

# AFC Champions League Elite: Persepolis, Garrido desperate to end drought in Dubai

## Sports Desk

Persepolis will be chasing a first victory at the rebranded AFC Champions League Elite when taking on Qatari club Al Gharafa in Dubai's Al Maktoum Stadium today.

It has been over a year since the Tehran Reds last walked away with a win at the top-tier Asian club competition – a 2-0 home triumph over Istiklol of Tajikistan in October 2023 – and another game without maximum points will put the Iranian champion's campaign in serious jeopardy. Stepping into the game on the back of 1-0 defeats at Al Ahli Saudi and Qatar's Al Sadd, either side of a 1-1 home draw against Pakhtakor, Persepolis is 10th in the West Zone's 12-team table, one point adrift of the last knockout spot with five rounds of matches to spare.

For all the domination and clear-cut chances that Persepolis had in the two away losses, Spanish head coach Juan Carlos Garrido was left ruing his side's poor finishing and will be hoping the Reds frontline will step up and find their scoring boots in Dubai. Garrido himself will have a personal streak to end, as the Spaniard has never won in nine Champions League outings, with the winless run stretching back to his time on Al Ain bench in 2019.

The good news for the Spanish coach is the return of prolific winger Oston Urunov, who missed four games with a hamstring injury but is available for



Persepolis striker Ali Alipour (c) is seen in action during a 1-0 loss to Al Sadd in the AFC Champions League Elite in Doha, Qatar, on Oct. 21, 2024.  
● PERSEPOLIS FC

selection today.

Iran international center-back Hossein Kan'anizadegan and Moroccan fullback Ayoub El Amloud are unlikely to feature despite flying to Dubai with the rest of the team.

Persepolis suffered a first domestic defeat of the campaign last time out, losing 1-0 at Es-

teghlal Khuzestan, while Al Gharafa is flying high after a 3-1 home win against Al Arabi in the Qatar Stars League on Thursday. Al Gharafa, which also got off to losing start in the competition – a 3-0 defeat away to Reds' archrival Esteghlal – sits seventh in the West Zone table with three points.

The Qatari side's impressive 4-2 win against defending champion Al Ain was undone by the 2-1 defeat to Al Wasl on Matchday Three.

The records are against Al Gharafa as Portuguese Pedro Martins's men have lost their last four away matches on the continental stage.

## Mosimane's mammoth mission

In Riyadh, South African head coach Pitso Mosimane, who has endured a tough start to life with Esteghlal since taking over a fortnight ago, will be eager to end the Blues' four-game losing streak in all competitions when they play away to a star-studded

Al Hilal in Riyadh.

Today's opponent, however, is the last team Mosimane would have wanted to face.

Looking to extend their perfect Asian run to four matches, The four-time champions have been in phenomenal form – unbeaten in 56 domestic games – though Friday's 1-1 draw at Al Nassr ended their eight-game winning start to the Saudi Pro League season.

A Champions League classic saw Al Hilal defeat Al Ain 5-4 on the road two weeks ago, while Esteghlal fell to a 1-0 loss to Al Nassr in Dubai.

Beaten 2-0 at home by Tractor on Thursday, the Capital Blues are struggling in the 14th place of the Iranian 16-team table – just a single point clear of the relegation zone – but they are still very much in contention for a knockout spot in the continent, sitting sixth in the standings with three points.

Elsewhere today, Emirati club Al Wasl will host Al Sadd, with Al Ahli Saudi – also on nine points – welcoming Iraqi champion Al Shorta in Jeddah.

Pakhtakor and Al Rayyan will square off in Tashkent, and Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr and Al Ain are tipped for a thrilling encounter in Riyadh on Tuesday.

## Cavs edge Bucks, improve to 7-0 in NBA

REUTERS – Donovan Mitchell buried a jumper with 0.3 seconds remaining as the Cleveland Cavaliers extended their unbeaten run with a 114-113 win over the host Milwaukee Bucks on Saturday night.

Mitchell had 30 points for the Cavaliers, who recorded their seventh successive victory, their best start to a season since Bill Fitch coached them to a franchise-record 8-0 start in 1976-77.

Sam Merrill contributed 17 points off the bench, including five 3-pointers, Jarrett Allen had 15 points and 12 rebounds, Evan Mobley had 14 points and seven boards and Darius Garland finished with 11 points and 10 assists.

Damian Lillard notched 41 points – including 10 3-pointers – and nine assists, Giannis Antetokounmpo piled on 34 points, 16 rebounds and nine assists and Taurean Prince scored 16 for the Bucks.

Elsewhere, Jayson Tatum pumped in 29 points and Payton Pritchard hit six 3-pointers on the way to 22 points off the bench as Boston Celtics defeated host Charlotte Hornets 113-103.

Jay Huff scored a career-high 20 points in 14 minutes to highlight a balanced attack by the Grizzlies in defeating 76ers 124-107 in Philadelphia.

RJ Barrett had 31 points, including five in overtime, and nine rebounds as Toronto

Raptors defeated visiting Sacramento Kings 131-128.

Buddy Hield scored 27 points off the bench and Jonathan Kuminga added six of his 23 points in overtime as Golden State Warriors scraped past Rockets 127-121 in Houston. Bam Adebayo had 32 points and grabbed 14 rebounds to lead Miami Heat to a 118-98 win over Washington Wizards in Mexico City.

Devin Booker recorded 28 points, nine rebounds and nine assists to help Phoenix Suns beat visiting Portland Trail Blazers 103-97.

Keldon Johnson poured in a season-high 25 points off the bench and Jeremy Sochan and Chris Paul amassed dou-

ble-doubles as San Antonio Spurs defeated visiting Minnesota Timberwolves 113-103. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 25 points and nine assists as visiting Oklahoma City Thunder remained unbeaten with a 105-92 victory over Los Angeles Clippers.

Nikola Jokic scored 18 of his 27 points in the third quarter, and host Denver Nuggets defeated Utah Jazz 129-103 for its first home win of the season.

Cleveland's Donovan Mitchell (45) puts up the game-winning shot against the Bucks in Milwaukee, WI, US, on Nov. 2, 2024.  
● AP



● SCOTT HEPPPELL/REUTERS

## Arteta has no complaints after Newcastle defeat

THE GUARDIAN – Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta had no complaints about his side's defeat at Newcastle but refused to concede that the title race is all but over.

"I am very frustrated, we deserved to lose today," said the Spaniard after Alexander Isak's fine first-half header secured Eddie Howe's team a first win in six Premier League games. "We got dragged into the game Newcastle wanted and not the

one we wanted. But you have to be at your best in every game to give you a chance to win."

Not that Arteta has abandoned hope of overhauling Liverpool and Manchester City at the top of the table. His team are seven points off the lead. "After 10 games we are not going to find the answer now," he said. "It is not about winning the title, it is about being our best version every week. We have to put it right on Wednesday."

If Arsenal's impending Champions League date with Internazionale at San Siro promises to offer an intriguing litmus test of the team's resilience, Arteta must once again cope without his key midfielder Martin Ødegaard, who is injured. "We don't have him," he said bluntly. "We can discuss that all day long but we have many other answers that are very effective."

Those alternatives failed against

a Newcastle side that even Arteta, who has rarely seen eye-to-eye with Howe, seemed grudgingly to admire here. "They are really good at what they do," he said. "They drag you into the sort of game they want. They are all big and very physical, Joelinton especially."

Asked whether he needed an Isak, Arteta demurred, insisting: "No, I love my players and I wouldn't change them for anyone."