

# Persepolis sets up derby date with Esteghlal in Iranian Hazfi Cup final

## Sports Desk

A second Tehran derby in less than six weeks will be staged in the capital's Azadi Stadium on Wednesday, when Persepolis and Esteghlal square off in the Iranian Hazfi Cup final. Newly-crowned Persian Gulf Pro League champion Persepolis continued its dazzling form over the past three months with a 3-1 victory over Havadar in the semifinal on Thursday – a day after Esteghlal had routed Nassaji Mazandaran 4-0 for a place in final showdown. Persepolis capitalized on a flying start to the game in Tehran's Pas Stadium as Georgian center-back Giorgi Gvelesiani gave the Reds a fourth-minute lead from the spot – after Mehdi Torabi was brought down in the box by Morteza Mansouri – and Vahid Amiri's left-footed effort from the edge of box found the bottom corner for their second in the ninth minute. Masoud Shojaei blew the

chance to cut the deficit to one in the first half when his penalty was saved by his ex-international teammate Alireza Beiranvand, but Persepolis was punished for underestimating the opponent – which had beaten the Reds 1-0 in the league in February – as substitute Babak Moradi sent Beiranvand the wrong way from the spot on the hour mark. Havadar pushed forward for an equalizer but Issa Alekassir restored the two-goal cushion for Persepolis, rounding off a textbook counter-attack with 18 minutes left on the clock to help the Reds maintain their 100-percent record since the Persian New Year break in late March with a ninth successive victory in the league and cup. Standing between Persepolis and a second domestic double in four years is Esteghlal, which will be looking for consolation with the Hazfi Cup crown after falling

off the pace late in the league title race, finishing third – four points adrift of the Reds – despite an impressive run in the second half of the campaign. Arash Rezavand's header from close range and an Alireza Ebrahimi's own goal in the first half was followed by Mohammad Mohebi's brace after the interval to see the Blues avenge last year's quarterfinal setback in the shootout against eventual champion Nassaji. Esteghlal will also be seeking revenge against its familiar foe in Wednesday's showdown after suffering a 1-0 defeat when the two Tehran-based giants met in April. Alekassir came off the bench at the break to find the target as Yahya Golmohammadi's side pulled off a massive derby victory to overtake both Sepahan and Esteghlal on top of the table with three games to spare before lifting a sixth league trophy in seven years.



Persepolis striker Issa Alekassir (R) celebrates with head coach Yahya Golmohammadi after scoring in 3-1 victory over Havadar in the Iranian Hazfi Cup semifinals at the Pas Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on May 25, 2023. **PAYAM SANI/IRNA**

## Iranian Hazbavi joins Al Sadd



al-saddclub.com

## Sports Desk

Iranian center-back prodigy Mohammad-Amin Hazbavi joined Qatar Stars League giant Al Sadd on a five-year contract for an undisclosed fee, the club announced on Thursday. Hazbavi, 20, bagged three goals in 15 appearances for Foolad Khuzestan in the newly-finished Persian Gulf Pro League season, while helping the southern Iranian club reach the AFC Champions League quarterfinals. He was also part of the national team in last year's AFC U23 Asian Cup in Uzbekistan, which finished with a group exit for Mehdi Mahdavia's men. Hazbavi will be the 10th Iranian to wear Al Sadd's outfit in the history of the club, with current Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee, legendary striker Ali Daei, and international defender Morteza Pouraliganji also in the list.

A four-time champion in the Qatari top-flight over the past decade, Al Sadd finished third in the 2022/23 season – seven points adrift of champion Al Duhail – and suffered a 3-0 defeat against Al Arabi in the Emir Cup final in May.

## Jacobs pulls out of Diamond League showdown with Kerly



LUCY NICHOLSON/REUTERS

REUTERS – Olympic gold medalist Lamont Jacobs said he has been forced to "postpone" his 100 metres showdown with world champion Fred Kerley at the Diamond League meet in Rabat this weekend due to a back issue.

The Italian was set to make his first appearance in an outdoor event this year after a "winter of intense preparation" having withdrawn from last year's World Championships before the semi-finals due to a thigh injury.

"I am forced to skip the debut 100 metres and the first face off with Kerley in Rabat, which I was really looking forward to, due to a lumbo sacral nerve block that I'm working on resolving in the short term," Jacobs said in a statement on Thursday.

"It's the result of a misstep and not an injury, which does, however, keep me from competing in Morocco."

The 28-year-old said he was still in strong physical shape and ready for a great outdoor season.

# Celtics roll Heat in Game 5 of East finals to inch closer to historic comeback



Celtics guard Marcus Smart (36) shoots during the victory over the Miami Heat in Game 5 of the NBA Eastern Conference finals in Boston, MA, US, on May 25, 2023. **WINSLOW TOWNSON/USA TODAY SPORTS**

AP – Derrick White had 24 points, including six three-pointers, and the Boston Celtics dominated the Miami Heat 110-97 on Thursday night in Game 5 to extend the Eastern Conference finals. Marcus Smart had 23 points and five steals. Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown finished with 21 points apiece as the Celtics won their second straight and trimmed Miami's series lead to 3-2. The Celtics are halfway to becoming the first team in NBA history to overcome a 3-0 deficit to win a series. Boston also survived two elimination games in the second round against the 76ers. Teams that fell behind 3-0 are 0-150 all-time in series. "It just says that our backs are against the wall and we're sticking together and we're competing at a high level to give ourselves a chance," Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said. Game 6 is tonight in Miami, where the Heat will try again to become the

second No 8 seed to reach the NBA Finals in the current format, which dates to 1984.

"We're always going to stay positive, knowing that we can and we will win the series," the Heat's Jimmy Butler said. "We just have to close it out at home."

Duncan Robinson led the Heat with 18 points. Bam Adebayo added 16 points and eight rebounds. Butler had 14 points, five rebounds and five assists, but sat out the final 9:47 of the game. Caleb Martin finished with 14 points.

It was Butler's lowest-scoring game of the playoffs. He had 16 points in Game 3, a blowout win by Miami.

Miami never led and had 16 turnovers.

Boston entered the day just 4-5 at TD Garden this postseason. But with a raucous home crowd behind them, the Celtics thrived on their energy.

They dove for loose balls, outfought

Miami for rebounds and found each other for layups and dunks in transition as they built as much as a 20-point lead in the first half.

The Heat cut into it, but Boston kept knocking down 3s and grew its edge as high as 96-72 in the fourth quarter.

The Heat started Kyle Lowry at point guard after Gabe Vincent was ruled out with a sprained left ankle earlier in the day. It was Lowry's first start since February 2.

Vincent, the Heat's third-leading scorer this postseason, got hurt late in Miami's Game 4 loss when he landed awkwardly while trying to save a loose ball near the Heat bench.

His presence was missed as Miami struggled early on the offensive end, swarmed by a Celtics' defense that forced the Heat into 10 first-half turnovers that led to 17 Boston points. Lowry played 31 minutes, scored five points and finished with four turnovers.

# One mission accomplished but job not yet done for Ten Hag

REUTERS – While Manchester United ticked off a major season goal by securing their return to the Champions League next season after a year's absence, manager Erik ten Hag made it clear his team has unfinished business. United, who are chasing a domestic double, face rivals and treble-chasers Manchester City in the FA Cup final on June 3 at London's Wembley Stadium. "Next week is going to be big and we will do everything in our power," Ten Hag told Sky Sports on Thursday. "We have to get well prepared and give us the best chance to get the cup." United captured the Carabao Cup in February amid talk that the team could make a run for three trophies. But inconsistent results meant they were never really in contention for the Pre-

mier League title, which was wrapped up by City last weekend. City are now hoping to emulate United's 1999 treble of Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup titles. "We're still not where we want to be but we're back in the Champions League and I think that was a really important step," Ten Hag said. Asked about how he would balance Sunday's Premier League finale against Fulham and keeping players healthy for their FA Cup showdown with City, Ten Hag said he was not looking past this weekend. "Still we can be third in the league," the Dutchman said. "It's important to keep focus, not getting injuries as well. But also get a home record. It's going to be an important game, we want to win that game."

United are one win away from equalling their record for home victories through all competitions. Their record of 27 was set in 2002-03. Asked how he feels nearing the end of his first season at United, Ten Hag said: "I'm comfortable here. "I remember after the second game (4-0 loss at Brentford) it was tough but we've constructed a team with a good spirit, work well on the training pitch and get results." The Dutchman was pleased with the spirit his side showed on Thursday. "We wanted to win. We showed the winning attitude," he said. "Chelsea have outstanding players but in the counter attacks we were really good, really dangerous. We scored four in the end. We should've scored more but they could score as well."



Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag reacts during a Premier League victory over Chelsea at Old Trafford, Manchester, Britain, on May 25, 2023. **MOLLY DARLINGTON/REUTERS**