

Garrido on the brink as Persepolis hits new low in Iranian top flight

Sports Desk

Spanish coach Juan Carlos Garrido's tenure at Persepolis could be cut short after just six months, following the defending champion's latest setback in the Persian Gulf Pro League.

A 3-1 home loss to Mes Rafsanjan on Saturday saw the Tehran Reds match their worst record of four defeats after 13 games into a league campaign over the past nine seasons. Persepolis's set-piece vulnerability was exposed again as Amirhos-

sein Jolani and German fullback Kofi Schulz scored on two corner kicks, giving the visitors a 2-0 lead in the first half. Ali Alipour pulled one back from the spot for Garrido's side after a VAR review deemed Schulz to have fouled substitute

striker Lucas Joao, but Mohammad Alinejad restored the two-goal cushion in the 11th minute of added time, finding the empty net from 40 yards out, as Mes celebrated a third victory of the season to move up to 13 in the 16-team table.

A win would have seen Persepolis close the gap on top of the table after both Tractor and Sepahan dropped points, but the Reds - seven-time champions in the past eight seasons - are now fourth, trailing the top two by five points and one point behind Yahya Golmohammadi's Foolad Khuzestan.

"I don't really have any explanation for the first-half goals. It wasn't a tactical issue, but unforgivable individual errors," Garrido said after the game, taking a veiled swipe at Iranian international center-back Hossein Kan'anizadegan, who was clumsy on both goals before being taken off

at the break.

"We can't afford to gift the opponent these kinds of goals. You have to be more focused in those situations. A defender has to be more resilient on set pieces and aware of where the ball is going. We were simply dreadful and disgraceful, and I can only apologize to the fans for today's performance," added the Spaniard, whose team was the only unbeaten team in the league until October 30 but has now lost four in six outings.

Rumors and speculations are already swirling around the future of the Reds' bench following the defeat. Several reports in the Iranian media

on Sunday suggested that the club hierarchy is willing to part ways with Garrido in the coming days, with chairman Reza Darvish in talks with the Spaniard to agree on a compensation fee.

With the club also struggling in the AFC Champions League Elite, sections of the Reds crowd at the Shaher-e Qods Stadium were outspoken in showing their frustration in the closing stages of Saturday's game, calling for the Spanish coach to step down from his role.

Next for Persepolis is a home game against Khaybar on Friday, followed by a visit to bottom side Havadar on January 1 before the midseason break.

Tractor stunned, Sepahan held

Persepolis is still lucky to remain five points adrift of the summit, after Tractor suffered a shock 1-0 defeat at home against Shams Azar earlier in the day, while second-place Sepahan salvaged a point in a 1-1 draw away to Golgozar Sirjan.

In Tabriz's Yadegar-e Imam Stadium, Shams Azar keeper delivered a man-of-the-match performance as Mojtaba Najjarian's first-half strike proved the difference between the two sides, ending Tractor's run of five consecutive league wins.

Despite the remarkable victory, Shams Azar remains

second from bottom in the table with 13 points.

Tractor will be eager to get back in the ways when playing Nassaji Mazandaran on the road next, with Shams Azar looking to build on Saturday's triumph against Golgozar at home.

Sepahan missed a glorious opportunity to overtake Tractor on top of the standings, though Patrice Carteron's side still felt fortunate to leave the pitch with a point after finding a controversial late equalizer.

Reza Asadi came off the bench to bag his first goal for Sepahan in 284 days in the 86th minute, cancelling out Alireza Alizadeh's

second-minute opener for the home side, though TV replays clearly showed the ball going in off the striker's arm.

Second to Tractor in the table on goal difference, Sepahan will take on Havadar on Friday, and then visits Tehran for a highly-anticipated encounter with Esteghlal at the renovated Azadi Stadium.

Elsewhere, Hassan Shoushtari's 16th-minute spot-kick helped Zob Ahan beat Malavan 1-0 at home.

A third league defeat in a row left Maziar Zare's Malavan in the fifth place with 18 points, with Zob Ahan in seventh with 17.



IRNA

'Judges gave Usyk Christmas gift': Fury on rematch loss



Unified heavyweight champion Oleksandr Usyk (R) lands a punch on Tyson Fury during a world title fight in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on December 21, 2024.
 © RICHARD PELHAM/GETTY IMAGES

BBC - Tyson Fury refused to accept he lost his rematch against unified heavyweight champion Oleksandr Usyk and claimed the judges gave his opponent a "Christmas gift". All three judges scored the fight 116-112 in Usyk's favour, handing the Ukrainian a second successive win over Fury. Fury and his promoter Frank Warren were both adamant the Briton had done enough to win the contest in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

"The judges gave him a Christmas gift," Fury said. "I feel like I won both fights. "I know I had to knock

him out but it's boxing and this happens. There is no doubt in my mind I won this fight.

"Frank [Warren] had me three or four rounds up and a lot of people had me up by at least two." Fury, 36, did not answer any questions in the ring after the bout, choosing to head backstage where he eventually spoke to the media.

"I'm not going to cry over spilled milk, it's over now," Fury added.

"I've been in boxing my whole life but I'll always feel a little bit hard done by - not a little bit, a lot." Queensberry's Warren made clear his frustration with the result in

the ring and continued to make his case for a Fury win afterwards.

"I'm dumbfounded at how they [judges] scored it," Warren said.

"His jabbing was superb, his footwork was superb, he wasn't slow. He was very evasive."

Victory for Usyk extends his unblemished record to 23 victories and further strengthens his claim as one of the greatest of this generation.

"Uncle Frank, I think he is blind," Usyk said.

"If Tyson says it is a Christmas gift, then OK, thank you God, not Tyson. Thank you to my team."

Iranian weightlifter Keshtkar wins Asian youth bronze

Sports Desk

Iran's Maryam Keshtkar won a first medal for the country at the Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships in Doha, Qatar, bagging a bronze in the women's competitions.

A first lift of 94kg saw the Iranian girl finish third in the clean & jerk discipline of the 59kg class in the youth age group. Having registered 67kg with her third snatch attempt, Keshtkar went to stand fifth in total with 161kg.

Uzbekistan's Marjon Abdumutalova made a clean sweep of triple golds, thanks to an 84-103-187 record, followed by Kazakhstani duo Darya Balabayuk and Nursuila Berikbol, who tallied 185kg and 165kg in total respectively.

The event, featuring 127 male and 110 female weightlifters from 19 Asian countries, will continue in the Qatari capital until Wednesday.



IWFIR

Barca disappointed after Atletico loss but life goes on, says Flick

REUTERS - Barcelona extended their poor run of form and slipped off the top of LaLiga by losing 2-1 at home to Atletico Madrid on Saturday but coach Hansi Flick urged his side to move on and come back stronger after the winter break. Barca have now gone three games without a LaLiga win having picked up five points out of a possible 21, suffering defeats by Leganes and Las Palmas in their previous two home games. They are three points behind Atletico having played a game more. Despite their first home defeat against Atletico in 18 years, Flick said they

put on a good performance and expected the winter break to help them regain their early season form.

"Today it was unbelievable how we played. Maybe this break came at the right time. I appreciate how we played. But we have to learn from these things. Losing nine points is not normal and we have to work on it," Flick told reporters.

"The points lost against Las Palmas and Leganes are in the past. We will show after the break how strong we are. We are very disappointed with the defeat, but life goes on." In spite of their latest setbacks, the

former Bayern Munich coach said he was proud of his young team and will work to restore their confidence.

"When I drive at 0630 to go to training I am happy because I can train with these players. Now there is not a good atmosphere in the dressing room, but that's football. We will be back for sure," he said.

"We have to build confidence and make them proud of how they play. My job is to give confidence to all the players. In Munich there was another team with a lot of experienced players. But I'm happy with this team, it's young and has fantastic quality."