

## Persian Gulf Pro League roundup: Late win sends Persepolis back on top

### Sports Desk

Mehdi Torabi netted from the spot as Persepolis beat Paykan 1-0 at Tehran's Azadi Stadium to move back on top of the Persian Gulf Pro League table.

Reds faithful had to wait 80 minutes to see their team break the deadlock after referee Mo'oud Bonyadifar blew in his whistle for a controversial penalty when substitute Leandro Pereira was brought down by Paykan skipper Behrouz Noruzifard.

Yahya Golmohammadi's men though believed they should have been awarded a penalty minutes earlier as Saeed Sadeqi was clearly tackled down in the box by the Paykan defender.

The one-goal victory over a resolute, solid Paykan side was enough to get Persepolis – chasing a sixth league crown in seven years – back on the summit, 24 hours after early second-half goals by Nilson Júnior and Farshad Ahmadzadeh had seen Sepahan beat rock-bottom club Naft Masjed Soleyman 2-0.

Persepolis will hold a one-point lead over Sepahan heading into a nail-biting final two weeks of the Iranian top-flight season, while third-place Esteghlal's title defense is all but finished after a 1-1 home draw against San'at Naft Abadan on Friday.

Mehdi Mamizadeh bagged the equalizer for the visiting side in the 62nd minute to cancel out Payman Babaei's strike from the spot right before the break.



Persepolis players celebrate Mehdi Torabi's winner in a 1-0 victory over Paykan in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on May 6, 2023. **ALI SHARIFZADEH/IRNA**

Esteghlal is now four points behind archrival Persepolis and will be facing tricky tests away to Mes Rafsanjan and at home against Tractor before the end of the campaign.

Tensions will also be high at the bottom of the table as the massive point in Tehran saw San'at – second from bottom – move level on points with Mes Kerman, which remained out of the

relegation zone despite the 3-1 home defeat against Tractor.

Brazilian Gustavo scored on either side of a Moein Abbasi's superb free-kick for Mes and Mohammad Aqajpour bagged the third to leave Tractor on course for a fourth-place finish and a possible AFC Champions League spot.

Mes Rafsanjan kept the deficit on Tractor at three

points with a 4-0 hammering of Malavan FC in Bandar Anzali.

Nigerian Godwin Mensha scored twice – the first of which eight seconds after the kickoff was the fastest goal in the Iranian Pro League history – with Shahin Tavakkoli and Omid Lotfi also on the scoresheet.

In Isfahan, late strikes by Arman Akvan and Shahrar Salari led Zob Ahan

to an impressive 2-0 win against Foolad Khuzestan at home, while in Sirjan, Milad Fakhreddini scored with five minutes into the second half and Amin Qasseminejad was denied from the spot by new Iranian international goalkeeper Hossein Pourhamidi minutes later as Aluminium Arak walked away with a 1-0 win at Golgozar.

Nassaji Mazandaran and Havadar, which will face Esteghlal and Persepolis in the Hazfi Cup semifinals respectively, shared the spoils in a 1-1 stalemate in Qaemshahr's Shahid Vatan Stadium. Mohammad-Javad Mohammadi gave Saket Elhami's men a 40th-minute lead before Hamed Shiri drew the home side level from the spot with eight minutes from normal time.

### Home hero Alvarez seals unanimous victory over Ryder to retain titles



Saul 'Canelo' Alvarez (R) is in action against John Ryder in Guadalajara, Mexico, on May 7, 2023. **HENRY ROMERO/REUTERS**

**REUTERS** – Undisputed super middleweight champion Saul 'Canelo' Alvarez retained his titles in style with a unanimous victory over Britain's John Ryder in front of a home crowd in Guadalajara, Mexico, on Saturday. Alvarez was the significantly busier fighter in the early exchanges, leaving Ryder with blood seeping from his nose in the third round before sending the Briton to the canvas in the fifth with a big left-right combination. Ryder grew into the contest as it wore on but was unable to offset the punishment he was dealt in the first half of the bout, with Alvarez receiving scores of 120-107, 118-109 and 118-109 from the three judges to seal the win.

"It's a historic moment for me. I'm blessed to be here with my people who have supported me from the beginning," said Alvarez, who was born in Guadalajara and grew up in the neighbouring town of Juanacatlan.

"He's a very strong fighter, man. When they're going for everything (all the championship belts), they turn it on. They become more difficult than usual. But I know that. I'm in this position a long time and I know.

"I respect my opponents because I know they're coming for everything."

Saturday's fight, which bettered Alvarez's record to 59-2-2, was the 32-year-old's first since undergoing hand surgery after beating rival Gennady Golovkin last year. Asked about his hand, Alvarez said it felt good, adding: "Not in the beginning. I needed a couple rounds, three rounds, to start punching to know I was good with the hand."

Right after his win, Alvarez called for a rematch with Dmitry Bivol, who inflicted the second of only two losses on Alvarez's resume when the pair clashed in a light heavyweight bout last year.

"Everybody knows we want the rematch with Bivol," Alvarez said. "If the fight with Bivol doesn't happen then we'll see. I'm able to fight everybody."

Alvarez added that any future rematch with Bivol would take place at 175 pounds.

The fight was Ryder's sixth loss in 38 bouts and he has now twice failed at world title level, after being defeated by Briton Callum Smith for the WBA 'Super' title in 2019.

## Lakers rout Warriors, Heat rip Knicks to grab NBA series leads



Lakers' Anthony Davis (C) goes up for a layup during a victory over the Warriors in Game 3 of the NBA Western Conference semifinal series in Los Angeles, CA, US, on May 6, 2023. **RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES**

**AFP** – Anthony Davis and LeBron James powered the Los Angeles Lakers in a rout of defending champion Golden State on Saturday while Jimmy Butler returned from an ankle injury to spark Miami's romp over New York in the NBA playoffs.

Davis scored 25 points and grabbed 13 rebounds while LeBron James added 21 points to lead the host Lakers over the Warriors 127-97.

Davis made 7-of-10 shots from the floor, 11-of-12 from the free throw line, and had four blocks, three assists and three steals while overwhelming with defensive plays.

"I just wanted to come out and get back to the dominant performance that I do defensively," Davis said.

"We wanted to get back to our roots, and defending and guarding. This is a tough team to guard but we know that we can do it and we did it well tonight, holding them to 97 points." James, who went the first 13 minutes without shooting, added eight assists and eight rebounds while D'Angelo Russell posted 21 points, all in the first half.

The Lakers grabbed a 2-1 lead over the defending champion Warriors in their best-of-seven Western Conference semifinal series with game

fourtonight in Los Angeles.

"We know they're going to come out with a lot of firepower Monday trying not to go down 3-1. We've got to have the mindset we had tonight," Davis said.

An 18-4 run to end the first quarter gave the Warriors a 30-23 lead, with James not taking a shot in the first period of a playoff game for the first time in his career.

"It's just a case of allowing the game to come to him, letting a natural rhythm happen and not forcing things," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said.

After falling behind 40-29, the Lakers answered with a 30-8 run in the final 7:22 of the second quarter for a 59-48 halftime lead.

The Lakers, who stretched the lead as large as 20 points in the third quarter, entered the fourth ahead 86-68 and cruised from there.

Ham praised Davis for his defending.

"He sets a tone for us defensively," Ham said. "He's the catalyst. He's the anchor. His activity, when he is changing shots, blocking shots, it's amazing. He's locked in."

Stephen Curry led the Warriors with 23 points while Andrewiggins added 16 and Klay Thompson

had 15.

In the Eastern Conference, Butler scored 28 points to lead the Heat over the Knicks 105-86, giving Miami a 2-1 series lead with game four tonight on their home court.

Butler missed Miami's loss Tuesday after suffering an injury in the series opener, but returned to help the Heat lead from start to finish.

Max Strus added 19 points for Miami while Bam Adebayo added 17 points and 12 rebounds and Kyle Lowry had 14 points.

Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said Butler's return infused his teammates with confidence.

"You can't put an analytic to it. It's just the overall confidence level your team has – that you can always get the ball to him and know that we'll get something efficient and coherent," Spoelstra said of Butler.

"You need a guy like Jimmy when you're playing against a good team like this."

Jalen Brunson led New York with 20 points but the Knicks made only 31-of-91 shots from the floor.

"The start of the game we got back on our heels," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said. "We couldn't get stop early, so we didn't get any easy buckets, so we paid the price."