

Jahanbakhsh, Taremi on target in UCL



● REUTERS

Sports Desk

Iranian internationals Alireza Jahanbakhsh and Mehdi Taremi were both on the score sheet on the opening night of the group stage at the UEFA Champions League.

Jahanbakhsh smashed home from inside the box with 14 minutes left on the clock on his debut at the competition as Feyenoord defeated nine-man Celtic 2-0 at home to go top of Group E.

Calvin Stengs got the Dutch champion off the mark deep into stoppage time in the first half before Celtic's Gustaf Lagerbielke and Odin Thiago Holm received their marching orders in the space of five minutes after the interval. Lazio and Atletico played to a 1-1 draw in Rome in the other match of the group.

In Hamburg's Volksparkstadion, Taremi scored a third goal for Porto, tapping in with a delicate effort on the half-hour mark, to help Porto beat Shakhtar Donetsk of Ukraine 3-1 in Group H. Brazilian Galeno scored twice either side of a Kevin Kelsy's equalizer for the Ukrainian side.

Elsewhere in the group, Joao Felix bagged a brace as Barcelona thrashed Belgian club Antwerp 5-0 at home.

Wrestling World Championships: Iran finishes runner-up after mediocre freestyle campaign

Sports Desk

A total of four medals saw Iran's freestyle team finish an average run at the Wrestling World Championships in the second place.

Rahman Amouzad, the last Iranian in action, summed up a forgettable campaign for the country on Tuesday as he failed to stand on the podium after an 8-6 defeat against Russian Shamil Mamedov, representing the Individual Neutral Athletes, in the third-place bout of the 65kg weight class.

Thoroughly tipped for a second successive world gold before the event, Amouzad still bounced back to outmuscle Moldovan Maxim Sacultan 10-0 to secure a wrestling berth for Iran in next year's Paris Olympics.

Of the country's 10-man squad, only one, Amirhossein Zare', managed to leave the Serbian capital with a gold, thanks to a technical-fall victory over Georgian Geno Petriashvili in the 125kg final.

Hassan and Amirmohammad Yazdani, meanwhile, came short in the show-downs with the American opponents to settle for the silver medals of their respective weight classes. Hassan Yazadni suffered a fifth loss in the sixth head-to-head with his familiar foe David Taylor when he was pinned in the final seconds of the 86kg final to extend his personal tally to a national-high nine major medals.

Amirmohammad looked in impressive form before the 70kg showpiece



Iran's Hassan Yazdani (red) is in action against American David Taylor in the freestyle 86kg final at the Wrestling World Championships in Belgrade, Serbia, on September 17, 2023. ● UWW

with Zain Retherford, but clearly ran out of steam toward the end of the contest to concede an 8-5 setback – a second world silver in three years for the Iranian. With six-time champion Jordan Burroughs absent at this year's event, Mohammad Nokhodi, beaten by the legendary American in the previous two finals, arrived in Belgrade as the favorite to walk away with

the ultimate prize of the 79kg weight class, but he eventually finished with a consolation bronze after an emphatic win against Azerbaijan's Orkhan Abasov. Milad Valizadeh (57kg), Reza Atri (61kg), Younes Emami (74kg), Amir-Ali Azarpira (92kg), and Mohammad Goleij (97kg) all left Serbia empty-handed. Team USA was crowned the freestyle champion for a second year in a row, collecting

148 points – 38 clear of the Iranian squad – with Georgia in third on 80, while the Russians' results were taken out of the equation in the team table. The runner-up finish for the five-time champion, which is yet to lift the team trophy since the 2013 glory, might go down as a decent outcome but the results in Belgrade indicated that more work needs to be done for the Iranian

to match the level of their opposite numbers in the American and Russian teams, who shared 13 medals, including five golds, between them. Eight bouts saw Iranians square off against either an American or a Russian opponent, with Amouzad the only one to come out victorious – a 7-4 win against American newcomer Nicholas Boone Lee. For all the criticism aimed

at the Iranian federation chief Alireza Dabir in recent days – some of which have unfairly been politically motivated – the former Olympic champion could still boast about a brighter future for the sport in the country after the Iranian teams made a clean sweep of the freestyle and Greco-Roman titles in the world cadet and junior championships earlier in the summer.

AFC Champions League: 10-man Persepolis succumbs to star-studded Al Nassr

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League champion Persepolis got off to a disappointing start in the new AFC Champions League season, suffering a 2-0 home defeat against Saudi club Al Nassr in Group E. Perhaps too much respect for Al Nassr's global stars in Cristiano Ronaldo, Sadio Mane, Marcelo Brozovic, Otavio, and Aymeric Laporte eventually cost the Tehran Reds as they overlooked the Saudi products on the pitch, who made the difference at the game played behind the closed doors at Tehran's Azadi Stadium – due to an AFC ban imposed on Persepolis two years ago being enforced.

An effort by Abdulrahman Ghareeb led to an own goal by Persepolis fullback Da-

nial Esmailifar in the 62nd minute – 10 minutes before the Saudi international set up Mohammed Qassem, who lashed home from an acute angle to double the lead for Al Nassr.

The Saudi giant enjoyed a one-man advantage for the best part of the second half, courtesy of Reds midfielder Milad Sarlak receiving his marching orders seven minutes after the break for a second bookable offence.

The buildup to the contest had been dominated by the viral scenes of thousands of the football-mad Iranians following Al Nassr's bus from the airport to the hotel just to get a glimpse of Portuguese superstar Ronaldo.

However, the five-time Ballon d'Or had a quiet debut at the Asian elite



Al Nassr captain Cristiano Ronaldo (L) is tackled by Persepolis center-back Morteza Pouraliganji during an AFC Champions League game at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on September 19, 2023. ● MAHDI MARIZAD/FARSNEWS

clubs competition as he managed a single shot on target during the course of the 90 minutes – a point-blank header in the first half which drew a superb save from international keeper Alireza Beiranvand. On the other side of the ground, meanwhile, Persepolis looked toothless, failing to create a clear-cut chance all night, except for Shahab Zahedi heading wide a Saeed Sadeqi's set-piece on the hour mark. For all the quality Al Nassr players dictating the tempo of the game, Persepolis head coach Yahya Golmohammadi still believed a couple of incidents, including an eighth-minute injury for key winger Mehdi Torabi, led to his side leaving the pitch empty handed. "The game was affected

by unfortunate events for us, first Mehdi Torabi's injury, then the dismissal of Milad Sarlak," said Golmohammadi, who steered Persepolis to the 2020 showdown, thanks to a shootout victory over Tuesday's opponent in the semifinals. "After that (the sending off), we conceded and couldn't find a way back. "We started the second half better, but Sarlak's red card worked against us. Congratulations to Al Nassr but for us, these big games help identify our weaknesses so that we can become stronger." Next for Persepolis is an away fixture on October 2 against Qatari champion Al Duhail, which shared the spoils with Istiklol in a goalless stalemate in Dushanbe.