

## World Junior Wushu Championships:

## Final-day heroics as Iran seals sanda crown



## Sports Desk

Iran claimed the sanda title at the World Junior Wushu Championships in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, thanks to a remarkable haul of seven gold medals and three silvers.

The country still had to settle for the fourth place in the overall standings – comprising sanda and talou competitions – with 23 medals, finishing behind China, Indonesia, and Malaysia, which bagged the same number of golds as Iran – nine – but stood third with more silvers. Iranian boys and girls stole the show on the final day of the competitions by collecting five golds and double silvers across different weight and age classes.

Abolfazl Asadi defeated China's Jinghua Liu for the boys' junior 65kg gold, while Amirhesam Mohammadi came out on top against Indonesian Genea Elyos Silaban to win the ultimate prize in the 52kg contests.

Meanwhile, Yekta Abdi, Saghar Hosseinzadeh, and Diana Rahimi were all victorious against Chinese opponents in their respec-

tive final showpieces, as Iran made a clean sweep of sanda golds in the girls' contests.

Adibi beat Jiaqi Lou in the junior 52kg final, with Hosseinzadeh outmuscling Baijin Yang for the 56kg prize, before Rahimi brought the curtain down on a perfect run for the Iranian girls with a victory over Miaoqi Ma in the 60kg final.

Elsewhere, Alireza Zamani settled for a silver in the children's 48kg contests after a final loss to Indian Shaurya.

Soroush Haji Mash'had also finished his campaign with a silver medal, suffering a final defeat against China's Fengjian Zhang in the junior 70kg final.

In the talou events, Sana Panahi won her second silver medal at this year's event when she scored 8.470 points to finish runner-up to the American opponent in the nanquan contest. Ramtin Siahmoshtei and Sana Chak were the most productive Iranians in the talou competitions, grabbing a gold, a silver, and a bronze medal apiece, while Arsham Khalilpour also enjoyed a decent campaign with a silver and a bronze medal.

## AFC Champions League Elite:

## Persepolis looking to build on momentum; Esteghlal eager to end blues

## Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League clubs Persepolis and Esteghlal will be back in AFC Champions League Elite action today, with the two Tehran archrivals on opposite ends of the spectrum as they head into their second continental outing.

Fresh from Wednesday's 1-0 triumph over Esteghlal in the league, Persepolis will be looking to take its domestic form into the home game against Uzbekistan's Pakhtakor, while Esteghlal is eager to bounce back from the derby disappointment when playing away to Qatar Stars League champion Al Sadd in Doha.

## Reds on the rise

The Reds faithful had major doubts about Juan Carlos Garrido being the right fit when the relatively unknown Spaniard took over at Persepolis in the summer, after the club had just won a seventh top-flight title in eight years but had to part ways with several key players in the

squad, including the Iranian international keeper Alireza Beiranvand and wizard winger Mahdi Torabi.

Despite a slow start to the season, Garrido has managed to prove his doubters wrong as his team is the only unbeaten side in the Iranian league after six rounds of matches and could go top of the table should it win its game in hand at Golgozar.

Persepolis might have felt unlucky to kickstart the revamped Asian Champions League with a 1-0 loss to Al Ahli Saudi, in a game that Garrido's men conceded an early goal but dominated against the star-studded host for the best part of the game, squandering numerous chances for an equalizer.

A repeat of the performance in Jeddah could be enough for Garrido's team to collect all points against the Uzbek guest, which also finished its ACL Elite opener empty-handed, suffering a 1-0 defeat against the UAE's Al Wasl in Tashkent.

Star winger Oston Urunov, who

missed the derby victory with an injury, was back in training on Sunday and is likely to start today's game.

## Writing on the wall for Nekounam

Esteghlal will step onto the pitch at the Jassim bin Hamad Stadium on the back of weeks of chaos and uncertainty swirling around the Blues bench.

Engaged in a never-ending run-in with the club hierarchy, head coach Javad Nekounam handed in his resignation in the aftermath of the derby defeat, only to see his decision rejected with the Al Sadd game looming.

It still seems to be a matter of time before Nekounam leaves the job, with a significant portion of the supporters having turned against him for his defensive approach after they were denied a first win against their city rivals since 2018.

Al Sadd has suffered three defeats in six QSL games this season and is six points adrift of Al Duhail on top of the table, though Akram Afif and his



teammates are flying high after a 4-2 beating of Al Gharafa on Thursday and will chase a first win in the new Asian competition following the 1-1 draw at

Al Ain.

Esteghlal, meanwhile, has been without a win in the domestic league since the opening-day victory at Shams Azar, but Nek-

ounam will be keen to build on the ACL 3-0 triumph over Al Gharafa in a last-ditch effort to turn the tables and save his career with the Blues.



## Barca boss Flick takes blame after squad rotation backfires

REUTERS – Barcelona manager Hansi Flick took the blame for his team's 4-2 LaLiga defeat at Osasuna on Saturday, saying that his decision to rest key starters had an impact in their first loss of the domestic season.

Leaders Barcelona went into Saturday's game on the back of seven consecutive wins to start the LaLiga season but were stunned by an Osasuna side that were lethal on the counter attack with Ante Budimir scoring a brace and Bryan Zaragoza a constant menace.

"You have to accept these defeats. We

didn't play very well. I think it's my responsibility," Flick told Movistar Plus.

"(With the rotations) I tried to protect the players, because they have been playing a lot of minutes. But I didn't expect us to play like this.

"We made a lot of mistakes and Osasuna did well. Although in the second goal I think there was a foul at the start of the action, I'm not entirely sure because I haven't been able to see it yet, but that's what I've heard. "To score four goals against us is too much, but I've told the team that we have to keep going. It's a busy schedule and

we are on the right track."

Flick was referring to a challenge by Osasuna midfielder Lucas Torro, who stood on Pau Victor's foot, in the buildup to Zaragoza scoring their second goal in the 28th minute.

The goal was given as neither the referee nor the VAR saw an infringement. "For me it is a clear foul," a visibly frustrated Pedri told Movistar Plus. "It's normal to make (team) rotations, there are a lot of matches. It's no excuse. We had to go out with 11 players and the score at halftime penalised us."