

Iranians steal the show at Karate 1 Series A opener



Iran's Rozita Allpour (L) is pictured in action during the 2020 Karate 1 Series A in Santiago, Chile.

Sports Desk

Iran claimed the top spot at the opening round of competitions of the 2020 Karate 1 Series A in Santiago, Chile, collecting five gold medals and one bronze.

Following Iran in the overall standings, Turkey stood second with 12 medals – including four golds – with Italy grabbing two golds and a single bronze to finish third.

On Sunday, the final day of the three-day event in the South American capital, Rozita Allpour

pulled off a huge upset by beating the Serbian world champion Jovana Prekovic in the women's -61kg kumite final for Iran's first gold of the season.

Hamidreza Abbas-Ali doubled Iran's gold tally in the women's contests, defeating China's Hanqi Cao in the +68kg final by Hantei, or referee's decision, following a 0-0 draw.

Bahman Asgari opened the account for Iran in the men's division, after he outpowered Brazil's Bruno Texeira 5-1 in the -75kg kumite final. Zabihollah Poursheib also

finished his campaign on a high and overcame Turkey's Ugur Aktas in the -84kg final before Sajjad Ganjzadeh brought the curtain down on a glittering tournament for Iran by claiming a 2-0 victory over Germany's Jonathan Horne in the men's +84kg final.

Also in the men's +84kg class, Saleh Abazari beat American Brian Iri 4-1 and settled for a joint-bronze, alongside Gogita Arkania of Georgia.

The next round of the series will take place in Istanbul, Turkey, on June 19-21.

Iniesta criticizes Barcelona handling of Valverde situation



Barcelona's treatment of Ernesto Valverde has been "a little ugly", said club legend Andres Iniesta, with rumors continuing to suggest that the Blaugrana head coach will soon be replaced by Xavi.

It has been confirmed that discussions have been held with a club icon who is currently cutting his managerial teeth in Qatar with Al Sadd, goal.com reported.

Valverde, who has struggled to convince in Catalonia this season despite previously claiming back-to-back La Liga titles, could find himself on borrowed time.

Iniesta admitted to being surprised by Barca's lack of trust in its current boss, and the manner in which it is seemingly going about replacing him, with a proven tactician deserving of better.

The Camp Nou legend, who is currently in Japan with Vissel Kobe, told Onda Cero, "Barcelona's behavior has been a little ugly.

"You have to have respect for your current coach. The way things are done is what can hurt the most."

Iniesta conceded that "Valverde's situation has been weakened" of late, with Barca having missed out on a place in the Spanish Super Cup final as archrival Real Madrid claimed another piece of major silverware.

The World Cup-winning midfielder claimed that the relationship between club president Josep Maria Bartomeu and an expectant fan base remains "good", but added that he hopes "the situation at the club is solved because it's not nice what's going on, not for the coach, the players or the fans."

If a change in the dugout is made, then it could be that a familiar face to Iniesta returns to Camp Nou.

Xavi is relatively inexperienced when it comes to coaching, having only hung up his boots in 2019, but a re-

turn to his roots has long been mooted for the 39-year-old. "The person who knows best whether he's prepared or not is Xavi," said Iniesta.

A number of other big names, including many with strong ties to Barcelona, have been linked with a high-profile post that could soon become vacant.

Ronald Koeman is among those said to be in the mix, but the former Blaugrana defender has made it clear that he would only be in a position to return to Camp Nou after leading the Netherlands into its Euro 2020 campaign this summer.

Koeman and Xavi have been at Barca... one has more experience but that isn't decisive..." Iniesta added.

For now, Barcelona is preparing for a return to La Liga action on Sunday when it take in a home date with Granada – with the defending champion currently topping the table on goal difference.

Keen Kenyan

Women's marathon world record holder Brigid Kosgei said she looks forward to defending her title at this year's London Marathon after organizers announced the Kenyan's inclusion on Monday, BBC reported.

Federer ready, in good shape for Australian Open campaign



JULIAN FINNEY/GETTY IMAGES

Roger Federer declared himself ready on Monday to kick off the new season at next week's Australian Open despite having played no competitive matches since November.

The 20-time Grand Slam winner was scheduled to warm up for the year's first major at the inaugural ATP Cup in Australia but withdrew to spend more time with his family, Reuters reported.

In contrast, his rivals Novak Djokovic and Rafa Nadal were part of some closely-fought matches at the team event, which was played in Brisbane, Perth and Sydney.

Federer, 38, said he was happy with his preparation at home.

"I've trained long and hard in the offseason and I didn't have any setbacks, which is crucial," Federer said at

a promotional event in Melbourne. "Last week I was asking myself 'am I happy to go to Australia, or I should rather just stay here and stop packing immediately?' Because I can."

"I could easily just stay home and I was like, 'no, no, I'm really happy to go to Melbourne and kick off the season there'."

"I have kept myself in good shape, obviously I had an amazing team around me."

A six-time winner at Melbourne Park, Federer won the Australian Open title in 2017 and 2018 but lost to Greek Stefanos Tsitsipas in the fourth round last year.

Djokovic went on to win a record seventh Australian Open title in 2019 and looks in perfect shape to add another after his ninth consecutive hard-court win over

world number one Nadal on Sunday as Serbia was crowned champion at the ATP Cup.

Nadal has also shown no sign of trouble with his game or his fitness and the contenders at the Australian Open could again be the Big Three, who have shared the last 12 Grand Slam titles.

"I'm aware that at 38 I shouldn't be the favorite, it should be someone probably in their 20s, but the three of us have been able to stay as the favorites which is great for us," Federer said.

"Both guys are already showing great signs. I was watching Stefanos Tsitsipas in the fourth round last year.

Both guys, injury free, are always tough to beat."

Federer also offered Australian Ash Barty some advice as she pre-

pares to play her home Grand Slam as women's world number one.

"What a year she's had; it was a pleasure watching her play," Federer said. "She can have a different mindset."

"I can relax you and you can really explore all of your potential and that's what happened to me when I won my first major, and I broke through as world number one after that."

"I thought, 'well now I'm the guy to beat and I prefer to be in this position rather than being a contender'. I hope that Ash is also going to see it that way."

'No room for two'

Meanwhile, Nadal called on tennis administrators to create one "big world team cup competition" instead of confusing fans by staging the ATP Cup and

Davis Cup within two months of each other.

Nadal won the International Tennis Federation's revamped Davis Cup competition with Spain in November before losing Sunday's final Djokovic's Serbia.

"I think it's a great competition but ... I can't change my mind (within two months) is not real," Nadal told reporters.

"We need to find a way to fix it and we need to find a way to make a big deal with ITF and ATP to create a big world team cup competition, not two world cups."

"I think that's a confusion for the spectators, and we need to be clear in our sport."

Other top players, including Djokovic, have previously backed the merger of the two team events.

DeRozan scores 25, Spurs rally from 18 down, beat Raptors

DeMar DeRozan scored 25 points, Rudy Gay had 15 and San Antonio Spurs rallied from an 18-point deficit to beat Toronto Raptors 105-104 on Sunday.

"Being down what we was down and still being able to fight back and pull it out was big, especially on the road," DeRozan said, according to The Associated Press.

San Antonio used a big fourth quarter to win for the third time in four games. Derrick White scored 13 points for the Spurs, and LaMarcus Aldridge had 11. DeRozan also collected eight rebounds and four assists while topping 20 points for the 11th straight game. San Antonio trailed 82-69 to begin the fourth and fell behind 87-73 on a three-pointer by Matt Thomas with 10:14 left. The Spurs responded with a 17-0 run, taking an 88-87 lead on Aldridge's layup with 6:34 to play, then capping their spurt with a pair of free throws from DeRozan.

The Spurs led 100-91 with 2:37 left, but Kyle Lowry, Norman Powell and Serge Ibaka each made three-pointers as Toronto

tied it 100-100 on Ibaka's shot from distance with 1:17 left.

Siakam broke the tie by making the second of two free throws with 41 seconds left, but Marco Belinelli replied with a three for the Spurs, making it 103-101 with 28 seconds remaining.

After a Toronto timeout, Siakam missed a shot that would have tied the game. San Antonio's Lonnie Walker IV grabbed the rebound, Lowry fouled DeRozan, and the former Raptors star pushed the lead to four points by making a pair from the line.

Lowry replied with a deep three, cutting the deficit to one, and Aldridge missed a pair of free throws with four seconds left. But Siakam's long three-pointer bounced off the backboard at the buzzer.

DeRozan missed his first three free throws but made 11 straight the rest of the way. He didn't score until 1:25 remained in the first half and attempted just three shots in the first two quarters, but made six of nine attempts in the second half.

Playing in Toronto as a



Spurs' DeMar DeRozan (10) goes up for a dunk against the Raptors during an NBA game at the Scotiabank Arena, Toronto, ON, Canada, on January 12, 2020.

visitor for only the second time, DeRozan received loud applause when he was introduced before the game. Fans rose for a standing ovation when DeRozan was honored with a tribute video during

a first-quarter timeout, part of Toronto's ongoing 25th anniversary celebrations. "It's amazing to be able to get that much recognition," DeRozan said. "It never gets old."

Ibaka had 21 points and

a season-high 15 rebounds for the Raptors, and Lowry finished with 16 points and a season-high 15 assists.

"Normally our fourth-quarter defense is great, but it wasn't tonight," Raptors coach Nick Nurse said.