

Bagheri tipped to showcase coaching credentials on Persepolis bench



Sports Desk

Persepolis's interim coach Karim Bagheri has been backed by high-profile figures in Iranian football for a permanent role on the Reds' bench.

The former Iranian international midfielder was given the caretaker job for the upcoming two fixtures in the Persian Gulf Pro League, after ex-Spanish head coach Juan Carlos Garrido parted ways with the club by mutual consent, following a 3-1 home loss to Mes Rafsanjan on Sunday.

A fourth defeat in six league outings left the defending champion in the fourth place of the Iranian top-flight table with 23 points – five points

adrift of top two Tractor and Sepahan and one behind Foolad Khuzestan. Persepolis will take on Khaybar at home on Friday and then plays away to bottom-side Havadar next Wednesday before heading into the mid-season break.

The club hierarchy has reportedly begun seeking a new foreign coach, with numerous names popping up in the Iranian media in recent days to replace Garrido before Persepolis resumes league action against Zob Ahan on January 21.

Widely regarded as one of the finest players of his generation, 50-year-old Bagheri has served as an assistant coach during Persepolis's domestic dominance over the past decade, working under Ali Daei, Branko Ivankovic, Gabriel Calderon, Yahya

Golmohammadi, Osmar Loss Vieira, and, most recently, Garrido.

However, Bagheri, the club captain in the 2000s, has repeatedly insisted over the years that he has no intention of being the number one in the Tehran Reds' dugout, though some retired players believe he will have to seize the opportunity in the upcoming double-header to justify an extended tenure.

Persepolis legend Ali Parvin, who coached Bagheri in Persepolis and the national team, said in an interview on Tuesday that he will try to convince him to stay on as the head coach.

"I think he will be the best fit for the job if his team wins the next two games," Parvin said.

"I will surely persuade him to continue as the manager. That's how I

became the Persepolis head coach – starting with the interim role for a couple of matches," said Parvin, adding that Bagheri has "a decent group of players at his disposal" to succeed. Meanwhile, Khodadad Azizi, who formed a deadly trio with Daei and Bagheri in Team Melli in the late 90s, said he was thrilled to see his former international teammate given the job, though he believes Bagheri deserves a long-time contract.

"I think Persepolis should offer Karim a deal until the end of the next season. In my eyes, he is the all-time greatest player in Iranian football. He has worked as an assistant coach at the club for years and now deserves a shot at the managerial role. I truly wish him the best of success at the job," Azizi said.

Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships: Iranians excel with 15 more medals

Sports Desk

The Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships continued with 15 more medals, including triple golds, for the Iranians on the penultimate day of the competitions in Doha, Qatar.

Aria Paydar headlined Iran's medal hunt on Tuesday, making a clean sweep of golds in the men's junior 109kg contests.

The Iranian lifted 169kg in his third snatch attempt and then registered 211kg in the clean & jerk discipline to finish on 380kg in the total standings.

Joining Paydar on the podium was fellow-Iranian Hassan Emadi, who tallied a 164-195-359 record to collect the snatch and C&J bronzes,

before settling for the total silver.

There were further medals for the Iranian boys in the men's 102kg event, where Alireza Nassiri bagged three silvers with a 171-218-389 result, while Abolfazl Zare' won three bronze medals, courtesy of a 172-194-366 finish.

In the women's draw, Kizhan Maghsoudi added three silver medals to Iran's haul.

Representing the country in the junior 87kg class, the Iranian girl raised 94kg above her head in the snatch contest, before overcoming the 115kg weight in the C&J event for an overall 209kg tally.

Tuesday's results took Iran's haul to a remarkable 45 medals, including 10 golds, in the Qatari capital.



● IWFFR

Gakpo hopes Salah will extend Liverpool stay



● HARRY MURPHY/GETTY IMAGES

PA MEDIA – Cody Gakpo is hopeful that his Liverpool teammate Mohamed Salah will extend his stay at Anfield. The 32-year-old Egypt forward is out of contract at the end of the season and a new deal is yet to be agreed.

Salah has been in sensational form this season and the two goals he scored against Tottenham on Sunday took him above Billy Liddell into fourth place on Liverpool's list of all-time leading goalscorers.

"It's very special what we are all witnessing," Gakpo told the club's website. "The amount of goals he scores but the assists he gives as well, the way he plays the game, how he puts other attacking players or midfielders like myself in a position to score and to be dangerous is from a high level."

"I hope for us and for him that he can continue doing that for a long time. We are very lucky to have him and proud that we can be his teammate[s] and try to make him better. And he is trying to make us better as well."

Gakpo has also been a key man in Liverpool's surge to the top of the Premier League table, scoring nine goals, including seven in his past 12 games in all competitions. The Dutch international joined Liverpool two

years ago after stellar performances at the World Cup, and he expressed his hope to stay at the club for "many more years".

Gakpo said: "I enjoy every minute I'm here. It has been a fantastic two years for myself. A lot of things happened obviously – a lot of good moments, some less good moments – but a lot of things that I've learned. I'm very happy to be here at the club, hopefully for many more years. I think now we are in a good place as a team and I'm very happy that I can contribute as well."

Boxing Day will bring an Anfield reunion for Gakpo with the Leicester City manager, Ruud van Nistelrooy, with whom he worked at PSV Eindhoven. Having begun his tenure with victory over West Ham, Van Nistelrooy has been quickly brought down to earth by heavy back-to-back defeats against Newcastle and Wolves.

"He was the striker coach for me when I was in the first team a little bit and also when I was in the academy," Gakpo said of Van Nistelrooy. "I learned a lot from him and I'm very grateful for all the lessons. He was also my head coach in the last half-season I was at PSV, so very grateful for all the lessons he taught me and it was an honour to get all those teachings from him."