

AFC Champions League Elite: Persepolis out to end winless run

Economy Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League champion Persepolis will vie for a first victory in the new AFC Champions League Elite season when taking on Qatari giant Al Sadd in Doha today.

With just a point from their first two outings and on a run of five consecutive winless games on the continental stage, the Tehran Reds will hope to relive some of the fond memories of the previous meetings with their familiar foes when the final whistle blows at the Jassim bin Hamad Stadium.

The two sides have squared off on seven occasions in the competition over the past six years, with Persepolis coming out on top in four – including a last-eight 1-0 win in their last meeting in 2020.

Qatari international star Akram Afif provided his teammates with three assists to help Al Sadd defeat Al Shahaniya 4-2 in the Qatar Stars League on Friday, while Persepolis has not been in action since claiming a 1-0 victory over Chadormalou in the Iranian top flight a fortnight ago.

Persepolis head coach Juan Carlos Garrido will be without Iran international center-back Hossein Kan'ani and Uzbek star winger Oston Urunov due to injury, though the Spaniard will be happy to welcome back instrumental skipper Omid A'alishah

to the squad after recovering from a hamstring problem.

Meanwhile, Al Sadd fullback Pedro Miguel is set to be sidelined for three months after undergoing a surgery, with Algerian Youcef Atal also missing today's game with injury.

Al Sadd is third in the 12-team table of West Zone with four points – courtesy of a 1-1 draw at Al Ain and a 2-0 win at home against Esteghlal – while a first-day 1-0 loss at Al Ahli Saudi and the 1-1 draw against Pakhtakor in Tehran have seen the Reds sit ninth and outside the knockout spots.

Fresh start for Blues

Persepolis archrival Esteghlal will be back in Champions League action on Tuesday, playing Saudi Pro League giant Al Nassr in the neutral venue of Rashid Stadium in Dubai.

Having lost three of their last four games across all competitions, the Tehran Blues could hardly have asked for a more formidable opponent than Cristiano Ronaldo and co., who step into the game on the back of a 2-1 win at Al Shabab – thanks to a Portuguese star's 97th-minute penalty – in the Saudi Pro League on Friday and are yet to lose a game this season.

Esteghlal's desperate search for a permanent head coach following Javad Nekounam's departure last month came to an end with the signing of South African Pit-



● MOJTABA SALEH/AFC

so Mosimane on Friday night. However, Mosimane, whose Abha side was thrashed by eight goals against Al Nassr in April before being relegated from the Saudi Pro League, will

watch Tuesday's game from the stands, with interim coach Sohrab Bakhtiarizadeh remaining in charge of the bench, the club announced.

Hammered by Zob Ahan (3-0)

in the Iranian league on Friday, Esteghlal began its Asian campaign with a 3-0 win against Al Gharafa at home before falling to an away loss to Al Sadd and is fifth in the West standings with

three points.

Al Nassr, meanwhile, defeated Al Rayyan 2-1 but was held to a 1-1 stalemate at Iraqi side Al Shorta in Baghdad to stand above Esteghlal in the table.

ICF Canoe Polo World Championships: Iranian girls finish fourth to secure World Games berth



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Iranian women's team sealed a place in next year's World Games after a fourth-place finish at the ICF Canoe Polo World Championships in Deqing, China, on Sunday.

The Iranian girls started the final day of the competition with a 3-2 victory over Singapore, courtesy of goals from Fatemeh Jalilian, Atousa Eslami, and Elaheh Pourabdian, to finish runner-up to the Netherlands in Group WP and progress to the semifinals. Jalilian and Pourabdian were

again on the scoresheet but Iran fell to 7-2 loss to New Zealand in the last-four clash later in the day, before suffering a 2-1 defeat against the Netherlands in the third-place matchup – a third loss to the Dutch women for Iran at this year's event.

New Zealand went on to beat Italy in the final showpiece and lift the women's trophy.

Iranian women got off to a shaky start in the tournament, suffering back-to-back defeats against the Netherlands (6-2) and France (6-1), before bouncing back to beat the Chinese Taipei 3-2 and

stand third in Group WB. Iran defeated Spain 3-2 in their first Group WP game but fell short against the Netherlands and Team GB by the same scoreline (3-2) before beating the Switzerland 4-3 on the penultimate day of the competition.

In the men's draw, Iran had to settle for a 15th-place finish after a 7-4 win against Australia.

Having stood second in the Group MS table, Iran had come out victorious 7-2 against South Africa in the first game of the 15-18 classification round on the final day.

Sinner hopes for long rivalry with Alcaraz

REUTERS – The rivalry between Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz, the world's two highest ranked players, brings out the best in both, Sinner said on Saturday after beating Alcaraz in the final of the Six Kings Slam exhibition event in Saudi Arabia.

Sinner, who won 6-7(5) 6-3 6-3 to bag the \$6 million title, said he hoped for a long rivalry with Alcaraz, after Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic faced off for the final time in the third-place match earlier in the day.

"I wake up in the morning trying to understand the ways how to beat him. This kind of

rivalries, this kind of players, they push us always to our 100%," world number one Sinner said in a post-match interview.

"Hopefully this rivalry will last as long as possible. But there are so many other great players who can jump in ... let's see what's coming in the future," the 23-year-old said.

Italy's Sinner and Spain's Alcaraz have won two Grand Slams each this year, with Alcaraz beating Sinner in closely fought clashes at the French Open semi-finals and the China Open final.

The off-the-court friends have

played each other 10 times on the ATP tour, with 21-year-old Alcaraz winning six matches, including the last three.

"I will do everything so that this rivalry gets better and better ... I am happy to share the court with him," four-times Grand Slam winner Alcaraz said.



Italy's Jannik Sinner (L) poses with the trophy after winning the final against Spain's Carlos Alcaraz in the Six Kings Slam exhibition event in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Oct. 19, 2024.

● HAMAD I MOHAMMED/REUTERS

