

## Tractor stunned by Shams Azar in Iranian top flight



MEHRAN NAZARZADEH/ISNA

### Sports Desk

Newly-promoted Shams Azar celebrated a first victory of the Persian Gulf Pro League season, walking away with a shock 3-2 win against Tractor in Tabriz. Pouria Sarabadani gave the visiting side a surprise lead from the spot 17 minutes into game before Mohammadreza Rezaei double the advantage in the 33rd minute. Amir-Mohammad Nesaee headed home Shams Azar's third from close range two minutes after break. New signing Mehdi Abdi pulled one back for the home side with a 70-minute penalty and Ricardo Alvez's long-range effort reduced the deficit to one with eight minutes left on the clock, but it still proved too little too late as Tractor's run of four successive victories came to an end. Shams Azar is above bottom side Esteghlal Khuzestan with four points, while Tractor is third with 12 - three points adrift of Persepolis and Esteghlal. Elsewhere on Saturday, Iraqi defender Muntadher Mohammed scored a late winner to lead Mes Rafsanjan to a 2-1 win at Zob Ahan.

# Taraneh Ahmadi an unlikely source of joy for Iranian sport in Hangzhou



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The decision to send full-strength volleyball and wrestling teams to the recently-finished Hangzhou Asian Games indicated Iran's determination to go all out for the top podiums in China.

The Iranian freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestlers - winner of five golds in the Games - stepped into the competitions less than a fortnight after the World Championships concluded in Belgrade, while the volleyball gold-winning run came at a cost for the country as the exhausting trip to Rio de Janeiro right after the final was followed by disappointing results at the Olympic Qualification Tournament.

The final outcome of the Games, however, did not quite turn out to be what the Iranian Sport Ministry and the National Olympic Committee (NOC) had longed for prior to the event.

The tally of 13 gold

medals across the 15 days was seven short of what the Iranians achieved in in Jakarta-Palembang 2018 - the lowest for the country since the 11-gold mark in Doha 2006.

Following below-par campaigns in certain competitions - namely football, basketball, shooting, weightlifting, and karate - the Iranian sporting apparatus may now have to pin hopes on other sports for the future events after finding glory in some unlikely sources.

While the table tennis squad ended a decades-long drought in the Games for the country with a brace of precious bronzes, there were first-ever medals in chess (gold), artistic gymnastics (silver) and mountain cycling (bronze).

Taraneh Ahmadi and Romina Sarlak were also among Iran's unheralded heroes in

Hangzhou as the former grabbed a roller skating medal - a women's inline speed slalom silver - with the latter shattering the world record of the category, clocking 4.254 seconds,



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in the preliminary round despite eventually leaving China empty-handed.

Ahmadi, however, feels lucky to have been a part of the Iranian delegation in the first place, as she was granted a berth by the National Olympic Committee only a couple of weeks before the event.

"I had a poor run at the Italian Open in June, which was the reason my name was omitted from the list of the Iranian athletes for the Asian Games," the 21-year-old girl told Iran Daily, adding: "I wouldn't have participated at the event, had it not been for my coach Ehsan Habibabadi's persistence in convincing the NOC to send me to Hangzhou."

"I vowed to return with a medal. I felt like a soldier for my country rather than an athlete at the Games village, which is why I worked my socks off to succeed," added the Iranian, who came short against Liu Chiao-hsi of the Chinese Taipei in the final showdown.

"I had competed with some of my Hangzhou opponents in a tournament in France months ago and had some decent results there, winning a team silver. I was in my best form for the Asian Games but the level of competition was truly different," said Ahmadi, also a gold medalist at the 2017 World Roller Games in Nanjing, China, who believes

the results in recent years have drawn worldwide admiration for the Iranian roller skaters.

"Everyone now thinks highly of the Iranian roller skating, which was not the case before the Asian Championships in 2016, where we won a gold and two bronzes. Our boys registered brilliant results in the time-trial chart of an international tournament in Spain - contested by some of the best in the world. All of our opponents wanted to know if we would take part at the Asian Games, which shows the high status that the Iranians possess in the sport," said Ahmadi, who hopes her success in Hangzhou will bring more atten-

tion to roller skating in the country.

The Iranian girl has come a long way to become a medalist for her home land in the greatest sporting showpiece in the continent.

"My parents were not really into sports. They bought me a piano when I was a little girl because they wanted to see their daughter become a prominent musician. But I like my skating shoes more than my piano. I used to go to a park in my childhood neighborhood in Isfahan to train roller skating, before I eventually turned pro when I was 11," Ahmadi said.

"My father is now proud of what I've achieved throughout my career. He is my biggest fan."

## 'England's greatest ever player': Tributes pour in for Sir Bobby Charlton

BBC - The world of football has united in tribute to Manchester United and England legend Sir Bobby Charlton, who died at the age of 86 on Saturday. Charlton, who "passed peacefully in the early hours of the morning" after being diagnosed with dementia in 2020, lifted three league titles, an FA Cup and a European Cup in a distinguished 17-year career at Old Trafford.

He also scored 49 goals in 106 appearances for the Three Lions, famously helping them win the World Cup in 1966.

"For me, [he is] England's greatest ever player," former England striker Gary Lineker told BBC Radio 5 Live.

"You can only judge players that you have seen in your lifetime and I was lucky enough to see him play when I was a young boy. He was one of my heroes, one of many people's heroes. "He was unique. Wherever

you go in the world, even if they didn't speak the language, they knew two words - Bobby Charlton." Part of Manchester United's so-called 'Holy Trinity' alongside club legends Denis Law and George Best, Charlton scored twice in a famous 4-1 extra-time win against Benfica in the 1968 European Cup final as Sir Matt Busby's team became the continent's first English champions.

He was England's record goalscorer until 2015, when Wayne Rooney surpassed the Ashington-born attacking midfielder's tally of 49.

"When you read about everything he has done in the game, how many trophies he has won, appearances he has made and goals he has scored, he could have been excused for having a little bit of arrogance about him," said former Newcastle and England striker Alan Shearer. England manager Gareth Southgate also paid a heartfelt tribute to Charl-



MATTHEW PETERS/GETTY IMAGES

ton and said: "The privilege of meeting him on several occasions allowed me to understand his personal pride and emotion

in having represented England, and simply confirmed in my mind his standing as one of the gentlemen of the game."

"The world of football will unite in sadness at losing an undisputed legend." Charlton survived the Munich air disaster in 1958

which tragically claimed the lives of 23 people, including eight of his United team-mates.

"Sir Bobby was the reason I had the opportunity to play for Manchester United," said David Beckham, who made his first-team debut for the club aged 17 after attending Charlton's soccer school. "I owe everything to Sir Bobby."

Manchester United record goalscorer Rooney, who took charge of his first game as Birmingham City manager at Middlesbrough on Saturday, said: "I'm still in shock. Coming out at half-time for the second half, we heard the news. "Winning the World Cup in '66 and the European Cup in '68 after what he'd been through with the Munich disaster - he's had a great life. He's a great, an absolute legend of the game."

"He's an iconic figure around the world," added Middlesbrough boss Michael Carrick, who spent 12 years at Old Trafford as a player.

"I was lucky enough to get to know him and feel his support and feel what Manchester United meant to him. It was a position I never took for granted."

"A huge loss for his family and for the Manchester United family and for English football, European football," said Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola, adding: "A big legend. On behalf of Manchester City our condolences to his family, Manchester United and for everyone because we have the Premier League that we have because of these type of people."

Geoff Hurst, now the only surviving member of Alf Ramsey's World Cup-winning side who scored a hat-trick in the 1966 final, took to X to pay tribute to his former team-mate, writing: "Very sad news today. We will never forget him & nor will all of football. A great colleague and friend. He will be sorely missed by all of the country beyond sport alone."