

# Iranians grab 10 medals, finish runner-up in Asian Poomsae Championships

Iran collected 10 medals to stand second in the team table at the Asian Taekwondo Poomsae Championships in Da Nang, Vietnam. Taekwondo powerhouse South Korea lifted the team trophy at the eighth edition of the competition, with the Chinese Taipei finishing third. The second day of the event saw the Iranians claim three medals – including one gold – across different age groups. Hossein Beheshti, Mahdi Jamali, and Ali Salmani teamed up to beat the host's trio to the ultimate prize in the men's team over-30 event. This was a second medal for Beheshti on Monday following a silver in the mixed pair over-30 contest alongside Atousa Farahmand, with Marjan Tajji and Yassin Zandi settling for a bronze in the under-30 class. Represented by nine athletes in Da Nang, Iran had picked up seven medals on the opening day. Mahdiyeh Oqbaei won a first gold

medal for Iran, thanks to a victory over South Korean Hana Lee in the women's under-40 final, while Yasaman Limouchi also finished her campaign on a high with a gold in the women's freestyle over-17 event.

Elsewhere in the

women's contests, Farahmand took the individual under-50 silver. In the men's draw, Zandi was unlucky to finish as the individual under-30 runner-up after a controversial defeat against South Korea's Kang

Wan-jin in the final showpiece. Jamali also finished Day 1 with a silver, coming short against Park Yong-hwa of South Korea in the under-40 final. Salmani and Mohammad-Taqi Hatami added a couple of bronze medals to Iranian men's medal count, standing on the

Abolfazl Zandi (-54kg) and Matin Rezaei (-63kg) will be in men's action as the six-time champion Iran will begin its quest for a first team crown since 2018.

Iranian Olympian Mahdi Haji Mousaei (-58kg) will be joined by Amir-Sina Bakhtiari (-74kg), and Mohammad-Hossein Yazdani (-87kg) in the men's bouts on Friday, with teenage prodigy Mobina Ne'matzadeh (-49kg), Elham Haqiqi (-62kg), and Melika Mirhosseini (-73kg) getting their campaigns underway in the women's competitions. Ali Khoshravesh, replacing injured captain Mirhashem Hosseini, will fight for the men's -80kg glory on Saturday, along with Aryan Salimi, who will take part in the +87kg weight class ahead of Olympic participation in the summer.

Yalda Valinejad (-67kg) will be the sole Iranian girl in action on the final day of the kyorugi competitions, which will be followed by the Asian Para Taekwondo Championships on Sunday.



## Persian Gulf Pro League

# Stakes high at bottom end as five teams seek survival

### Sports Desk

All eyes might be on Tehran archrivals Esteghlal and Persepolis in the two-horse race for the Persian Gulf Pro League crown, but the stakes are equally high at the bottom end of the table.

Separated by five points with three games to spare, five teams will give their all to secure a place in the Iranian top flight when the new season gets underway in late summer.

San'at Naft Abadan – rock bottom with 20 points – looks destined to start next campaign in the second tier for the first time in nine years.

Under new head coach Faraz Kamalvand, San'at defeated third-place Sepahan and Mes Rafsanjan in recent weeks but the massive results have done little to inspire the southern Iranian club, which has left the pitch empty-handed on 15 occasions while managing only four wins in 27 matches this season.

San'at will play Shams Azar

at home next before visiting Zob Ahan and then welcoming fourth-place Tractor for the final round of fixtures on May 31.

Sitting two points clear of their fellow-southern Iranian club in the table are Ahvaz city rivals Foolad and Esteghlal Khuzestan, which have three league titles between them since the Iranian Pro League was launched two decades ago, with the latter just outside the bottom two on goal difference. The addition of Brazilian Sávio Roberto and Iraqi striker Aso Rostam, among other signings, in the winter break saw Esteghlal Khuzestan – the last team other than the Tehran giants to win the league – enjoy a decent run in the second half of the season but the 4-1 humiliation against fellow-struggler Nassaji Mazandaran last time out was a major blow in the Ahvaz Blues' quest for an extended spell in the top-tier league.

Next for Sirous Pourmousavi's men is a daunting en-

counter with defending champion Persepolis at Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Tuesday, followed by a visit to Mes Rafsanjan and the home game against Havadar. Foolad, meanwhile, is on a 10-game winless run – suffering six losses in the process – and will need significant improvement in the remaining fixtures, starting with the home game against Zob Ahan.

Abdollah Veisi's side will square off against Paykan in the Foolad Arena on May 26 and finish its campaign with a trip to Qaemshahr to take on Nassaji in what could be a decisive battle for both sides.

Nassaji has been the most in-form team of the bottom five in the closing stages of the campaign under Saket Elhami, who parted ways with Mes in the mid-season to return to northern Iran, two years after steering the club to Hazfi Cup glory – Nassaji's maiden silverware in the Iranian club football.

The emphatic victory over

Esteghlal Khuzestan helped Nassaji move three points clear of the relegation zone but Elhami's side will still have to keep up the momentum in the remaining fixtures, the first of which will be at home against leader Esteghlal.

An away game at Havadar will come Nassaji's way in its penultimate fixture, followed by the final-day game against Foolad.

Paykan seemed to be secured a Pro League place for next season before a run of three successive defeats against Shams Azar, Iraco, and Zob Ahan sounded the alarm bells for Reza Enayati's side.

Tied with Nassaji on 25 points – with a better goal difference – Paykan will host Tractor and visit Foolad in its next two games, hoping to secure safety before the final day, which will see the Tehran club welcome Esteghlal in what may well be a must-win encounter for Javad Nekounam's Blues in their title quest.



Nassaji Mazandaran's Mohammadreza Azadi (c) celebrates a goal during a 4-1 victory over Esteghlal Khuzestan in the Persian Gulf Pro League in Ahvaz, Iran, on May 13, 2024.

● FFIRI



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola reacts during a 2-0 win against Tottenham Hotspur in the Premier League in London, Britain, on May 14, 2024.

● DYLAN MARTINEZ/REUTERS



## Guardiola feels Man City are 'serving for Wimbledon'

**REUTERS** – Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola has likened his side's final Premier League game of the season to "serving for Wimbledon" as they moved to the top of the table after beating Tottenham Hotspur 2-0 on Tuesday. Guardiola's side have 88 points, two clear of Arsenal, and will secure a record fourth successive league title if they beat West Ham at home on Sunday, the final day of the season.

"The tennis players say 'the serve to win Wimbledon', the last match, is the most difficult," Guardiola told the BBC. "We know what we're playing for. The tension is there. We have a day off, two days to prepare and then we will do our best," he added. City, who have kept up the pace in the title chase, are now unbeaten in 22 league games, while Arsenal, who need to beat Everton, will be

hoping for the best on Sunday. Guardiola also spoke about goalkeeper Ederson, who was treated on the pitch after being tripped by Cristian Romero and midfielder Kevin de Bruyne, and was forced to come off through injury. "Ederson had a problem with his eye, he couldn't see well, so the doctor said he had to come off. De Bruyne had injured his ankle," he added.