

## Khatoon set sights on further progress in Women's Champions League



● MEHR

### Sports Desk

Iranian club Bam Khatoon will aim to build on an impressive group-stage run and make a deep run in the inaugural AFC Women's Champions League when the knockout phase gets underway in March.

The 10-time Iranian league champion came from behind to beat Group B host College of Asian Scholars 2-1 last week and finish runner-up to Melbourne City with four points. The draw for the last eight of the competition is yet to be made, but young Khatoon striker Sara Didar says she and her teammates don't care who they will face in the next round's single-legged tie, insisting: "We won't be satisfied by just a place in the knockout stage."

"Just to progress from the group stage is not the ceiling of our ambitions. We've already set our sights on going further in the knockouts, no matter who our next opponent is going to be. Khatoon players and coaching staff are solely focused on victory in every game and will give their all to achieve that goal," added the Iranian teenager.

Having won two in two in the preliminary group, Khatoon began its campaign in Thailand with a 2-1 loss to the Australian champion and was left heartbroken by the 1-1 draw against Kaya of the Philippines after conceding the equalizer deep into stoppage time.

"Khatoon players did a great job in Thailand as nobody really expected us to qualify from the group. My players showcased the true potential of the Iranian women. They did themselves and their country proud," head

coach Marziyeh Ja'fari told IRNA. "The first game against Melbourne City was a really tough one. Australia is a powerhouse in women's football and Melbourne had nine international players in the squad.

"My players were inexperienced for an international competition, having played only six or seven games abroad over the past four years. They still showed remarkable confidence and delivered a decent performance despite ultimately falling short," Ja'fari added.

Khatoon's prolific striker Zahra Qanbari, who scored the 93rd-minute winner against the Thai club, hopes the recent success will help raise the profile of women's football in Iran. When asked about her jubilation after the final-day triumph, Qanbari said: "That strike was truly a milestone for Iranian women's football, as the last-eight berth was a remarkable achievement and a testament to the sport's significant growth in the country in recent years."

"Women's football was largely unknown in Iran before the tournament, with many people unaware of its existence, but I'm sure the latest success will contribute to its publicity among the Iranians."

The runner-up finish in the group meant Khatoon will face one of Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds, South Korea's Incheon Red Angels, or Ho Chi Minh City of Vietnam in the next round.

The semifinals and the final showpiece will be played in a centralized format in May next year.

## South African Mosimane appointed as Esteghlal head coach

### Sports Desk

South African Pitso Mosimane was named as the new head coach of Esteghlal, the Persian Gulf Pro League club confirmed late on Friday. Mosimane will join up with his new team in Dubai for Tuesday's encounter with Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr in the AFC Champions League Elite.

"Esteghlal F.C. is a very big club in the [Persian] Gulf region, with a long and illustrious history. The two Asian Champions League stars on top of their badge tell you what kind of club this is," Mosimane said in a statement.

"Their last trophy was won in 2022, and we can believe their fans are hungry for glory once again. The challenge that awaits us is steep, but it is our privilege to lead such a prolific club. I would like to thank the club leadership for placing their trust in us. We are ready to get to work," added the South African, who will be joined by four members of his technical staff in the new job. His appointment brings an end to

the Tehran Blues' desperate search for a permanent coach in recent weeks, after Javad Nekounam stepped down from his role in late September.

Nekounam, who led the club to a runner-up finish in the league behind archrival Persepolis last season, endured a poor start to the new campaign, with his team managing two wins in seven outings, while suffering three losses including the defeats in the Tehran Derby and against Al Sadd in the AFC Champions League Elite in Nekounam's last two games in charge.

Former Esteghlal center-back Sohrab Bakhtiarzadeh served as an interim coach over the past three weeks, leading the Blues to a 2-1 win at Havadar before a dreadful 3-0 loss to Zob Ahan at home on Friday saw them sit 11th in the league table - eight points adrift of the top. Mosimane's last job was at Abha, though it was one to forget as his team was relegated from the Saudi Pro League last season.

However, Esteghlal hierarchy still hopes the 60-year-old, an ex-head

coach of his national team, can build on a decorated career in African club football to restore the good old days for the Blues.

Mosimane steered Mamelodi Sundowns to five top-flight titles in his home country, as well as the 2016 CAF Champions League crown, during his six-year stint with the club, before joining Egypt's Al Ahly in 2020, where he won a domestic league and cup double in his first season.

The first non-Egyptian African to manage Al Ahly, Mosimane also lifted back-to-back CAF Champions League trophies with the Cairo-based heavyweight in 2020 and 2021, while his team finished third in the 2020 FIFA Club World Cup in Qatar thanks to a shootout victory over Brazil's Palmeiras.

South African head coach Pitso Mosimane signs his contract with Persian Gulf Pro League club Esteghlal on Oct. 19, 2024.  
● MT SPORTS



● REUTERS

## Martin takes pole in Australia Grand Prix qualifying

REUTERS - World Championship leader Jorge Martin of Pramac Racing put in an impressive performance on Saturday to take pole position ahead of six-time MotoGP champion Marc Marquez in qualifying ahead of today's Australian Grand Prix.

Martin secured his third consecutive pole at Phillip Island and sixth of the season with a stunning time of one minute 27.296, almost six tenths of a second

clear of Gresini's Marc Marquez, who had dominated the practice sessions.

Aprilia's Maverick Vinales was third quickest, clocking one minute 27.991 to complete an all-Spanish front row, and Marco Bezzecchi of VR46 Racing was fourth.

Two-time MotoGP champion Francesco Bagnaia of Ducati, who trails Martin by 10 points in the championship standings, finished

fifth after a slow tire change delayed his second run.

"For sure today it was a tricky day, with the wind it was drying fast, we didn't know what to expect in the track. Finally I was able to improve in the second run," Martin said in a post-qualifying interview.

"The race will be tough with Marc behind me but I think we are the best in terms of pace so let's go for a good one."