



## Brazilian Osmar named Persepolis manager for the rest of the season

Gulf Pro League champion for the rest of the season. Numerous names, including Vladimir Petkovic and Portuguese Jose Peseiro, had been

### Sports Desk

Weeks of speculations and rumors swirling around the Persepolis bench came to an end as Brazilian Osmar Loss Vieira was appointed as the manager of the Persian

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brought up in the media for the job but the 48-year-old Brazilian – an assistant to former coach Yahya Golmohammadi – was eventually handed the helm after Croatian Branko Ivankovich rejected a third approach by the Reds on Saturday due to “family and personal” reasons. A three-time league champion with Persepolis, Golmohamma-

di stepped down from his role following a 1-1 at Mes Rafsanjan on the first day of the new year, putting a lid on months of rift with club chairman Reza Darvish.

Ivankovich, whose Oman team crashed out of the AFC Asian Cup group stage on Thursday, was the club's prime candidate for the vacant role but he made it clear that he has no intention of returning to the Iranian top flight, where he had also lifted the trophy on three occasions before parting ways with the Reds in 2019.

Osmar, now with the team in a training camp in Dubai, first joined Persepolis as a number two to Golmohammadi for the start of the 2022/23 season. “Osmar has a decent knowl-

edge of the team, the opponents, and the competitions, while enjoying a friendly relationship with the players. He also played his part in helping Persepolis win a league and cup double last season,” the club's statement read after his appointment.

Before leaving for Iran, Osmar worked as a first-team assistant and academy coach in his home country for the best part of his managerial career, while spending short and unimpressive spells as the manager of Corinthians and Juventude.

His appointment drew criticism from parts of the Reds supporters on social media as they were expecting a more high-profile face on the bench in chasing a seventh league

crown in eight years. Persepolis is third in the Iranian league table with 30 points after 15 matches – trailing archrival Esteghlal and Sepahan by two and one points respectively.

However, the Brazilian, who is believed to have the backing of senior Persepolis players, will be privileged to have a reinforced squad for the second part of the season after Qatari fullback Abdelkarim Hassan signed for the club, while former Persepolis striker Issa Alekassir rejoined from Sepahan last week.

Osmar's first game in the new role will come at home against second-tier side Naft Gachsaran in the Hazfi Cup on February 9.

## James' triple-double lifts Lakers over Warriors in second OT

**BBC** – LeBron James helped the Los Angeles Lakers to a thrilling 145-144 overtime win against the Golden State Warriors as he secured bragging rights over Steph Curry. James, the oldest player in the NBA at 39, scored 36 points plus a career-high 20 rebounds and 12 assists.

James secured victory by sinking his two free throws with just a second remaining on the clock. Curry managed a game-high 46 points and seven assists on the losing side.

Four-time MVP James acknowledged his duel with Curry was one he would look back fondly on when his career

is over. “Steph came to me after the game and said ‘how does it keep getting better?’” James said.

“It's something that you will truly take all in when you are done playing.

“When you are able to watch with your grandkids and say that I played against one of the best ever to play this game.” The Warriors grabbed a one-point lead thanks to a superb 28-foot, three-point jumper from Curry with 5.2 seconds left.

Klay Thompson took the game into the second period of overtime after his 25-foot three pointer with seven seconds

remaining before James had the final word.

Elsewhere, NBA defending champions Denver Nuggets clinched a 111-105 win over Philadelphia 76ers, who were without star centre Joel Embiid.

Embiid became one of only 10 players in NBA history to score 70 or more points in a game when the 76ers beat the San Antonio Spurs 133-123 last week.

Reigning MVP Embiid went through his pre-match warm-up but was withdrawn by the team's medical staff with soreness in his knee.

It was the 11th game Embiid has missed this season, and he can only afford to sit out six more to remain eligible for the league's awards, including MVP.

Two-time MVP winner Nikola Jokic top scored with 26 points and 16 rebounds for the Nuggets, while Jamal Murray added 23 points.



Lakers forward LeBron James (8) shoots during an NBA win against the Warriors in San Francisco, CA, US, on January 27, 2024. ● DARREN YAMASHITA/USA TODAY SPORTS

## Xavi announces Barca exit plan after Villarreal defeat

**REUTERS** – Barcelona manager Xavi Hernandez said on Saturday that he had decided to step down at the end of the season after his side lost 5-3 at home to Villarreal in LaLiga, their third defeat in their last five games in all competitions.

Barca are third in the table on 44 points, 10 behind leaders Real Madrid and eight adrift of second-placed Girona.

“I'd like to announce that as of June 30 I will not continue as Barca coach,” he told a press conference after meeting with club president Joan Laporta for over half an hour.

“It is a situation of common sense and I have decided that on June 30th I will not continue as Barca coach.

“I think the club needs a change of dynamic and I told the president Joan Laporta. As a fan, thinking about the club and the players, I think they will be freed up and will be calmer.

“I think the best thing to do is to leave on June 30th. Having said that, I will give my all for the four months that are left, I think we can have a good season and I hope that the dynamic will change. I believe I am doing the right thing.”

Xavi played for Barcelona for 17 years, making 767 appearances

and winning 25 trophies, including four Champions League titles and eight LaLiga crowns.

But despite being a club great and winning LaLiga last term, Barca's stuttering campaign has put Xavi under pressure.

They were thrashed by Real in the Spanish Super Cup final earlier in January and knocked out in the Copa del Rey quarter-finals by Athletic Bilbao on Wednesday. Barca face last season's Italian champions Napoli in a Champions League last-16 tie.

“I had a very human conversation with the president (Laporta), with a lot of common sense. The trust is absolute, he even got a little emotional,” 44-year-old Xavi added.

“But I think it is time. I'm not driven by financial matters, but by my heart. I think it's the best thing for the club. I don't want to be a problem for the club in my heart.

“This game today is an example that we need a change of direction because it has been unfortunate and it is a time to change this dynamic. I can't remember a game as cruel as today.

“I insist. I don't want to be a problem but a solution and I believe that between now and June I can still be a solution.”

Barca's on-field struggles are a

reflection of the turmoil off the pitch at the club, including deepening financial problems and a refereeing scandal that could drag on for years.

Spanish prosecutors in March 2023 filed a complaint over alleged payments by Barca from 2001 to 2018 totalling more than 7.3 million euros (\$7.92 million) to firms owned by former refereeing official Jose Maria Enriquez Negreira.

A Barcelona court has agreed to take on the case.

Barca already face huge financial challenges related to their massive wage bill and as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and a 1.6 billion-euro Camp Nou stadium renovation project.



● AP

## Bayern sign defender Boey from Galatasaray for €30m

**REUTERS** – Injury-hit Bayern Munich have signed fullback Sacha Boey from Galatasaray (GSRAY.IS), opens new tab on a contract until 2028, the German champions said on Sunday.

The 23-year-old former France youth international had joined Galatasaray on a four-year contract in 2021 from Stade Rennais.

He scored his first Champions League goal for the club in a 2-2 draw against Copenhagen on Sept. 20 2023.

Turkish Super League champions Galatasaray said in a statement that Bayern would pay a fee of 30 million euros (\$32.59 million).

“Sacha Boey is a very quick and physically very strong right back who



puts in a lot of kilometres in each game and does not shy away from a one-on-one,” said Bayern sports director Christoph Freund. “He will improve our defensive quality.”

The Bavarians, second in the Bundesliga behind Bayer Leverkusen, have been struggling with a growing list of injury absences including defensive stalwarts Dayot

Upamecano and Konrad Laimer, who were injured in their mid-week win over Union Berlin and will be out for weeks.

Defensive midfielder Joshua Kimmich was also injured in that game, while defenders Kim Min-jae and Noussair Mazraoui are on international duty and right back Bouna Sarr is injured.

● REUTERS