

Persian Gulf Pro League:

Persepolis stunned by Nassaji; Esteghlal continues revival under Mosimane

Sports Desk

A run of poor results and performances continued for Persepolis as the Persian Gulf Pro League champion suffered a 1-0 home defeat against bottom club Nassaji Mazandaran.

Meanwhile, Esteghlal's resurgence gained momentum under head coach Pisto Mosimane thanks to an impressive 2-0 away victory over Foolad Khuzestan in Ahvaz.

At Shahr-e Qods Stadium, Persepolis frontline, spearheaded by Issa Alekassir, was wasteful again, while Nassaji's Brazilian goalkeeper Luan Polli was in dazzling form, as Kevin Yamga's 25th-minute strike was enough to secure a first victory of the campaign for the northern Iranian club.

The visiting side went down to 10 men with 16 minutes left after midfielder Alexander Merkel was dismissed for dissent, but the home side still failed to capitalize on the advantage, struggling to break through Nassaji's solid backline.

There were more red cards in the stoppage time with Nassaji's Armin Sohrabian and Persepolis fullback Ayoub El Amloud receiving marching orders for a second booking.

A second league defeat of the season heaped further pressure on Spanish head coach Juan Car-



Persepolis winger Oston Urunov is frustrated during a 1-0 loss to Nassaji Mazandaran in the Persian Gulf Pro League in Tehran, Iran, on Dec. 7, 2024.
● ALI SHARIFZADEH/IRNA

los Garrido, despite a promising start to his reign on Persepolis bench.

The disappointing run in the AFC Champions League Elite,

coupled with the team's insipid displays and defensive vulnerabilities, has put Garrido under scrutiny in recent weeks, and with crucial away

games against Malavan and Sepahan on the horizon, the Spaniard faces a race against time to turn the Reds' fortunes around.

Blues on the rise

The woeful early days of the new season under Javad Nekounam now seem like a distant memory for Esteghlal fans, after their

team built on a decent performance in the away draw against Saudi giant Al Ahli to walk away with a massive victory at Foolad Khuzestan.

Brazilian center-back Raphael Silva headed home on a corner-kick with three minutes into the game at Foolad Arena, before Amirali Sadeqi put the Blues in the driving seat midway through the first half with a superb strike from the edge of the box.

Uzbekistan international Jaloliddin Masharipov delivered a man-of-the-match performance by dictating the tempo in the middle of the pitch to help Esteghlal claim a fourth win in 11 league outings and move up to eighth in the top-flight table.

With Mosimane's evolution picking up pace, Esteghlal supporters are still hopeful their team will return to the title race in the coming weeks.

Next for Esteghlal is a home tie against Mes Kerman in the Hazfi Cup on Wednesday before the Blues host Golgozar Sirjan on their return to league action on Sunday.

Wrestling wunderkind Khalili demonstrates credentials for senior success

Sports Desk

The final showdown of the Iranian Premier League marked another significant milestone in the rapid rise of wrestling prodigy Sina Khalili, who is making a strong case for a place in the country's freestyle national team.

A world and Asian under-17 champion last year, Khalili stole all the headlines when he outclassed two-time world senior silver medalist Amir-Mohammad Yazdani 14-5 in a thrilling 70kg bout to inspire Saipa to a comeback victory over Shahr Bank at the Azadi 12,000-seater Hall in Tehran on Friday. The 18-year-old had be-

gun the day with a 2-1 win against Kurban Shiraev in the semifinals, making up for the 5-2 loss to the Russian at the Poddubny Wrestling League 7 in Moscow in November.

Khalili was to represent the country at the World U23 event in October, but had to skip the tournament to fill in for injured Yazdani at the Seniors World Championships.

He got off to flying start in Tirana, defeating Belarusian Niurgun Skriabin and former world bronze medalist Alibek Osmonov of Kyrgyzstan by technical superiority, though he ultimately finished his campaign empty-handed following a 6-5 loss to

Tajikistan's Russian-born Abdulmazhid Kudiev in the quarterfinals.

His brave and impressive performances in the Albanian capital still convinced head coach Pejman Dorostkar to name him in the Iranian squad for the head-to-head against Russia.

"Sina was exceptional today," Saipa head coach Gholamreza Mohammadi said of his performance in the league on Friday, adding: "He is one of the bright talents in the new generation of Iranian wrestlers."

"This is just his first year in the junior level, though he is already a contender for a seniors' national

team spot, as he is keen on world and Olympic glory in the near future," added the four-time world medalist.

Khalili's display on Friday was reminiscent of reigning world super-heavyweight champion Amirhossein Zare's rise to prominence back in the 2019 edition of the Iranian league, when he, at 18 years of age, overcame a nine-point deficit to beat then-world champion Geno Petriashvili.



Sina Khalili (L) is seen ahead of a freestyle 70kg bout in the Iranian Wrestling Premier League in Tehran, Iran, on Dec. 6, 2024.
● IAWF



Iran's Pakdaman drops to 11th in FIE World Ranking

Sports Desk

Iranian fencer Ali Pakdaman descended by two spots to sit 11th in the men's senior saber category of the FIE World Rankings.

The latest ranking was released after the conclusion of the Grand Prix Nuoma in France, where Pakdaman, 34,

defeated Polish fencer Marcel Broniszewski 15-13 but suffered a 15-9 loss to Yago Moran of Spain in the round of 32.

South Korea's Oh Sang-uk – a team and individual gold medalist at the Paris Olympics – topped the ranking, with Tunisian Farès Ferjani, who was beaten by the

South Korean in the Olympic final, and Ziad Elsisy of Egypt in the following spots.

Pakdaman was part of the Iranian men's saber squad that reached the team semifinals at the Paris Games, but missed out on the podium after a last-four defeat against Hungary was

followed by a loss to the host in the bronze medal contest.

Pakdaman then spearheaded the country to a team silver medal at the FIE Coupe du Monde last month, courtesy of defeat against South Korea in the final showpiece in Oran, Algeria.