

Ezzatollahi set to join Shabab Al-Ahli: *Report*

Sports Desk

Iranian midfielder Saeid Ezzatollahi is closing in on a move to Emirati club Shabab Al-Ahli Dubai "in the coming days", according to Varzesh3.

Should the deal go through, it will be a third spell in the Persian Gulf club football for the 27-year-old Iranian, who also played for Qatar's Al-Gharafa on loan from Danish side Vejle BK for the second part of the 2021/22 season.

Introduced to the Iranian top flight with Malavan FC in 2012, Ezzatollahi was also on Esteghlal head coach Javad Nekounam's wish list during the mid-season transfer window but refused to return to the Persian Gulf Pro League.

Shabab Al-Ahli is third in the UAE's ADNOC Pro League with 24 points after 12 rounds of matches, six points adrift of Al Wasl on top.

Having joined Vejle in August 2020, the former Rostov and Reading player has bagged a goal and assist piece in 11 appearances in the Danish Superliga this season, where his team is second from bottom in the 12-team table.

Ezzatollahi has 66 caps for the national team under his belt, playing an integral part as a number six since making his international debut in 2015.

Ezzatollahi was part of the Iranian squad at the 2018 and 2022 World Cups, as well as the AFC Asian Cup in 2019.

His latest international outings came in the recently-finished Asian Cup in Qatar, where Iran made it to the semifinals before suffering a 3-2 defeat against the host and eventual champion.



Iranian girls crowned CAFA futsal champions



Iranian players celebrate a goal during a 9-0 victory over Tajikistan at the CAFA Women's Futsal Championship in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on February 11, 2024. **FFIRI**

Sports Desk

A 9-0 hammering of host Tajikistan saw Iran claim a third successive title at the CAFA Women's Futsal Championship in Dushanbe.

Sara Shirbeigi bagged five goals with Maral Torkaman, Fatemeh Rahmati, Fereshteh Khosravi, and Fatemeh Hosseini also on the scoresheet

to make a clean sweep of four victories for Foruzan Soleimani's girls at the annual Central Asian event.

Missing high-profile Fereshteh Karimi, who underwent surgery on her knee before the tournament, the Asian powerhouse began its campaign with a 5-1 victory over Uzbekistan before coming out on top against the

Kyrgyz Republic (11-0) and debutante Turkmenistan (9-0) prior to Sunday's triumph. Shirbeigi topped the scoring chart with 12 goals, followed by fellow-Iranian Hosseini, who finished on six strikes. Uzbekistan finished second to Iran in the five-team competition with nine points, with the Kyrgyz Republic in third with on six points.

Iran confirms 12-man squad for Beach Soccer World Cup

Sports Desk

Head coach Ali Naderi announced Iran's 12-man squad for the upcoming FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup, starting Thursday in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates. Stepping into the event as the reigning Asian champion, courtesy of a final victory over Japan in Thailand last March, Iran is in Group B of the competition – also featuring two-time runner-up Tahiti, Spain, and Argentina.

Goalkeepers Hamid Behzadpour and Mahdi Mirjalili will be joined by skipper Moslem Mesigar, Amirhossein Akbari, Mohammad-Ali Mokhtari, Ali Mirshekari, Mohammad Ma'soumizadeh, Movahed Mohammadpour, Reza Amirzadeh, Mo-

hammad Moradi, Mahdi Shirmohammadi, and Saeid Piraoun in the Iranian squad, which will begin its campaign against Spain, finalist in the 2013 edition, on the opening day of the tournament. Iran, a four-time Intercontinental Cup champion, will then take on Argentina on Saturday, before squaring off against Tahiti – in a repeat of a 2017 semifinal – two days later.

Piraoun joined up with the rest of his teammates in Dubai on Monday after recovering from a groin injury. In a final friendly before the tournament, Nadri's men came out on top against Colombia with a 3-2 victory in Dubai on Friday, thanks to a Ma'soumizadeh's double plus a Mokhtari's strike.

The top two of each of the four groups will progress to the quarterfinals with the final showdown set to be staged at the Dubai Design District Stadium on February 25.

The host country is pitted against Egypt, the United States, and Italy in Group A, with Senegal, Belarus, Colombia, and Japan – runner-up to Russia in 2021 – battling it out for last-eight spots in Group C. Brazil – the most decorated team in the competition with five trophies – Oman, Portugal – two-time champion in 2015 and 2019 – and Mexico are in Group D. Iran's best result in the sport's flagship international event came in the 2017 edition in Bahamas, where the Asian side defeated Italy 5-3 to finish on the third podium.



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Kenyan Kiptum, marathon world record holder, dies in road accident



JAMIE SABAU/USA TODAY SPORTS

REUTERS – Kenya's marathon world record holder Kelvin Kiptum and his coach were killed in a traffic accident in the Rift Valley on Sunday, cutting short the promising career of the only man to have run the endurance classic in less than two hours and one minute.

The 24-year-old set the world record, opens new tab at the Chicago Marathon in October with a time of two hours and 35 seconds to surpass the mark of 2:01:09 run by compatriot Eliud Kipchoge in Berlin in 2022.

Kiptum, who clocked three of the seven fastest marathon times in history, had been hoping to become the first man to run the marathon in under two hours in race conditions at Rotterdam in April as well as make his Olympic debut in Paris

in July.

"We are shocked and deeply saddened to learn of the devastating loss of Kelvin Kiptum and his coach, Gervais Hakizimana," World Athletics President Sebastian Coe said in a statement.

"On behalf of all World Athletics, we send our deepest condolences to their families, friends, team mates and the Kenyan nation.

"An incredible athlete leaving an incredible legacy, we will miss him dearly." According to the police report, Kiptum was driving his Rwandan coach and a woman in a car near the Rift Valley village where he was born when the accident occurred.

The athlete lost control of the vehicle and veered off the road into a ditch, travelling

for about 60 metres along it before crashing into a large tree.

Kiptum and Gervais Hakizimana died at the scene but the woman, 24-year-old Sharon Chepkurui Kosgei Keiyo, survived with serious injuries and was treated at a local hospital.

Despite the late hour, tributes were paid to Kiptum by senior Kenyan politicians and government officials.

"Devastating news as we mourn the loss of a remarkable individual, Kelvin Kiptum, World Record holder and Kenyan athletics icon," former Kenya prime minister Raila Odinga said on social media platform X. "My deepest condolences to his loved ones, friends, and the entire athletics fraternity. Our nation grieves the profound loss of a true hero."