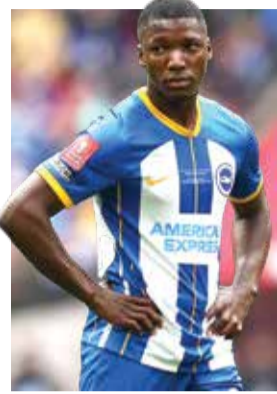


Liverpool agree British record £111m fee for Caicedo



● GETTY IMAGES

BBC – Liverpool have agreed a British record transfer fee of £111m with Brighton for midfielder Moises Caicedo.

After Brighton rejected a succession of bids from Chelsea, it remains to be seen whether the Blues will now match that amount.

Brighton had set a fee in excess of £100m for Caicedo and had said they felt no-one would reach it.

However, Liverpool have now done that, which leaves the 21-year-old Ecuador international free to go for a medical.

Liverpool lost midfielders Jordan Henderson and Fabinho to the Saudi Pro League last month but signed Caicedo's Brighton team-mate Alexis Mac Allister in June for £35m.

Former Reds captain Henderson, 33, joined Al-Ettifaq in a deal worth £12m plus add-ons, while 29-year-old Brazilian Fabinho switched to Al-Ittihad for £40m.

Speaking on Friday, Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said: "I got told I can confirm a deal with [Brighton] is agreed."

"What did change is that we are a club with not endless resources, so things we didn't expect, a couple of things happening in the summer [Henderson and Fabinho], stuff like this."

"We didn't think about that before the summer, to be honest and when it happened, we gave it a go and obviously, the club was really stretched there, to be honest."

The fee agreed for Caicedo exceeds the £107m Chelsea paid for Argentina midfielder Enzo Fernandez earlier this year. The Seagulls would also profit if Caicedo is sold by Liverpool because of a sell-on clause in his contract.

Caicedo joined Brighton from Ecuadorian side Independiente del Valle for £4m in February 2021 although he did not make his Premier League debut until April 2022.

He asked to leave Brighton in the January transfer window earlier this year. Arsenal then had multiple offers turned down for Caicedo before the player signed a new contract with the Seagulls until 2027 in March.

Klopp has been looking at various options to rebuild his squad after they finished fifth in the Premier League last season and failed to qualify for the Champions League.

Persian Gulf Pro League roundup:

New signings spearhead Sepahan to statement win; Nekounam off to flier with Blues

Sport Desk

The first round of matches in the new Persian Gulf Pro League season saw summer signings lead Sepahan to a massive 3-1 victory over Tractor at the Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium.

Persepolis began its title defense with a 1-0 win against Iralco in Tehran, while Javad Nekounam enjoyed a flying start to life on the Blues' bench as Esteghlal walked away with a 3-0 triumph over San'at Naft Abadan in southern Iran.

Golgozar Sirjan was also a big winner on the opening day, defeating Foolad Khuzestan by three goals at home.

Sepahan statement

Many believed Sepahan was unlucky to lift the trophy despite arguably delivering the best performances in the Iranian top flight throughout last season.

Thursday's win in the star-studded contest proved Jose Morais's men mean business again as the five-time champion will be looking to end a nine-year title drought.

Tensions were high in the battle of the two busy sides of the transfer window as 11 players were shown a yellow card with the host's Nilson Júnior and Safa Hadi of Tractor receiving their marching orders for a second bookable offence.

Shahriyar Moghanlou, the league's leading marksman last season, picked up where he had left off by bagging Sepahan's first goal of the new campaign in the 11th minute.

Morteza Asadi perhaps played a pivotal role in Sepahan's failure in the title race last season when his spot kick sealed a 1-0 win for Tractor in the fixture in the closing stages of the campaign.

Asadi's summer recruitment, however, paid off early on for Sepahan as he doubled the lead for the home side with 25 minutes into the game,



● Reza Shekari (#1) celebrates Sepahan's third goal in a 3-1 victory over Tractor in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium, Isfahan, Iran, on August 10, 2023.
● RASOUL SHOJAEI/IRNA

tapping in from close range on a Reza Shekari's low cross. A first appearance on his return to Tractor turned into an absolute nightmare for goalkeeper Hossein Pourhamidi when his ill-fated attempt to clear the ball let Shekari, who also joined Sepahan in the summer, find his name on the score sheet with a header from the edge box and all but secure the maximum points for the host on the hour mark.

Substitute Saeed Karim-Azar pulled one back in the 89th minute but it proved too little too late for the for the visiting side, which will be chasing a first win of the campaign against Persepolis at home on Wednesday, with Sepahan playing Zob Ahan in

the Isfahan derby. Chances were few and far between in an empty Azadi Stadium on Wednesday as a first-half goal by Ali Nemati was enough to get Persepolis to a winning start to their quest for a seventh league crown in eight years. A perfect through ball by Soroush Rafiei found Nemati behind the Iralco backline before the Reds fullback lobbed keeper Ahmad Gohari, who joined Iralco on loan from Persepolis, as the champion is yet to drop points in the league since the home defeat against Sepahan in March.

Persepolis archrival Esteghlal could not have asked for a better beginning to the new era under Nekounam after a

preseason which was dominated by financial shortcomings and the departure of two prolific players in Mehdi Qayedi and Mohammad Mobein.

A 1-1 home draw against San'at Naft with two games to spare ended Esteghlal's pursuit of the league title in May but it was a different story in Abadan on Thursday. Arash Rezavand's left-footed effort from inside the box led the Blues to a first-half lead before Amir-Arsalan Motahari's thumping header two minutes after the break propelled Nekounam's side to a 2-0 advantage.

Saleh Hardani capped off a brilliant run through San'at Naft's defense when he fired the ball into the bottom cor-

ner for Esteghlal's third of the afternoon in the 58th minute.

Esteghlal will play Malavan at the Azadi Stadium on Thursday, with San'at Naft visiting Foolad Arena to take on Foolad a day earlier.

Elsewhere, Greek manager Marinos Ouzounidis enjoyed a winning debut in the Iranian league as first half goals by Ahmadreza Zenderouh, from the spot, and Aliasghar A'ashouri were followed by Alireza Alizadeh's header in the second period as Golgozar came out on top against Alireza Mansourian's Foolad. Newly-promoted clubs Esteghlal Khuzestan and Shams Azar shared the points in a 1-1 draw in Ahvaz. Pouria Sarabadani netted a

maiden top-flight goal for Shams Azar the hour mark but Behrouz Barani drew the home side level in the 90th minute.

It was pretty much the same scenario when Nassaji Mazandaran hosted Paykan in Qaemshahr as a late Vahid Mohammadzadeh's header canceled out Amir Taher's opener for the visiting side. Zob Ahan head coach Mohammad Rabiei, who was linked with the Esteghlal job before leaving Mes Rafsanjan, also revealed in a victorious debut with Zob Ahan after three second-half goals inside six minutes saw the Isfahan-based win 2-1 at Malavan. Havadar and Mes Rafsanjan played to a goalless stalemate in Tehran.

OCA chief predicts 'greatest ever' Asian Games in Hangzhou despite election review



● The Hangzhou Olympic Sports Center Stadium is the main venue of the Hangzhou Asian Games.
● VCG

REUTERS – China's Hangzhou city will stage the "greatest ever" Asian Games next month, acting Olympic Council of Asia head Randhir Singh told Reuters on Friday, asserting OCA's internal issues will not impact the continental event.

The OCA has run into troubles after the International Olympic Committee (IOC) refused to recognise its elections last month, and asked India's Singh to carry on as its acting president.

The IOC has banned Kuwait's Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah for three years for his "undeniable impact" in the OCA elections in which his

brother, Sheikh Talal Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, was appointed president of the continental body.

Former Olympic skeet shooter Singh was first appointed acting president of the OCA in 2021 when Sheikh Ahmad stepped down as president after being convicted by a Swiss criminal court of forgery. Sheikh Ahmad has denied any wrongdoing.

"The OCA election has nothing to do with the organisation of the Games," Singh told Reuters by telephone sounding upbeat about the Games, which could not be held last year because of COVID-19 re-

strictions in China. "Hangzhou was all ready to host it last year itself. Venues are ready, everything is in place, and I'm sure we are going to see the greatest ever Asian Games."

The IOC is reviewing the OCA election process in which Sheikh Talal edged out Husain Al-Musallam 24-20 to head the Asian body, which had his father, Sheikh Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as its first president.

The IOC, in an Aug. 9 letter seen by Reuters, asked both candidates not to engage with OCA's voting members until the completion of the review process.