eqtisadiyah added that "two-legged ties or a centralized format in a neutral country" are still on the cards for the AFC.

The report said that Saudi Arabia, which will be represented by Al Hilal and Al Nassr in the round of 16, is ready to host all remaining games in the West Zone of the competition.

The final day of the group stage in the West saw Persian Gulf Pro League sides Esteghlal and Tractor join Persepolis in advancing to the next round.

Esteghlal beat Iraq's Al Shorta 1-0 – courtesy of a first-half Cheick Diabate's spot-kick – in Jeddah on Friday as the Tehran-based Blues won Group C with 11 points.

Tractor, the only team to go a whole group campaign without a defeat, was a guaranteed place in the next round as one the best three runners-up after Al Hilal suffered a shock 2-0 defeat against the UAE's Shabab Al Ahli.

Persepolis, having secured a last-16 spot with one game to spare, eased to a 4-2 victory over Qatar's Al Rayyan on Thursday to win Group E with 15 points – the highest tally in the West Zone groups.

The round of 16 will see Esteghlal and Tractor square off against Al Hilal and Al Nassr respectively, while the Iranian Reds will take on Istiklol of Tajikistan, the surprise package at this year's competition which finished above Al Hilal in Group A.

Sharjah and Al Wahda will also go head-to-head in an all Emirati tie.

Should the AFC confirm the single-legged ties in different countries, Esteghlal and Tractor will host their opponents, with Persepolis having to fly to Tajikistan.

Dortmund confirms Sancho has 'gentleman's agreement' over transfer

Jadon Sancho has a gentlemen's agreement with Borussia Dortmund that would allow him to secure an exit under certain criteria, sporting director Michael Zorc confirmed – but the same understanding does not apply to Erling Haaland.

The attacking duo, widely considered among the best young talents in the world game, have been linked with a move away following a frustrating season that sees Dortmund face the risk of missing out on Champions League football, goal.com reported.

Norway international Haaland has already been touted to a host of rivals across Europe by agent Mino Raiola and father Alf-Inge, but Zorc has now moved to confirm that the

Leeds-born star would not be able to leave as easily as his teammate, who holds an informal understanding over any potential exit.

"We already had a gentlemen's agreement with Jadon last year that he can switch under certain conditions," Zorc told ARD.

"He's been with us for a couple of years. However, this agreement does not exist with Erling."

The 58-year-old further confirmed that this agreement was almost activated last summer during Manchester United's pursuit of Sancho, adding, "In the end, the requirements were not met."

Previous reports have suggested that Haaland would be unable to

force an exit from his current home until mid-2022 at the earliest, owing to a clause in his current contract that runs through 2024.

This has not stopped Raiola from hawking his player's services on a well-documented European tour earlier this year, with stops at Barcelona and Real Madrid to reportedly offer the player out.

Sancho, who previously arrived at Dortmund from Manchester City, has continued to be linked to Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's Red Devils following their unsuccessful pursuit last term, though the winger is likely to be more focused on earning England selection for Euro 2020 than any move at present.



GETTY IMAGES

Iranian wrestler Alizadeh seeking Olympic GR berth in Sofia

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestler Nasser Alizadeh will leave for Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, where he will be looking to make a clean sweep of Greco-Roman quotas for the country at the Tokyo Olympics.

The final qualification tournament for the Games will take place in the Bulgarian capital from May 6-9, with the finalists of each weight class handed a place in Tokyo next July.

Iran has already clinched five spots for the Olympics and the men's Greco-Roman 87kg berth will still be at stake after Hossein Nouri failed to reach the final bout of the class at the Asian Wrestling Olympic Qualification Tournament in Almaty, Kazakhstan, last month.

Iran's head coach Mohammad Bana picked Alizadeh over experienced wrestler Ramin Taheri to take part in Sofia as Alizadeh is in fine form after cruising to the gold medal at the Asian Wrestling Championships in Almaty in mid-April.

The Iranian, however, will be fac-



IRNA

ing a mammoth task as Russia's Davit Chakvetadze, the gold medalist in Rio 2016, and two-time world champion Metehan Basar of Turkey, as well as Armenian world bronze medalist in 2018 Artur Shahinyan and reigning European champion Zurabi Datunashvili of Georgia will all be present in Sofia to battle it out for a ticket to the Japanese capital.

Doncic, Mavericks win 125-124 thriller over surging Wizards

Luka Doncic ended his longest stretch without a triple-double since the Dallas sensation's rookie year in a back-and-forth thriller against Washington's Russell Westbrook, the NBA leader in that all-around category.

Another career best was the bigger highlight for Doncic, The Associated Press reported.

The 22-year-old's career-high 20th assist fed Dorian Finney-Smith for the go-ahead three-pointer in the final seconds as Doncic also finished with 31 points and 12 rebounds in a 125-124 win over the Washington Wizards on Saturday night.

Westbrook had 42 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists for the Wizards, who lost for just the third time in 15 games in a surge that has put them in position to make the play-in tournament in the Eastern Conference.

Bradley Beal scored 29 points while breaking three ties in the final two minutes, the last time on a pair of free throws for a 124-122 lead with 26 seconds remaining.

Doncic had gone 21 games without a triple-double, his longest stretch since needing 44 games to get his first as a rookie in 2018-19.



NBC

Luka Doncic (77) of the Mavericks dunks the ball during an NBA victory over the Wizards in Dallas, TX, US, on May 1, 2021.

The Mavericks couldn't hold an 18-point, first-half lead, trailed by eight entering the fourth quarter and held on through four ties in the final four-plus minutes.

Dallas pulled even with the Los Angeles Lakers for the fifth seed in the Western Conference while improving to a season-high nine games over .500. The Mavericks hold the tiebreaker on the defending champions with nine games remaining.

out with right knee soreness after coming out of a game in Detroit two nights earlier.

Maxi Kleber topped his previous season high for a game in the first half, scoring all of his 17 points while also hitting a season-best five three-pointers before the break. The German's previous game high was 16.

Rui Hachimura scored 18 points for Washington.

Six Tokyo Olympic torch staffers diagnosed with COVID-19

Six people who helped with Japan's Olympic torch relay were diagnosed with COVID-19, bringing the total number of participants in the event who got the coronavirus to eight, organizers said.

The six people, who included a man in his 20s and another man in his 30s, helped on the relay in the southern prefecture of Kagoshima on April 27, Tokyo 2020 said in a statement late on Saturday, Reuters reported.

All of them assisted with traffic control and wore masks, with three of them doing so in the city of Amami and the other three in the city of Kirishima, said the organizers.

Earlier last month, two other people who helped with the torch relay on the southern island of Shikoku were diagnosed with COVID-19, including a police officer in his 30s who guided traffic in Kagawa Prefecture.

The Tokyo 2020 organizers urged people to comply with COVID-19 guidelines.



ISSEI KATO/REUTERS

Japanese authorities are determined to protect Games participants and a local population that opinion surveys have shown is largely opposed to the Olympics due to fears the event will lead to more COVID-19 infections.