



Persepolis fullback Vakhdad Khanonov (2nd R) celebrates with teammates after scoring the winner in a 3-2 away victory over Tractor in the Persian Gulf Pro League in Tabriz, Iran, on March 5, 2023.

# Persian Gulf Pro League: Khanonov scores late as Persepolis beats Tractor in five-goal thriller

Sports Desk

Tajikistani fullback Vakhdad Khanonov scored a 95th-minute winner as Persepolis walked away with a massive 3-2 victory over Tractor in Tabriz in the Persian Gulf Pro League. The result saw the capital Reds go top of the table for hours, but Sepahan defeated Havadar 3-1 at home later on Sunday to restore the lead in the Iranian top flight. Tractor started on the front foot and could have

gone in front, had it not been for Iranian international keeper Alireza Beiranvand denying Ricardo Alves and Reza Asadi in one-on-one situations. Still, Yahya Golmohammadi's men seemed to be on their way to a commanding victory when Mohammad Omri and Mehdi Torabi combined twice to give the visiting side a two-goal cushion by the half-hour mark. The introduction of Mohammad Abbaszadeh – whose goal saw Tractor beat Persepolis in the re-

verse fixture back in October – nine minutes after the break turned the game on its head as the former Reds' striker cut the deficit to one with a 67th-minute header and then sent Beiranvand the wrong way from the spot with six minutes left on the clock for his eighth goal of the campaign. Just when Persepolis was headed for a frustrating draw, 22-year-old Khanonov emerged as the unlikely hero, tapping in from close range after a couple of his teammates' attempt on a Soroush Rafiei's free-kick had been blocked. The last-gasp winner means only a single point separates Sepahan and Persepolis before they go head-to-head at Tehran's Azadi Stadium next Saturday. In-form midfielder Farshad Ahmadzadeh's sublime long-range strike gave Sepahan the lead with 10 minutes into the game in Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium and then Shahriyar Moghanlou made it two with a spot-kick three

minutes later to join Tractor duo Abbaszadeh and Asadi as the league's top scorers. Ramin Rezaeian could have put the game to bed before halftime, only to see his penalty kick kept out by Havadar keeper Mohammadreza Khaledabadi. Hossein Sadeqi gave Havadar a lifeline two minutes after the interval but Brazilian substitute Ygor Catatau secured maximum points for the host in the 74th minute. Elsewhere, Paykan and Zob Ahan played to a goal-

less stalemate in Tehran, while Mes Rafsanjan hammered San'at Naft Abadan 4-0 at home to reduce the gap on fifth-placed Tractor to two points. Brazilian Jefferson Bahia netted twice inside nine minutes in the first half, before Mehrdad Rezaei put the game beyond visitors' reach on the hour mark and Qaem Eslamikhah capped off an emphatic display by Mohammad Rabbiei's side from the spot in the stoppage time as San'at remains struggling in the relegation zone.

## Djokovic withdraws from Indian Wells amid US visa row



● GETTY IMAGES

World number one Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from this week's Indian Wells Masters event with the Serb unable to enter the United States. The 22-time Grand Slam winner, 35, had applied for special permission to enter the US because he is not vaccinated against Covid-19, BBC reported. The US requires international visitors to be vaccinated and proof will be required until at least 10 April. Djokovic missed last year's US Open because of his vaccination status. Djokovic, who also missed last year's Australian Open and was deported from the country because of his vaccination status, has said he would skip Grand Slams rather than have a Covid-19 vaccination. He was permitted to travel to Melbourne in January and won a record-extending 10th Australian Open title, tying Rafael Nadal's men's record of 22 Grand Slam wins.



## United meltdown was unprofessional, says angry Ten Hag

Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag looks on as his team play Liverpool at Anfield, Liverpool, Britain, on March 5, 2023.

● CARL RECINE/REUTERS

Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag called his side's performance "unprofessional" after their worst league loss since 1931 on Sunday, 7-0 to Liverpool at Anfield. "The result is quite obvious. It's unprofessional," said Ten Hag, whose side had been riding high a week ago after winning the League Cup final against Newcastle United, with talk of them making a late push for the Premier League title, Reuters reported. Trailing 1-0 after Sunday's first half, United unravelled after the break. "We were so unprofessional about decisions... moving forward, giving the space away in the back, in the midfield, not tracking back... then it's 3-0,

then the game goes," Ten Hag told a news conference. "But then, as a team, you have to stick together. And that is what we didn't do. And that was a surprise for me. I haven't seen this from my team. I don't think it's Manchester United. So it's really bad and poor." Former United captain Roy Keane said it was a "shocking day". "The senior players were embarrassing. They didn't show any leadership skills," he said. "A really tough day for Man United and thank goodness I have never been part of losing like that. The players will be ashamed; when the going got tough, they went missing." United arrived at Anfield un-

beaten in 11 games, including their League Cup victory and a come-from-behind win over West Ham in the FA Cup. Ten Hag said they played a "decent" first half but things turned bad after halftime. "They didn't co-operate any more together, and they didn't fulfil their jobs," the Dutchman said. "There are many things... it makes me angry, to concede so easily goals." Ten Hag said United, who host Real Betis in the first leg of a Europa League round-of-16 match on Thursday, needed to learn from the loss. "We had so many good results in the last week, months. So many good performances. And this was a really bad performance."

## Durant dazzles as Suns sink Mavs, Curry tastes defeat on return

Kevin Durant produced a 37-point masterpiece as the Phoenix Suns defeated the Dallas Mavericks while Steph Curry's return from injury was not enough to prevent Golden State falling to the Los Angeles Lakers in the NBA on Sunday. In the Eastern Conference, the New York Knicks made it nine straight wins with a thrilling victory in double overtime against the second-placed Boston Celtics. A packed slate of NBA games featured two heavyweight fixtures in the Western Conference, with Durant going up against former Brooklyn team-mate Kyrie Irving as the Suns traveled to Dallas, where they claimed a nail-biting 130-126 victory. In Los Angeles, Curry's return was a further boost to the in-form Warriors but it was the Lakers who claimed a precious 113-105 win to keep their play-off hopes on track. Durant, traded to Phoenix in a blockbuster move from the Nets last month, scored the go-ahead basket with less than 12 seconds remaining before adding two late free throws to ice the game. Durant received support from Devin Booker, who added 36 points, 10 as-

sists and five rebounds, while Chris Paul added 11 points. Dallas star Luka Doncic finished with 34 points, with Irving contributing 30 points and Tim Hardaway Jr. adding 21 off the bench.

Davis once again came up big for the Lakers in the absence of the injured LeBron James to help secure victory over the Warriors. Davis finished with 39 points, eight rebounds and six assists as six Lak-

ers players finished in double figures. The Lakers sprinted into a 20-point lead in the first quarter and then held off a second-half rally from the NBA champions. The returning Curry led the Golden State scoring with 27 points while Klay Thompson added 22. The Warriors fell to 34-31 with the loss and are fifth in the Western Conference. The Lakers improved to 31-34, and are just outside



Suns' Kevin Durant (35) shoots during an NBA victory over the Mavericks at the American Airlines Center, Dallas, TX, US, on March 5, 2023.

● JEROME MIRON/USA TODAY SPORTS

Tempers flared in the dying seconds with Doncic and Booker going nose-to-nose after the Slovenian squandered a relatively straightforward chance to tie the game with six seconds remaining. Phoenix improved to 36-29 to stay in fourth spot in the West while Dallas fell to 33-32. The Mavs are in seventh, just outside the automatic postseason places. In Los Angeles, Anthony

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Jayson Tatum top-scored for Boston with 40 points while RJ Barrett had 29 points and Julius Randle scored 30 for the on-fire Knicks. Eastern Conference leaders the Milwaukee Bucks bounced back from their loss to the Philadelphia 76ers, beating the Washington Wizards 117-111. Giannis Antetokounmpo claimed his fourth triple double of the campaign with 23 points, 13 assists and 10 rebounds.