

Raisi honors Iranian international medalists



Sports Desk

A ceremony to honor the Iranian medalists at the international events – attended by President Ebrahim Raisi and Sports Minister Kioumars Hashemi – was held in Tehran on Tuesday. More than 1500 athletes were among the guests in the capital's International Conference Center, praised for their achievements in different world and Asian championships over the past 12 months as well as the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China. Addressing the attendees, the Iranian president said the in-

frastructure for the professional sports need to be developed all over the country, so that the athletes will have no concerns "but to succeed at the International competitions." Meanwhile, Hashemi said that the Iranians walked away with 1005 medals across 79 sports in the previous Persian calendar year, which came to an end on March 21. "For all the problems facing these male and female athletes in their preparations, they put in all their efforts to make a whole nation proud by their achievements," added the Iranian minister.



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (2nd R) and Sports Minister Kioumars Hashemi (3rd R) are pictured in a ceremony to honor Iranian medalists at international sporting events in Tehran, Iran on May 7, 2024.
● president.ir

Persian Gulf Pro League roundup: Foreigners on fire as Blues retain edge on top



Esteghlal striker Gustavo Blanco celebrates his stoppage-time winner in a 2-1 victory over Zob Ahan in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on May 6, 2024.
● PAYAM SANI/IRNA

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Argentine striker Gustavo Blanco banged in a 94th-minute winner as Esteghlal pulled off a second-half fightback to beat Zob Ahan 2-1 at home and stay on top of the Persian Gulf Pro League table. On a day that the Tehran archrivals had their foreign players to thank for their victories, Uzbek winger Oston Urunov found the net twice to help 10-man Persepolis walk away with a 2-1 win at Nassaji Mazandaran earlier on Monday. It took Urunov six minutes to bag his first goal when the host's Brazilian keeper Luan Polli made a mess of saving his low drive from the edge of the box. The Tehran Reds looked in control throughout the first half but a second booking for midfielder Soroush Rafiei five minutes after the break turned the game on its head. Things went from bad to worse for the visitors on the hour mark as international keeper Alireza Beiranvand could only watch Amirmohammad Houshmand's sizzling strike find the bottom corner. The champions still showed character

to restore their lead, courtesy of Urunov keeping composure in a one-on-one situation with Polli to put it away for his fourth goal in the Iranian top flight since joining Persepolis in February. Trailing the top by a single point before the game, Persepolis held out Nassaji's push for a second goal to seal the maximum points and remain in the hunt for a seventh league crown in eight years. Nassaji, meanwhile, was dealt a massive blow in the survival battle though the northern Iranian club was lucky to remain outside the relegation zone on goal difference after Foolad Khuzestan fell to a 2-0 home defeat against Tractor later in the day. **Blues on course** Persepolis's victory meant that Esteghlal kicked off the game at Tehran's Azadi Stadium second in the table and Majid Aliyari's delicate finish for the visiting side – the league's best team on the road prior to Monday's fixtures – six minutes into the game was the worst start Blues boss Javad Nekounam could have hoped for. Esteghlal fans had to wait until the 64th minute for a much-needed equal-

izer, when Uzbek midfielder Jaloliddin Masharipov dummied past a Zob defender before firing into the roof of the net. Esteghlal strikers Arman Ramezani and Payman Babaei were introduced late in a desperate quest for a winner though Zob looked more likely to score on the counter. With the two sides looking destined for a repeat of the scoreline in the reverse fixture last November, Blanco came to the rescue for Nekounam's side as he was first to a loose ball in the box before smashing it into top corner deep into stoppage time – sending the Blues bench and home crowd into a frenzy. The result saw Esteghlal restore the one-point cushion on top of the table with four games to spare, as one of the tightest races for the Iranian league trophy in recent years is set to go down the wire. Next for Esteghlal is another home game against Foolad, with Persepolis playing away to Masoud Shojaei's in-form Havadar. Elsewhere on Monday, Esteghlal Khuzestan salvaged a massive 1-1 draw at Sepahan to move above Nassaji and Foolad into safety zone on goal difference. Javad Aqaiepour equalized for the visitors with a sublime overhead kick midway through the second half to cancel out Shahriar Moghanlou's opener right before the break – a 15th goal of the campaign for the Sepahan striker who is clear on top of the league's leading marksmen chart. Rock-bottom club San'at Naft closed the gap on Nassaji and Foolad to three points with a 1-0 triumph over Mes Rafsanjan in Abadan, while Mohammad Omri converted from the spot late in the game to save Malavan a point in a 1-1 home draw against Havadar. Iralco defeated Paykan 1-0 in Tehran, with Shams Azar and Golgozar sharing the points in a goalless game on Sunday.

Iran's Esmaeili wins Asian youth boxing gold

Sports Desk



Iranian Amir Esmaeili finished his campaign at the ASBC Asian U22 & Youth Boxing Championships on a high note, bagging a precious gold medal in Astana, Kazakhstan. Representing the country in the men's youth contests, Esmaeili came out on top against Uzbekistan's Shahzod Polvonov by unanimous decision (5:0) for the ultimate prize of the super heavyweight (+92kg) class. This was a third medal for the Iranian youth team in Astana – after a couple of bronzes for Amir-Reza Soltani (54kg) and Amir-Reza Malek-Khatibi (86kg) – which saw the country finish fifth in the medals table. Kazakhstan bagged a remarkable 12 medals – including five golds – to stand atop the table, with Uzbekistan, India, and China in the following spots. The Iranian men's under-22 squad, meanwhile, managed to claim three bronze medals – courtesy of Mohammad Mahshari (75kg), Ali Seyyed-Sadri (86kg), and Reza Khalilzadeh (+92kg). More than 390 boxers from 24 countries fought for medals across 25 weight categories.