



Saoud Al-Mohannadi

Qatari official disputes FIFA accusation

DOHA: A senior Qatari official facing a possible two-and-a-half-year ban following a recent FIFA investigation said he hopes a “full and fair” review of his case will exonerate him.

The ban against Saoud Al-Mohannadi was recommended in August by FIFA's ethics commission, which said that the Qatar Football Association (QFA) vice president had refused to cooperate with an inquiry.

Although FIFA has not said what was the subject of the inquiry, it is not connected with

the 2022 World Cup, which Qatar will host.

However Mohannadi has disputed FIFA's claim in his first statement since the commission's recommendation.

“I am confident that a full and fair review of the matter will confirm that I have co-operated extensively and candidly... with the Ethics Committee to the best of my ability,” he said in a statement posted on the QFA website.

Adding to the intrigue surrounding Mohannadi, he is also a candidate for upcoming elections to FIFA's ruling council after

being passed as eligible to stand by football's governing body.

The vote, for the two Asian spots on the council, will take place later this month.

Mohannadi added that he was “disappointed” with the commission's recommendation, and would continue to run for election.

“The experience of this campaign, along with the endorsements I have received, leaves me more convinced than ever of the value I have to offer after a long and successful

career in football administration,” he said.

He has the backing of the QFA, which previously took aim at FIFA, saying the commission's findings were published before Mohannadi had viewed the report.

FIFA has also recommended that the Qatari be fined 20,000 Swiss francs (\$20,400, 18,600 euros).

The recommendation by the ethics commission's investigators will be decided by FIFA's adjudicatory chamber.

— AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

Lochte banned through June 2017, loses \$100,000 in bonuses

LOS ANGELES: Ryan Lochte is banned from swimming through next June and will forfeit \$100,000 in bonus money that went with his gold medal at the Olympics, part of the penalty for his drunken encounter at a gas station in Brazil during last month's games.

The US Olympic Committee and USA Swimming announced the penalties Thursday. Lochte agreed to a ban that includes next year's world championships.

He'll get no monthly funding from either organization, can't access USOC training centers, must perform 20 hours of community service and will miss Team USA's post-Olympics trip to the White House.

Agreeing to four-month suspensions were Gunnar Bentz, Jack Conger and Jimmy Feigen, who were with Lochte at the gas station. Those sanctions, which end Dec. 31, also strip funding and training access and preclude them from the White House visit.

Bentz, 20, will also serve 10 hours of community service for violating a curfew rule for athletes under 21.

“As we have said previously, the behavior of these athletes was not acceptable. It unfairly maligned our hosts and diverted attention away from the historic achievements of Team USA,” USOC CEO Scott Blackmun said. “Each of the athletes has accepted responsibility for his actions and accepted the appropriate sanctions.”

The USOC gives a \$25,000 bonus to Olympic gold-medal winners, and USA Swimming has awarded a \$75,000 gold-medal bonus at past Olympics.

But that money pales in comparison to what Lochte lost last month

when key sponsors , including Speedo USA and Ralph Lauren, abandoned the 32-year-old in the wake of his actions at the gas station, then his rapidly changing accounts of what really happened. Estimates have put the financial hit for those losses at around \$1 million.

While the near-10-month suspension is four months longer than the one Michael Phelps received in 2014 for his second DUI, the ouster from next year's world championships isn't considered major, in part because those championships typically attract a lesser field in the year after the Olympics.

Despite his embarrassment, Lochte has maintained a high profile, posting regularly on social media and accepting a spot on the upcoming season of “Dancing With The Stars.”

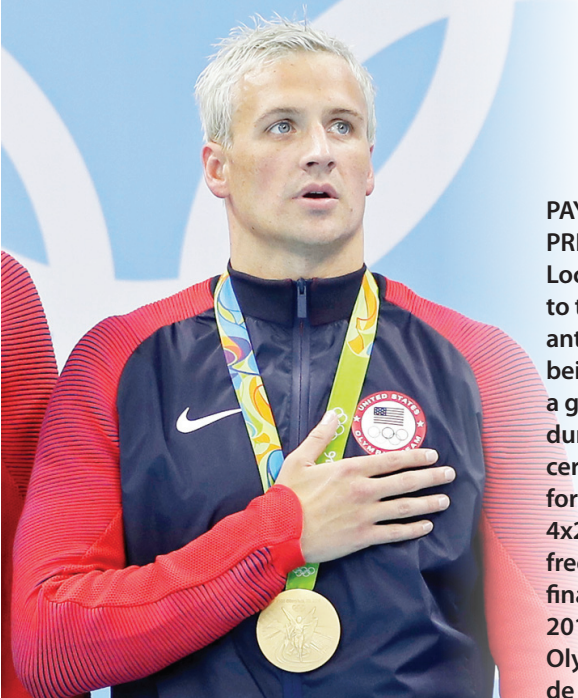
Last month, Brazilian police charged Lochte with filing a false robbery report, but Lochte has not said whether he'll return to Brazil to defend himself.

Lochte's gold in the 4x200 freestyle relay was one of 121 overall medals the United States won at the Olympics, yet his actions at the gas station overshadowed a large portion of the second half of the Olympics.

The International Olympic Committee's ethics commission is also looking into the incident.

“When Code of Conduct infractions occur, it's our responsibility to take action that reflects the seriousness of what happened,” USA Swimming executive director Chuck Wielgus said. “Unfortunately, this story line took attention away from the athletes who deserved it the most.”

— AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE



PAYING THE PRICE: Ryan Lochte listens to the national anthem after being awarded a gold medal during the ceremony for the men's 4x200-meter freestyle relay final at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. (AP)



AMAZING: Aaron Wheelz, an extreme wheelchair athlete, goes down a MegaRamp and tears through the panel with the number zero, marking the start of the Opening Ceremony of the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games at the Maracana Stadium in, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Wednesday. (AFP)



BIRD'S EYE VIEW: The opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games on Wednesday night. (AFP)

Paralympics: Rio opens Games for ‘superhumans’

RIO DE JANEIRO: Rio de Janeiro opened the Paralympic Games on Wednesday with samba, parading wheelchairs, giant balloons — and loud booing of Brazil's president — at a sold-out Maracana stadium.

The extraordinary sight of US Paralympian Aaron “Wheelz” Fotheringham jumping in his wheelchair from a 55-foot (17-meter) ramp got the crowd on its feet. Then the joyous rhythms of samba singers and a carnivalesque reproduction of a Rio beach scene got them dancing.

A sultry dance between an industrial robot and Amy Purdy, a US Paralympian and model wearing running blades, provided another eye-catching moment.

Brazil's tensions also flared with thousands in the crowd chanting “Out with Temer!” as newly sworn-in President Michel Temer appeared at the ceremony just days after taking over from his bitter rival, the impeached Dilma Rousseff.

Temer's hurried declaration of “I declare the Games open” was met with a roar of boos, and booing also forced Brazilian Olympics boss Carlos Nuzman to pause his speech after mentioning “thanks to the federal, state and municipal governments.”

Coming right after a vibrant but sometimes tricky Olympics, the Paralympics present one more challenge for Rio in a period of deep recession and political instability.

But “Brazilians never give up,” Nuzman said, telling the athletes: “You are superhumans.”

Blind, missing limbs, or partially paralyzed, more than 4,300 of the world's toughest and most competitive disabled paraded ahead of 11 days of contests. Some pushed their own wheelchairs, others were pushed, while others limped.

Even a sudden downpour accompanied by thunder could not dampen the cheers greeting the severely disabled torch bearers who

Belarusian booted after carrying Russian flag

A member of the Belarus delegation who carried a Russian flag at the Paralympic opening ceremony to support his country's near-neighbor that is banned from the competition was stripped of his accreditation, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) said on Thursday.

The man, identified by Russian media as Andrei Fomochkin, director of the Republican Center of Olympic training for Athletics in Belarus, was hailed as a hero by both Russian and Belarusian officials.

But his action fell foul of the IPC's ban on political gestures. “The IPC will be speaking to NPC Belarus this morning to remind them that political protests are forbidden at the

closed the show by carrying the Olympic flame to light the cauldron.

However, controversy hung over the no-show by International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach — the first absence of an IOC chief since the 1984 Summer Games.

Bach is due at a mourning ceremony in Berlin for the late West German president Walter Scheel.

GAMES BEGIN: Brazilian swimmer Clodoaldo Silva holds the Paralympic torch to light the Paralympic cauldron during the opening ceremony of the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games at the Maracana stadium in Rio de Janeiro on Wednesday. (AFP)



However, there have been suggestions that the no-show had more to do with divisions over the Paralympic committee's outright ban on Russian athletes after allegations of a state-sanctioned doping program and the IOC's softer line, which allowed some Russians to compete.

Globo and other Brazilian media



outlets also printed reports that Bach is wanted for questioning by local police investigating an illegal ticket-selling ring allegedly involving a senior Irish Olympic official.

Rio police were to give a news conference on the matter Thursday.

“Whether there's anything else — I don't know if there's anything else,” International Paralympic Committee President Philip Craven said of Bach's decision.

Russian para-athletes, who finished second behind China in the London 2012 medals table, were barred last month following a World Anti-Doping Agency report that alleged a vast state-sponsored doping program.

Separately, UK Athletics will review classifications after the Games, according to BBC News, following concerns that athletes were being mismatched to create an unfair advantage.

Constrained by political and economic crises, Rio 2016 organizers have skimped as far as they could on food, transport and accommodation.

Slow ticket sales also overshadowed the run-up to the Games, which followed concerns about half-empty stadiums at many of the Olympics events.

— THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

European leagues slam hasty Champions League reforms

AMSTERDAM: The European Professional Football Leagues (EPFL) slammed as “unacceptable” planned reforms of the Champions League and threatened Thursday to program matches at the same time as UEFA competitions.

“A major change in European football has been announced without the support and consensus of the organizers of domestic league football in Europe,” the EPFL said in a statement after a meeting Thursday in Amsterdam to discuss the outcome of last month's reform.

“This decision will have a detrimental impact on domestic competitions and will lead to an exponential growth in the financial and sporting gap between the biggest clubs in Europe and all the others.”

European governing body UEFA has decided for the period 2018-2021 that the four top-ranked leagues — Spain, England, Germany and Italy — will have four automatic places in the lucrative Champions League.

The changes have been slammed as increasing the gap between the

most powerful and smaller clubs.

The association called on UEFA's new president who will be elected next Wednesday in Athens “to reconsider the reform.”

Slovenian federation president Aleksander Ceferin, one of the two candidates, told French daily L'Equipe, “If I'm elected I cannot change it,” although he added: “For small clubs, like Slovenian ones, it's not a good thing.”

Bernard Caiazzo, president of France's Premiere Ligue union that represents the country's professional clubs, described the change

as “sad for French football.”

“This is a hasty decision and everyone is taken aback. This is a real scandal in form and substance, it's a disaster.

“Ninety percent of the clubs in Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 even have the feeling of being violated by this reform.”

The EPFL added: “The European Leagues believe the way this process has been conducted by UEFA to be unacceptable for an organization that claims to be the governing body of football in Europe.”

— AGENCIES

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