Welsh woe

Wales forward Gareth Bale is ruled out of the international friendly against Spain and his Real Madrid teammates with an injury, head coach Ryan Giggs confirmed.

Iran jumps up to third at Asian Para Games

Photos by IRNA

Sports Desk

A glittering day at the 2018 Asian Para Games in Jakarta, Indonesia, saw Iran move up to the third place of the table with an overall tally of 80 medals – including 30 golds.

Iranian athletes collected 13 golds, nine silvers and nine bronzes on the fifth day of the event.

Iranian swimmer Shahin Izadyar remained in contention for a perfect six-out-of-six record as a double gold in the men's 100m breaststroke SB9 and 50m freestyle S10 took his personal tally to five.

In the chess competitions, Omid Karimi (men's individual standard VI B2/B3), Atefeh

Naqavi (women's individual standard VI B2/B3) grabbed two golds while Naqavi was also a part of the three-a-side team (along with Fariba Zendehboudi and Fatemeh Barqoul) which finished first in the women's team standard VI B2/B3 contests.

Iranian judokas Vahid Nouri and Ehsan Mousanejad were also among the gold winners on Wednesday, coming out victorious in the final bouts of the men's 90kg and 100kg weight classes.

Iran's impressive run at the para athletics continued with 13 more medals.

Mahdi Olad (men's discus throw F11), Hashemieh Motaqian (women's discus throw F56/57), Alireza Mokhtari (men's shot put F53), Aref Baharvand (men's shot put F36) and Mahnaz Amini (women's javelin throw F57) added five golds to Iran's account, making it a total of 14 para athletics golds.

Leading Iran in the overall table, China and South Korea sit first and second with 197 (105 golds) and 95 (38 golds) medals respectively. Having started on October 6, the quadrennial multi-sport event will finish on October 13.

Belgian authorities raid clubs in fraud, match-fixing investigation

Belgian authorities said 57 police raids are ongoing in Belgium and six other European nations in a vast probe into financial fraud and match-fixing in football.

The federal prosecutor's office in Brussels said 44 raids occurred in Belgium and 13 more in France, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia, AP reported.

Belgian media, including public broadcaster RTBF, said police had conducted searches in the premises of 10 clubs including Anderlecht, Club Brugge and Standard Liege.

A spokesman said that a year-old probe found evidence of "suspect financial operations" by agents and also indications "of possible influencing of games" during the previous season.

Reports suggest that Mogi Bayat, Belgium's best known agent, Brugge coach Ivan Leko and a former Anderlecht coach were among those being questioned.

The investigation centers on "activities relating to a criminal organization, money laundering and private corruption".

"Match-fixing undermines the integrity of sports. The Justice Department is working for a fair sport," Justice Minister Koen Geens said.

The probe comes only three months after Belgium's national team reached the World Cup semifinals.

"Agents, referees, a former lawyer, an accounting office, jewelers, journalists" were among those hit by the raids, authorities said.

The raids took place in just

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about every region in Belgium. It involved 184 police officials in the country and 36 in the other European nations.

The statement said some football agents, independent from one another, "would have schemed to hide" transfer commissions, payments of players and coaches, and other payments from the Belgian authorities, causing tax losses.

It was during the investigation that indications appeared that there may have been match-fixing during the 2017-18 season.

Bolt ready to play for his footballing future

BENOIT TESSIER/REUTERS

Usain Bolt believes Friday's trial match could determine his future with the Central Coast Mariners.

Bolt is expected to start for the first time since arriving at the A-League club in August in the hope of beginning a professional soccer career, ESPN reported.

"This is going to be a big game. I think it will determine if the club makes up its mind on what to do with my career," said Bolt of the match against a select Macarthur South West United team.

After being used as a winger in his first brief trial appearance in late August, the retired track great hinted at a positional change for the match at Sydney's Campbelltown Stadium.

Not only has coach Mike Mulvey raised the prospect of starting with Bolt, but also deploying him further up the pitch in the frontline.

With Mulvey likely to play a strong lineup, Bolt is keen to show how much improvement he has made by working with the first team.

"[Mulvey] said he wants to play me up top more," Bolt said.

"The couple of games that I played, I didn't play with the first team.

"There's a few first-team boys in the team for Friday. So I'll get different service, better service, because they're more seasoned and more mature.

"So he just told me to make sure I'm focused and push myself, and I'll just take the chances when I get them."

Bolt has undergone one-on-one sessions on top of the team's training program in a bid to fast-track his development.

And the 32-year-old is taking his first run-on start as an indication that the coaching staff are pleased by the progress he has made with his conditioning and touch.

"That's always a good step, when coaches are satisfied with the fitness to put me in the starting line-up. That's always a big step," Bolt said.

"I can say I've been improving, [but] you won't know what level you're at until you actually play a competitive game.

"I've just got to go out there and play and see what I need to do or if I should continue if not. I'm just pushing myself, I think I've put in a lot of work.

"Now it's just to go out there and execute."

The Mariners open their A-League season against the Brisbane Roar on Sunday week.

Russia stars facing 'lifetime ban' over assault on officials

RUSSELL CHEYNE/REUTERS

Alexander Kokorin

Russian Premier League chiefs requested a lifetime ban for disgraced footballers Pavel Mamaev and Alexander Kokorin following an unprovoked attack on two government officials.

Krasnodar midfielder Mamaev and Zenit Saint Petersburg forward Kokorin are facing a five-year jail term after video footage caught them attacking two Russian trade ministry officials in an upscale Moscow café, AFP reported.

The footage showed one of the officials, Denis Pak, an ethnic Korean, being hit with a chair while eating a meal.

Now the former Russian international players, who have courted controversy in the past, could be banned for life from playing in Russia.

"This case is unusual in terms of our football and the league has addressed a request to the ethics committee of the Russian Football Union to impose a lifetime ban on Mamaev and Kokorin," Premier League spokesman Sergei Alekseyev said Wednesday.

Although they have not yet been formally charged, the pair also face up to five years in prison over the incident.

"I think law enforcement agencies will qualify this as hooliganism and punishment for this is quite severe – up to five years in prison," Igor Lebedev, a member of the RFU's executive committee, said in televised remarks.

Krasnodar has pledged to terminate Mamaev's contract while Zenit has condemned Kokorin's role as "disgusting". The Saint Petersburg club removed all t-shirts bearing his name following reports of the attack.

Pak's lawyer Gennadiy Udunyan earlier told Russian state television, "They started to mock (Pak's) ethnicity". The players then allegedly assaulted Pak when he made a critical comment.

He added, "He has a concussion."

Before the cafe assault the footballers attacked the driver of a television host and damaged her Mercedes in a separate incident on Monday.

The driver was hospitalized with injuries and a criminal probe was opened.

On Tuesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Kremlin – "just like the whole country" – was aware of the incident and described the video as "rather unpleasant".

'Lowlifes who went berserk'

Commentators, meanwhile, were keen to underline the players were not part of the Russia team that punched above its weight to reach the quarterfinals as the host of the World Cup this summer.

AFP

Pavel Mamaev (R)

"We should specify that those two...are not currently members of the national squad," Igor Rabiner, a columnist for the Russian daily newspaper Sport Express, told AFP.

Kokorin last played for the national side in late 2017, while Mamaev was last selected in 2016.

Rabiner added, "The players who represented Russia at the World Cup dramatically changed the country's attitude to the game with their successful performance and that is diametrically opposed to this pair's deeds."

It is not the first time the players' behavior has raised eyebrows.

The RFU suspended the pair in July 2016 after a video emerged from a Monte Carlo nightclub in which Mamaev and Kokorin allegedly spent $296,000 on a champagne-fueled party following Euro 2016, where Russia flopped.

Kokorin, who sat out this year's World Cup with a knee injury, later apologized for his behavior and was welcomed back into the national team.

Mamaev last played for Russia at Euro 2016.

"Now they're just lowlifes who went berserk," Rabiner added. "Just ill-bred people who went crazy on the huge money that they receive from their clubs."

Saunders denied license to fight Andrade

British WBO middleweight champion Billy Joe Saunders, who failed a doping test in August, has been denied a license by the Massachusetts State Athletic Commission to face American Demetrius Andrade in Boston this month.

Saunders had tested positive for oxilofrine in a Voluntary Anti-Doping Association (VADA) test, Reuters reported.

The stimulant is banned by VADA while it is prohibited only during competition by World Anti-Doping Agency and UK Anti-Doping.

British media reports said the 29-year-old Saunders could be stripped of the belt he won in 2015 if he fails to get a license for his scheduled title defense on October 20.

SCOTT HEAVEY/PA

Saunders has denied any wrongdoing in the matter and said that the adverse analytical finding was the result of using a common decongestant nasal spray.