

Wednesday, 24 June 2009

Footballers slapped with life ban and passports confiscated Green bands land Iran footballers in hot water



Six players took to the pitch with green bands to protest the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

DUBAI (Al Arabiya)

Four of Iran's national football players have been forced to "retire" following their World Cup qualifier against South Korea in which some team members sported green armbands in solidarity with the Iranian opposition against the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a known football buff.

The players have been slapped with a life ban, meaning they will not be able to play for their country again, and have also had their passports taken away from them, threatening their jobs abroad with European teams.

The young players Ali Karimi, Mehdi Mahdavi, Hosein Ka'abi and Vahid Hashemian were among six who took to the pitch with green arm or wrist bands, the color of defeated reformist candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi.

Most of the players removed the bands at half-time, with the exception of captain Mahdavi who wore it for the entire match.

It was unclear why the bands were removed some press reports said the delegation received orders from the head of the Iranian football federation while others said the bands were removed because they violated FIFA's, the world governing body of football, ban on political displays.

Stuck in Iran

The players have also been banned from speaking to the media and are stuck in Iran after returning from Seoul where they failed to qualify for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa following a 1-1 draw against North Korea.

All four players have links to European teams. Hashemian and Mahdavia play for the German teams Bochum and Eintracht Frankfurt while Karimi once played for German club Bayern Munich and Ka'abi has played for English team Leicester City.

This is not the first time footballers have used their status on the pitch to highlight political issues and in January, during Israel's assault on Gaza, Muslim footballer Frederic Kanoute was fined for uncovering a T-shirt with the word 'Palestine' written on it after he scored a goal in the Spanish Cup.

In 2008, Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Aboutreika was warned for displaying a t-shirt saying "Sympathize with Gaza" during the African Cup of Nations final in Ghana last month.