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Iran restricts footballers' style

By Roxana Saberi

BBC News, Tehran

A recent ruling by Iran's football federation banning players from sporting "unusual" and "foreign" styles is sparking debate in Iran's football community.



The federation wants players to set good examples for Iranian youth

The federation called on clubs last month to warn players to look 'appropriate' - not only on the pitch, but also when they travel.

The Federation also said professional players should refrain from curling their hair or wearing ponytails, and from sporting necklaces, earrings, or rings.

The ruling also says players should not wear tight clothes, grow strange-looking beards, or copy foreign styles.

Players' form

The ruling has upset football players like Ali Mansourian. He shaves all his hair off, while some of his fellow athletes on Iran's Esteqlal team have grown their hair long.

"In my opinion, the appearance of a player

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is his own business," Mansourian says.

"I'm opposed to saying to Mr So-and-so, 'Don't grow your hair long,' or 'Don't wear a certain type of clothes.'



The ruling has upset Iranian football players

"If you look at Islam, for example, the Prophet Mohammad's hair was long. He was very handsome."

But the federation's statement has also won praise from players like Mojtaba Jabari. He is on Iran's national team, which will play in next year's World Cup.

"Whatever they do, the form of a football player must be good," Jabari says.

"I think that because we're coming up on the World Cup, it's better for players to improve their skills instead of think about their hairstyles."

Setting an example

The federation reasons that players should respect the country's Islamic values and set good examples for Iranian youth.

"Every country has a certain definition of [good] behaviour, clothing, speaking, and so on," says

lawmaker Iraj Nadimi, a member of Iran's Parliamentary Sports Committee, which oversees the Football Federation.

“ The way the players do their hair in my opinion, is no problem - But if they want to pluck their eyebrows, that's a problem ”

22-year-old fan Mohammad

"Here, it's the same thing. I think most of our athletes know this.

"Freedom is not based on individual tastes. For example, if I want to walk down the street with no clothes on, this isn't freedom. And we don't accept that an athlete be like this.

"Our athletes are role models, and they use public goods, like our stadiums, so they should observe these points."

Spectators

Usually only men are allowed to watch the games at Iran's stadiums.

Some spectators hold back their long hair with bandanas. Many sport ponytails, earrings, and gold necklaces.

Twenty-year-old fan Mohammad says instead of following the styles of Iran's professional football players, he prefers to copy those of musicians like Eminem.

"The way the players do their hair in my opinion, is no problem," he says. "But if they want to pluck their eyebrows, that's a problem."



Players' style has spread to the terraces

And 27-year-old Mehdi says the ruling limits the freedom of football players.

"It's very bad," he says. "I think all people are free, and we shouldn't mix sports and politics. It's not good."

It's not clear how violators of the ruling might be punished.

Some Federation members say players will be fined and banned from playing, but the written statement itself says players' observance of the guidelines will be "supervised" and "encouraged".

Two players have already received warnings about their hairstyles.

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