

# New era for Reds as Spanish coach Garrido enters unknown territory



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At first glance, the Persepolis job seems to be an ideal one for Spanish head coach Juan Carlos Garrido, who was officially unveiled as the Reds' new boss on Sunday. Having spent the best of his managerial career in the Middle East and North Africa region, the Spaniard takes over at a club that lifted a seventh Persian Gulf Pro League trophy in eight years last month – finishing runner-up to Esteghlal on the other occasion – while winning double Iranian cup titles and reaching the final showpiece of AFC Champions League twice in that period. Still, the Reds' supporters are far from finding out if the former Villarreal coach's appointment will be a success story or it will turn out to be the beginning of the end for the club's domestic dominance. When interim coach Osmar Loss Vieira refused to extend his contract in June, Persepolis faithful longed

for a prominent figure on their team's bench for the upcoming season. Several high-profile names in Italian Walter Mazzarri, Ajax coach John van 't Schip, and ex-Iran manager Dragan Skocic were brought up in the media for the role but the club ended up introducing a rather unfamiliar face in Garrido, whose trophy cabinet has been limited to a couple of titles with Egypt's Al Ahly and Moroccan club Raja Casablanca in the CAF Confederation Cup – the second-tier club competition in Africa – and now club hierarchy hope the fans will show patience with the Spaniard in the early stages of his reign. Garrido, meanwhile, will have to be up to the challenges facing him in the new job. The supporters and pundits will be quick to make comparisons between the team's performances under Garrido, who promised an attacking brand of football in his first press conference, and some free-flowing, offensive displays delivered on the Reds' best days under



New Persepolis head coach Juan Carlos Garrido (L) is seen in his first press conference in Tehran, Iran, on July 8, 2024.

his predecessors Brank Ivanovic, Yahya Golmohammadi, and Osmar in recent years. The Spanish coach inherits an aging squad, which had to

ride the winning mentality among the players in coming out on top in the past two closely-contested title races, not to mention several

instrumental players are on their way out of the club. Goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand and his fellow-Iranian international Mahdi Tora-

bi, the two linchpins of the team's success in recent years, are on the verge of signing for Tractor, with first-choice right-back Da-

nial Esmaeilifar set to join them in northwest Iran. Qatari fullback Abdelkarim Hassan, who made undeniable contribution to the title run since joining Persepolis in January, is also believed to be keen on returning to his home country, and Uzbek wizard winger Oston Urunov will miss the best part of the preseason due to international commitment in the Paris Olympics. Having already set about their summer transfer business, Esteghlal, Sepahan, and Tractor are expected to form another four-horse race for the title alongside Persepolis when the new campaign kicks off in late August, whilst Garrido will have less than two months to get to know the players at his disposal and instill his gameplans. In the meantime, club CEO Reza Darvish and technical director Hossein Badamaki will have to make sure the new signings will arrive in time to fit in the Spanish's tactics and formation ahead of what will be a hectic domestic and continental fixtures list for the club.



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## Iranian bodybuilders dominate Asian Championships

### Sports Desk

The Iranian bodybuilding team cruised to the men's title at the IFBB Asian Championships in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, thanks to a remarkable 25 medals – including 15 golds – across different age and height categories. Abolfazl Behzadi, Mobin Karimi, Seyyed Vahid Hosseini, Yasser Bekhrad, Amin Roshanaei, and Reza Beiranvand walked away with the ultimate prize of their respective weight classes in the bodybuilding contests, while Farshad

Ebadi and Mohsen Kohanjameh grabbed a couple of golds in the classic bodybuilding events. Abolfazl Hajibaqer and Hossein Farhang (physique), Hamid Gomeyzi (classic physique), Abolfazl Sedqi (master bodybuilding 40-44 years), Akbar Biklari (muscular physique open), Omid Zakeri (fitness open), and Mostafa Ezzati (fitness challenge) were also among the Iranian gold winners in the four-day event. There were further glories for veteran bodybuilder Kohanjameh and Ezzati, as

the former settled for two silver medals in the classic bodybuilding 40-49 years open and classic physique over 175cm contests, with the latter adding a fitness challenge silver to his personal tally. Mehran Raisi (men's bodybuilding +90kg) and Ali Safari (classic bodybuilding up to 171cm) also finished their campaigns with a silver medal. Sedqi, meanwhile, was handed a second medal when he finished third to Beiranvand and Raisi in the bodybuilding +90kg class – joining Seyyed Moham-

ad-Hassan Bohlouli (classic physique up to 175cm), Salar Honarmand (physique up to 176cm), and Ali Shafiei (fitness model open) in leaving the Mongolian capital with a bronze. The Iranian 22-man squad tallied 291 points for the top spot in the men's team table, followed by China and Japan, which finished on 258 and 221 points respectively. Iran also finished atop the male seniors' table with 263 points, with China (196pts) and Japan (135pts) completing the top three.

## France team shrug off critics as they look ahead to semis

REUTERS – France's players are having none of the criticism of their team at the European Championship after reaching the semi-final, insisting they have done sufficiently well to get them this far in the tournament. The French are through to the final four despite having only three goals – two own goals and a penalty – to their name and with much concern about the form of captain Kylian Mbappe and the vastly experienced Antoine Griezmann. "Personally, I don't care at all. In the end, we are semi-finalists," said midfielder Youssouf Fofana at a press conference on Sunday. He was one of the successful penalty takers in Hamburg on Friday as France edged Portugal on post-match kicks to advance to Tuesday's semi-final against Spain in Munich.

"As to the level of Antoine and Kylian, we must realise that it has been enough to get us to be semi-finalists. I don't see why we should look for the negative. "We need to pull in the same direction in order to lift the trophy, not worry that so-and-so is not in form or that the way we have been playing has not been good, because in the end, it's been enough to get us to the semis," Fofana added. Randal Kolo Muani, who was started against Portugal in the attack, backed Mbappe to still come good. "I wouldn't say he's had a poor tournament. He had a huge season, he scored more than 45 goals. Seeing him not score here, it's up to us to help him, to push him. The competition is not over. Apart from his broken nose, he's OK physically." Mbappe did net a penalty,

in the group game against Poland, but has not looked comfortable in a mask since breaking his nose at the start of France's campaign. Both players also rejected suggestions the level at Euro 2024 had proven disappointing. "Disappointing? I wouldn't say that. It's difficult to score, but I don't find it disappointing," said Kolo Muani. "Today's football is much more closed, much more tactical, played more without the ball," added Fofana. "It really is a game of chess." As for the semi-final against Spain, Kolo Muani said the French would be up to the task. "The matches are going to get harder and harder. They are one of the best teams in the tournament, playing very good football. We like big matches. We'll be ready by Tuesday."



France players celebrate after the quarter-final victory over Portugal in Euro 2024 in Hamburg, Germany, on July 5, 2024.

