

Iranian duo shortlisted for world futsal awards



Farzaneh Tavassoli

Sports Desk

Iran's Fatemeh Etedadi and Farzaneh Tavassoli were nominated for the 2018 UMBRO Futsal Awards.

Etedadi was shortlisted for the Best Female Player in the World award with Tavassoli receiving a nomination in the Best Female Goalkeeper in the World category.

Both players made a massive contribution to Iran's title defense at the 2018 AFC Women's Futsal Championship in Thailand last May.

Etedadi scored nine goals – including a double in the semifinals – to finish joint-top scorer of the competition while Iranian shot stopper was in dazzling form throughout the tournament.



Fatemeh Etedadi

In the 10-woman list, Etedadi will see competition from the likes of Brazilians Amandaíha and Vanessa, who together have claimed the prize on seven occasions in the past eight editions of the awards.

Tavassoli, meanwhile, will compete with Portugal's Ana Catarina Silva Pereira, Ana Etayo Garde and Silvia Agüete Outón (both from Spain), Russia's Anastasia Ivanova,

Bianca Castagnaro Moraes of Brazil and Italian duo Jennifer Aparecida De Oliveira Camargo and Maria Antonia Mascia.

The UMBRO Futsal Awards are the most prestigious annual futsal awards presented by the website futsalplanet.com.

The winners of the 19th edition of the awards will be announced on January 10.

Dawn run?

Tokyo 2020 Games organizers formally proposed moving the start time of the marathon races to either 5.30 a.m. or 6.00 a.m. to avoid the worst of the Japanese capital's scorching summer heat.



Serena confirmed for Australian Open return

Serena Williams will resume her quest for a record-equaling 24th grand slam title at the Australian Open in January after organizers on Wednesday confirmed her entry to the tournament she won for a seventh time on her last appearance in 2017.

The 37-year-old American achieved her victory over sister Venus in the final two years ago while eight weeks pregnant with her daughter Alexis Olympia, who was born the following September, Reuters reported.

Williams reached the Wimbledon and US Open finals after her return last

year but lost both, leaving her one short of Australian Margaret Court's tally of grand slam singles titles.

Her final match last season was the final at Flushing Meadows, where her loss to Naomi Osaka was overshadowed by her row with umpire Carlos Ramos.

Williams is scheduled to play an exhibition tournament in Abu Dhabi in the final week of the year before heading to Australia to warm up for her assault on the Melbourne Park title at the Hopman Cup in Perth.

Also among the 102 women and 101 men to have confirmed they will

compete in the first Grand Slam of 2019 is five-time runner-up Andy Murray, who missed three of the four majors last year because of a hip injury.

The 31-year-old Scot has entered the tournament with his protected ranking of number two after sliding down to 259th in the world in the wake of surgery on his injured joint.

Reigning champion Roger Federer will be gunning for a record seventh men's single crown from January 14-27, while Caroline Wozniacki will embark on her maiden Grand Slam title defense at Melbourne Park.

Ballon d'Or snub will make Ronaldo even better, says Allegri



Juventus manager Massimiliano Allegri sent an ominous warning to his rivals by claiming the decision not to award Cristiano Ronaldo a sixth Ballon d'Or award will spur him on to hit new highs this season.

With Luka Modric crowned as the best footballer in 2018 at Monday night's gala, it proved the first time since 2007 that neither Ronaldo nor Lionel Messi have not won the award, The Independent reported.

Ronaldo claimed four Ballon d'Or wins while at Real Madrid – as well as his first with Manchester United – though his move to Juventus has not caused the goals to dry up having netted 11 times already this season.

However, Allegri believes that

the snub this week will only go to spur him on to even greater levels this season, which should come as a warning to the rest of Serie A and their Champions League opposition.

"I think he deserved to win the Ballon d'Or for what he did with Real Madrid, winning the Champions League," Allegri told reporters.

"At the World Cup with Portugal honestly he couldn't go any further [than the round of 16]. Therefore, I mean, he deserved it."

"But I think that this can be a motivation to do even better this season and win the next Ballon d'Or with Juventus."

A Juventus player has not won the Ballon d'Or since Pavel Nedved

claimed the award in 2003 – with Gianluigi Buffon finishing second three years later – and while Buffon left the club in the summer to join Paris Saint-Germain, he believes the arrival of Ronaldo reinvigorated the rest of the club and prevented more following him through the exit.

"For me, it was time to say 'enough,'" Buffon said at the Ballon d'Or ceremony this week.

"Juve probably felt others could've left and that the only way to reawaken everyone was buying Cristiano."

'Absurd'

Meanwhile, Barcelona head coach Ernesto Valverde described

Messi's fifth-place finish in the Ballon d'Or vote as "absurd".

It is the first time Messi has finished outside the top three since 2006, with Ronaldo, Antoine Griezmann and Kylian Mbappe all finishing ahead of him.

And while Valverde was reluctant to give his full verdict on the result, he conceded that seeing Messi down in fifth was difficult to comprehend.

"I'm not going to get into that, whether it's right or wrong how an award ended up," he said.

"I think the people who voted for it have to answer that. Everyone has their own opinion. To us it's absurd."

"We congratulate Modric on his win."

Iran's Maqsoodlou to play in Dutch chess tourney

Sports Desk

Iranian chess sensation Parham Maqsoodlou will participate at the Tata Steel Chess Tournament 2019 in the Netherlands.

The 18-year-old Grandmaster – a champion at the 2018 World Junior Chess Championship – will be the first Iranian ever to

compete at one of the most prestigious events in the international chess calendar.

Maqsoodlou will face 13 other opponents in the Challengers category – with 14 playing in the Tata Steel Masters division.

During its 80-year history, the tournament has attracted some of the biggest names in the history of the

game.

Visitors to the tournament have witnessed the rise and domination of players like Norway's Magnus Carlsen – who won it last year – India's Viswanathan Anand, and Russia's Gary Kasparov.

The 81st edition of the competitions will start in Amsterdam on January 11.

Kipchoge, Ibarguen win IAAF awards



Kenyan distance runner Eliud Kipchoge holds his award for the male athlete of the year at IAAF Athletics Awards in Monaco on December 4, 2018.

Kenyan distance runner Eliud Kipchoge and Colombian long and triple jumper Catherine Ibarguen were named male and female world athletes of the year.

The pair were honored by the IAAF at a ceremony in Monaco, BBC Sport reported.

Kipchoge, 34, won the London Marathon and set a world record of two hours, one minute and 39 seconds in Berlin.

His time in the German capital bettered that of compatriot Dennis Kimetto, whose 2:02.57 was also set in Berlin, in 2014.

Ibarguen, also 34, claimed triple and long jump honors in the Central American and Caribbean Games, the Continental Cup and the Diamond League finals.

The Olympic champion was unbeat in all eight of her triple jump competitions, ending the year with a world-leading mark of 14.96m in her specialist event and a national record of 6.93m in the long jump.

Sweden's 19-year-old pole vaulter Armand Duplantis won the men's rising star award while the women's award went to American 400m runner Sydney McLaughlin.