

Brazilian Silva rejoins Esteghlal

Sports Desk

Brazilian center-back Raphael Silva rejoined Persian Gulf Pro League club Esteghlal as a free agent on a season-and-a-half long contract.

Silva, 31, first signed for Esteghlal from Saudi side Al Faisaly in March 2022 and made 42 appearances for the Tehran Blues before parting ways with the club by the end of last season.

He was part of the team under ex-manager Farhad Majidi, which lifted the Iranian top-flight trophy in the 2021/22 campaign without conceding a single defeat.

An Iranian Super Cup winner in 2022, Silva finished third in the league with Esteghlal last season and settled for the runner-up spot in the Iranian Hazfi Cup after a 2-1 loss to archrival Persepolis in May.

The Brazilian is the first winter signing by Esteghlal head coach Javad Nekounam, who, on his first season in charge, has led the Blues to the top spot of the Iranian league table with 31 points

– one clear of Sepahan and two above defending champion Persepolis – before the mid-season break.

● khabarvarzeshi.com



Basketball great Haddadi back to Iranian league

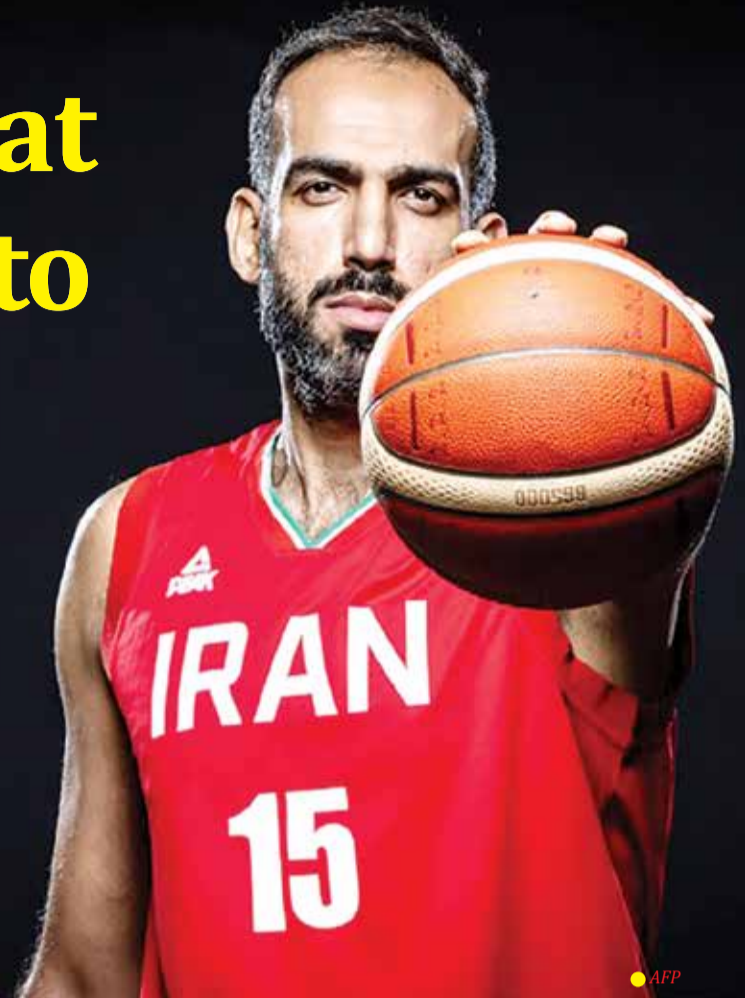
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Hamed Haddadi, widely regarded as the greatest Iranian basketball player of all time, made a dramatic return to the Iranian Pro League by signing for Palayesh Naft Abadan until the end of the season.

A former center of the NBA franchises Memphis Grizzlies and Phoenix Suns, Haddadi, 38, joined the Iranian club after four years with China's Sichuan Blue Whales.

A three-time FIBA Asia Cup champion with Iran, and a four-time MVP in the competition, the 7-foot-2 center called time on his international duty after country's final outing in last September's FIBA World Cup against Lebanon in Jakarta, Indonesia.

His previous appearance in the Iranian league came with Petrochimi Bandar Imam in 2018. Palayesh Naft Abadan is sixth in the 12-team table after 12 rounds of matches.



Nuggets' Jokic banks in half-court miracle at buzzer to stun Warriors



Nuggets' Nikola Jokic (15) hits a game-winning three-pointer over Warriors' Kevon Looney during an NBA game in Chase Center, San Francisco, CA, US, on January 4, 2024.

● SCOTT STRAZZANTE/AP

THE GUARDIAN – With three seconds left in a tie game, Denver Nuggets coach Michael Malone set up Nikola Jokic to be the safety valve on an inbound pass at the far end. Jamal Murray, the first option, wasn't available up the sideline. Neither was second-choice Kentavious Caldwell-Pope.

Instead, Aaron Gordon got the ball

to Jokic, who took three dribbles across half-court, stopped and launched a 40-footer over Kevon Looney from the right sideline that banked in as time expired. That have the Nuggets a stunning 130-127 victory over the Golden State Warriors Thursday night after trailing by 18 points in the fourth quarter. They closed with

a 25-4 run.

Jokic had 34 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds. He tied it at 127 with a short jumper with 26 seconds left. Golden State's final possession ended with Stephen Curry's turnover, setting the stage for Jokic's winner.

Malone said he told Jokic during the timeout to "take two dribbles over half-court and shoot."

"And he executed the play to perfection," Malone said. "But great players make great plays. And Nikola catching the ball and making something happen behind that is just incredible."

Jokic said he was just trying to "get a little bit closer and just throw it to the basket."

"I think those shots are the easiest shots to take," Jokic said. "You don't have any other option."

The defending champion Nuggets have won 11 of 13 and six straight on the road. They sent the Warriors – who failed to get back to .500 after snapping a three-game skid Tuesday night – to a 1-3 start on their seven-game homestand. Golden State has blown several double-digit leads this season.

Aaron Gordon scored 30 points for Denver, and Jamal Murray had 25. Curry led Golden State with 30 points. Klay Thompson added 24.

"Some are a little bit easier to swallow than others," Curry said. "This one is definitely tough."

Golden State pulled away in the third quarter, outscoring Denver 44-24 after trailing by double-digits early in the half. The Warriors had a 19-6 midway through the quarter, with Brandin Podziemski hitting three corner three-pointers for a 107-94 lead going into the fourth quarter.

The Nuggets took a 70-63 lead into halftime, shooting 62% from the field.

Malone said he was most proud of his team responding down big to the Warriors on the road.

"When you get down to this team, it's very easily drop your head in this building with that crowd," Malone said. "And that's probably the thing I was most pleased with tonight is that everybody – coaches, players, we just stayed the course even after that third quarter which they dominated."



Paralympian Pistorius released on parole

BBC – Paralympian Oscar Pistorius has been freed on parole from a South African jail, nearly 11 years after murdering his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp. Officials confirmed Pistorius was "at home" on

Friday morning, having served half of his more than 13-year sentence.

Ms Steenkamp's mother said she accepted the decision to release the former athlete – but added her family was the one

"serving a life sentence". Pistorius, now 37, shot Ms Steenkamp multiple times in 2013 through a door.

The double amputee later claimed he had mistaken her for a burglar.

Pistorius was eventually convicted of murder in 2015 after an appeal court overturned an earlier verdict of culpable homicide. Under South African law, all offenders are entitled to be considered for parole once they have served half their total sentence, which for Pistorius was finally set in 2017 at 13 years and five months.

He will live under strict conditions – including being unable to speak to the media – until his sentence expires in 2029.

Pistorius first went to prison in October 2014, shortly after his initial conviction. There was a

period between 2015 and 2016 when he was released under house arrest before his conviction was changed and sentenced lengthened.

Pistorius's lower legs were amputated when he was less than a year old. He subsequently relied on prosthetics and became a world-renowned athlete known as the "blade runner".

He had a successful career on the track, first at the Paralympics, winning multiple golds, and then cementing his reputation after competing against non-disabled athletes at the London Olympics in 2012. The murder of Ms Steenkamp just six months later, and the subsequent trials, dominated headlines around the world.



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Ten Hag had 'very positive' talks with Ratcliffe

BBC – Erik ten Hag says he has held "very positive" meetings with Manchester United's new investors Ineos.

Manager Ten Hag met Sir Jim Ratcliffe at United's training ground on Tuesday. On his first visit since the agreement to buy 25% of the club was announced on Christmas Eve, Ten Hag said he spent "many hours" with Ratcliffe and Ineos representatives Sir Dave Brailsford and John-Claude Blanc.

The deal is set to be ratified by the Premier League in six to eight weeks.

"It was a very positive," Ten Hag said.

"We had a long meeting, for many hours we sit together, on many issues we were on the same page. It was a very constructive meeting and we're looking forward to working with each other."

It is expected Ineos will make significant changes to the structure of United, although stock market regulations prevent that from happening at the moment.

Ten Hag says it is too soon for anyone to make decisions of such significance given Ratcliffe and his associates only arrived in the north west on Tuesday, spending time at Old Trafford on Tuesday and again on Thursday to get to know staff members and understand how the club functions.

"We have to let it settle down," said Ten Hag. "They are just coming in and introducing themselves. They have good ideas, so we have to see what we can integrate. We will work together but you can't tell that after one day. We have had our debates about strategies and I think we will come together."



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