

Iran's Pakdaman grabs Asian saber gold; Rahbari bags bronze

Sports Desk

The first day of the Asian Fencing Championships in Wuxi, China, saw the Iranians steal the show in the men's saber event.

Ali Pakdaman won a first gold medal at the competitions for Iran in 22 years, while Mohammad Rahbari settled for a joint bronze alongside Hong Kong's Low Ho Tin.

Pakdaman saved multiple match points to beat decorated South Korean Kim Jun-ho – a world bronze medalist in 2018 and a team gold winner at the Tokyo Olympics – 15-14 to take his illustrious record at the Asian Championships to 13 medals.

A clean sweep of six victories in the group phase had secured a place for Pakdaman in the knockout round, where he came out on top against opponents from India, Hong Kong, and Kuwait to progress to the quarterfinals.

The world No. 16, who had won an Asian individual silver in Wuxi seven years ago, defeated Japan's Kento Yoshida 15-13 before a 15-10 triumph over Tin saw him advance to the final showpiece.

Meanwhile, Rahbari marched into the knockouts thanks to five successive wins and then defeated fencers from Uzbekistan and Jordan before a 15-11 win against Mohammad Fotouhi in an all-Iranian battle sent him into the quarterfinals.

A double team silver medalist in the Asian Games, Rahbari eased past Uzbekistan's Musa



Ali Pakdaman poses with the Iranian flag after winning the men's individual saber gold medal at the Asian Fencing Championships in Wuxi, China, on June 17, 2023.
● irfnc.ir

Aymuratov 15-4 but his campaign came to an end with a 15-12 defeat against Kim.

Elsewhere in the competitions, Hong Kong's Vivian Kong came out victorious (15-4) against Song Se-ra of South Korea – a world champion in 2022 – for the wom-

en's individual épée gold, with the host's Lin Sheng and South Korean Choi In-jeong sharing the third podium.

This year's Asian Championships serve as a qualifying event for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

Esteghlal's quest for coach drags on as Spanish Sanchez Flores enters the fray

Sports Desk

Esteghlal's complicated quest for a new manager took another twist on Saturday after Spaniard Quique Sanchez Flores's name was brought up for the job at the Persian Gulf Pro League giant.

It looked to be just a matter of time before former Esteghlal midfielder Javad Nekounam is unveiled as the new 'Teheran-based Blues' boss but the club's caretaker CEO Hojjat Karimi, in an Instagram post on Saturday, urged the Esteghlal faithful to be "patient" as the board looks to avoid "a hasty and emotional decision-making and will come up with the best choice for Esteghlal's managerial role within few days."

The announcement came after several sources reported on Friday that Esteghlal had reached full agreement with Nekounam, but the ex-Iranian international is reportedly facing legal barriers to take the job due to his controversial departure from Foolad Khuzestan in March.

Nekounam, who led the southern Iran side to the Iranian Hazfi Cup triumph in 2021, stepped down from his job hours after a last-16 win against Saudi side Al Faisaly in Doha over a rift with the club hierarchy.

Esteghlal had also been in talks with Iranian Mohammad Rabiei, who impressed during his five-year tenure at Mes Rafsanjan – steering his team to a fifth-spot finish in the Iranian top flight in the newly-finished campaign – as well as Spanish coach Juan Ramon Lopez Caro – a former manager in La Liga outfits Levante and Celta Vigo plus Saudi Arabia, Oman and Spain under-21 team.

Meanwhile, IRNA and Fars News

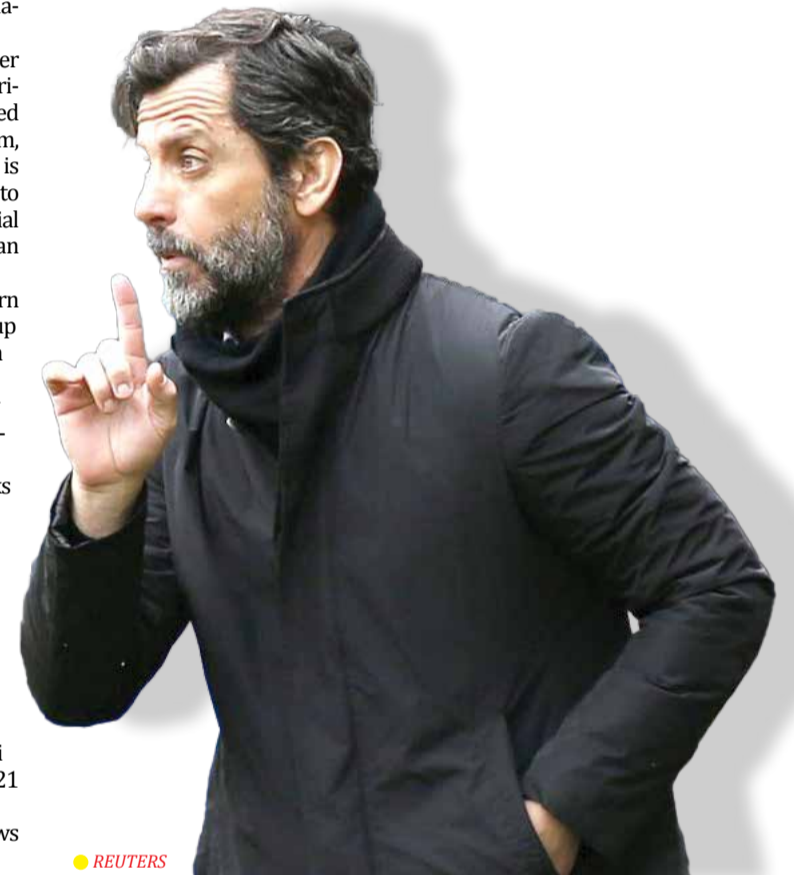
Agency reported on Sunday that Esteghlal is also considering a move for Sanchez Flores and the Spaniard is set to visit Tehran on Thursday for further negotiations.

Should the Spanish coach join Esteghlal, he will be among the most prominent managers to step into Iranian club football in recent years. The Valencia and Benfica boss in the 2000s, Sanchez Flores was in charge of Atletico Madrid when the Spanish capital giant lifted the UEFA Europa League and Super Cup in 2010.

Sanchez Flores, who was the head coach of Premier League club Wat-

ford over two spells, is familiar with working in the Middle East as he enjoyed decent spells at Emirati teams Al Ahli and Al Ain from 2011 to 2014. His last job was at La Liga side Getafe, where he was relieved of his duties in April with the club fighting relegation with seven matches to spare.

Esteghlal's job has been vacant since Portuguese Ricardo Sa Pinto ended his one-year stint at the club in May to join Cypriot side APOEL Nicosia, after the Iranian Blues finished third the league and were beaten 2-1 in extra time by archrival Persepolis in the Hazfi Cup final.



● REUTERS

Almost 20,000 abusive social media posts in World Cup 2022: FIFA report

BBC – Almost 20,000 abusive social media posts were aimed at players, coaches and officials during last year's World Cup, says a FIFA report.

Of 20 million posts scanned by moderation software developed by FIFA and players' union FIFPRO, 286,895 were hidden from public view.

The biggest spike in abuse came after England's quarter-final loss to France, when Harry Kane missed a late penalty.

"The figures and findings in this report do not come as a surprise, but they are still massively concerning," said FIFPRO president David Aganzo.

"They represent a strong reminder for everyone involved in our game, and it must lead to providing preventative measures and solutions for players who are increasingly facing this type of abuse."

The report, released on Sunday, said more than 300 people have been identified and their details will be shared with authorities "to

facilitate real-world action being taken".

It said 38% of identifiable abuse came from accounts based in Europe and 36% from South America.

Last year FIFA, world football's governing body, partnered with FIFPRO to implement a plan to protect players, coaches and officials from social media abuse during international tournaments.

They established a package of tools called the social media protection service (SMPS), which flagged posts and comments, with 19,636 during the World Cup in Qatar confirmed by the service provider as abusive, discriminatory or threatening.

These were reported to the relevant social media platforms and, in many cases, were removed.

Of the detected abusive messages, sexism made up 13.47%, homophobia 12.16% and racism 10.70%.

"Social media companies' responses to abuse and threat published on



England captain Harry Kane is frustrated after missing a late penalty during a 2-1 quarter-final defeat against France in the World Cup 2022 in Qatar.
● REUTERS

their platforms evolved throughout the tournament but still indicated many blind spots, particularly outside of English language content," said the

report. "Targeted individual racism was high volume with more than 300 players being targeted and a few individual high-profile

players receiving a large proportion of targeted abuse across the competition. "Homophobia was prolific and platform responses

seemed blurred by the cultural differences which seemed to bar action." Twitter had the highest number of abusive messages reported to it with

13,105, followed by Instagram (5,370), Facebook (979), YouTube (113) and TikTok (69).

France suffered the highest number of abusive messages when grouped by country, with Brazil the second most and England third.

The Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, which starts on 20 July, will also feature SMPS support and FIFA has a confidential web-based whistleblowing system to allow people to report abuse.

"FIFA has a duty to protect football, in particular the players and the fans," said FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

"However, FIFA also expects all authorities and social media platforms to also accept their responsibilities and support us in the fight against all forms of discrimination."