

Persepolis edges Golgothar, remains on course for domestic double



Persepolis striker Issa Al-e Kassir scores his side's second goal in a 2-1 victory over Golgothar Sirjan in the Iranian Hazfi Cup at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on April 30, 2023.

● MOHAMMADREZA ALIMADADI/IRNA

Sports Desk

Persepolis capped off a remarkable eight days with a 2-1 victory over Golgothar Sirjan on Sunday to book a place in the Iranian Hazfi Cup last four.

The result came a week after the Tehran-based Reds had gone top of the Persian Gulf Pro League table, when a 1-0 win against archrival Esteghlal was followed by Sepahan's 1-1 draw at home against

Malavan.

One point clear of second-placed Sepahan in the league, Persepolis is now five wins away from a league and cup double – including away games at Paykan and Nassaji Mazandaran either side of a home fixture against Golgothar in the league.

Iranian international Mehdi Torabi put Persepolis in front on the half-hour mark at Tehran's Azadi Stadium, sending Mohsen

Forouzan the wrong way from the spot after Saeed Sadeqi's cross had been handled by Golgothar defender Armin Sohrabian. Issa Al-e Kassir – rewarded with a place in the starting XI for bagging the match winner in the Tehran derby – chipped the keeper right before the interval to double the lead for the home side.

Reza Shekari pulled one back for Golgothar with seven minutes into the sec-

ond half but Yahya Golmohammadi's men held off the late pressure by the visiting side to set a semi-final date with Havadar on May 24.

Havadar, which walked away with a 1-0 league victory over Persepolis in the Azadi Stadium in February, defeated second-tier side Esteghlal Mollasani 2-1 at home – courtesy of a veteran Masoud Shojaei's 93rd-minute strike on Saturday.

Mohammad Chaharmahali gave Havadar the lead in the 39th minute, only to see his strike canceled out by Mohammad-Amin Saeedavi in the second half.

The other semifinal will see defending champion Nassaji Mazandaran play away to Esteghlal on May 23.

Second-half goals by Hamed Shiri and Reza Jafari either side of a Behrouz Norouzfard's own goal sealed an impressive 3-0 home win

against Paykan for Nassaji on Sunday.

Esteghlal, meanwhile, survived a major upset with a 1-0 win at second division club Pars Jonoubi Jam on Saturday.

Mohamad Mohebbi missed a spot-kick in the 15th minute and the Blues had to wait until the seventh minute of extra time for the winner, when Saeed Mehri scored with a composed left-footed effort from inside the box.

Verstappen 'can be pleased' with second at Azerbaijan GP



Max Verstappen celebrates on the podium after finishing second in the Azerbaijan Grand Prix in Baku, Azerbaijan, on April 30, 2023.

● MAXIM SHEMETOV/REUTERS

Double Formula One world champion Max Verstappen found the silver lining in finishing second to Red Bull team mate Sergio Perez at Azerbaijan Grand Prix on Sunday. The team's third one-two finish in four races this season left Verstappen six points clear of the Mexican in a two-horse title battle, Reuters reported.

The Dutch driver started on the front row in Baku, taking the lead from Ferrari's Charles Leclerc on lap four but pitting just before the safety car was deployed.

Perez, yet to pit and able to do so without losing position, made the most of his good fortune.

Verstappen said he had been experimenting all race with steering wheel settings, looking for a better balance in the car.

"I actually think that I found a good compromise towards the end of the race because I think my last 10 laps were a lot stronger. And I felt a lot happier with the car, how everything was behaving," he told reporters.

"So I think all in all, I can be quite pleased with second," added last year's race winner.

"I mean, of course you always want to win, right? But I think sometimes you need these kinds of weekends to learn and have a better understanding of the car, of what the car needs to go faster.

"And sometimes on the street circuit like this, it really comes out. Sometimes these kinds of things might get a bit masked on a normal track because of downforce and just the general behaviour of a car.

"So, maybe this was a good day, you know, to go forward."

Perez's accomplished victory in Baku has confirmed – in his mind at least – that he is a genuine rival to Verstappen for the world championship this year.

"It's a long year ahead," Perez said.

"We want to beat each other. I want to win the championship as much as Max wants to, but there is a lot of respect between us and we are similar in the way we think about the sport. I don't think it will change. We will fight as hard as we can but with a very high level of respect to us and the team."

Curry scores playoff career-high 50 as Warriors down Kings

Stephen Curry scored a playoff career-high 50 points in the most prolific Game 7 performance ever and answered time and again to will the Warriors on in their quest for a repeat, sending Golden State into the Western Conference semifinals with a 120-100 win against the Sacramento Kings in Sunday's winner-take-all game.

Curry led a memorable comeback in the series, too, perhaps improbable even for the defending champions when they got down 2-0 and given their road woes all season.

"It's amazing 'cuz you're still in the fight," Curry said. "Better than the alternative of on the outside looking in. Having been down 0-2 in this series, nothing was guaranteed, you don't take anything for granted."

Curry's points are the most in NBA history in a Game 7, topping former teammate Kevin Durant's 48 for the Nets against Milwaukee in 2021.

Kevon Looney grabbed 21 rebounds for a Warriors

team that needed to win twice on the road facing a hostile, cowbell-clanging crowd in the state capital to become the first reigning champion to drop the first two games and win any post-season series.

Now, bring on LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers in the Western Conference semifinals with all that NBA Finals history between James and Golden State dating to his Cleveland days. Game 1 is tonight at Chase Center.

Sacramento's special comeback season is over long before these young Kings had planned. After snapping a 16-year playoff drought – longest in NBA history – under Coach of the Year Mike Brown, playoff-starved Sacramento missed advancing to the second round for the first time since 2004.

Curry shot 20 of 38 with seven 3s and delivered after almost every big play by Sacramento as Splash Brother Klay Thompson struggled on both ends again. But Thompson came through in some cru-



Warriors' Stephen Curry (C) goes up for a basket against the Kings in Game 7 of the NBA Western Conference first-round playoffs in Sacramento, CA, US, on April 30, 2023.

● JOSE CARLOS FAJARDO/BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

cial moments.

"What an incredible performance," Thompson said. "This is a Game 7 I'll forever remember as the Steph Curry game."

Malik Monk's putback and three-point play with 14.6 seconds remaining in the third pulled Sacramento within six only for Thompson to hit a long 3 and convert

a four-point play to make it 91-81 heading into the final 12 minutes.

Domantas Sabonis had 22 points, eight rebounds and seven assists but the

Warriors held De'Aaron Fox in check as he scored 16 points on 5-for-19 shooting in his third game playing with a broken index finger on his shooting hand.