

# Persian Gulf Pro League review: Limouchi hits hat-trick, Sepahan routs Havadar to go top

## Sports Desk

Mahdi Limouchi scored a sensational hat-trick to inspire Sepahan to a 5-0 home demolishing of Havadar in the Persian Gulf Pro League on Friday.

Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi and Reza Asadi were also in the scoresheet, the latter finding the net from the spot, as Sepahan overtook Tractor on top of the league table with 31 points, while Havadar, which had Omidreza Ravankhah as the new head coach on the bench, remained rock-bottom with eight points. Stunned by a 1-0 home loss to Shams Azar last time out, Tractor left the pitch without a win for a second running after a 1-1 away draw against Nassaji Mazandaran.

Nassaji defender Amirmohammad Houshmand headed home on a corner kick with 19 minutes into the first half, before Mahdi Torabi bagged an equalizer 17 minutes from normal time.

A heated quarrel between Tractor's Mahdi Hashemnejad and Nassaji center-back Vahid Mohammadzadeh led to chaotic scenes in the stoppage time at the Vahani Stadium, with the former and his head coach Dragan Skocic receiving their marching orders.

The result saw Tractor drop to second in the table with 29 points, with Nassaji sitting 12th on 14 points.

### Caretaker contribution

Interim coach Karim Bagheri got off to a winning start on Persepolis bench as the Tehran Reds



▲ Sepahan's Reza Asadi (5) and Mahdi Limouchi celebrate a goal during a 5-0 victory over Havadar in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium, Isfahan, Iran, on Dec. 27, 2024.  
● SAJJAD HOSSEININEJAD/FOOTBALL.NET

came from behind for a hard-fought 2-1 victory over Khaybar at home.

The visitors were rewarded for their brave start at the Shahr-e Qods Stadium when they took a shock lead through Aref Rostami's point-blank header midway through the first half, piling fur-

ther pressure on the defending champion, which had stepped onto the pitch on the back of four defeats in six league outings.

Under-fire strikers Ali Alipour and Isa Alekasir, however, came to the Reds' rescue in the second half to avoid a third con-

secutive home defeat for Persepolis.

Having missed a couple of clear-cut chances earlier in the game, Alipour held his nerve when he was sent through on goal by Soroush Rafiei's long ball in the 53rd minute to draw the home side level.

Desperate for his first goal of the campaign, Alekasir ended his 10-game drought with four minutes left on the clock, tapping into the roof of the net on Oston Urunov's low cross. Alipour thought he had his second of the night in added time, only to see his strike ruled out

by a VAR review for an Abolfazl Babaei's foul in the buildup to the goal.

Maximum points saw Persepolis overtake Foolad Khuzestan, which had shared the spoils with Esteghlal Khuzestan in a goalless Ahvaz Derby on the preceding night, and move up to third with 26 points.

Khaybar, meanwhile, is third from bottom in the 16-team standings, standing just above the relegation zone thanks to a better goal difference on Shams Azar.

Elsewhere, Omid Latifi and Mohsen Azarbad scored second-half goals to lead Zob Ahan to 2-1 away win against Mes Rafsanjan.

Mahdi Sharifi caught the deficit to one in the 91st minute, but it proved too little too late for Masoud Shojaei's men, who are 13th in the table – equal on 13 points with Khaybar.

In Qazvin, an Ali Qorbani's last-gasp header gave Golgozar a 1-0 win against Shams Azar, while Malavan played to a 1-1 home draw against Irarco at home.

Reza Ghandipour found the net for the home side in the 21st minute, before Amin Kazemian restored parity with a stunning strike 12 minutes later to join Limouchi on top of the league's leading marksmen chart with six goals.

On Thursday, Esteghlal played to a goalless stalemate on the road against Chadormalou to remain 10th in the table with 17 points – a third league draw in a row for the Tehran Blues ahead of the highly-anticipated visit of Sepahan.

## Greco-Roman National Championships:

# Yousefi wins 130kg title to make case for national team spot

### Sports Desk

Former world champion Ali-Akbar Yousefi showcased his credentials for a place in the Iranian squad by winning the 130kg gold at the Greco-Roman National Championships – the opening phase of the national team trials for next year's World Championships – on Friday. Outscoring his three opponents 23-1 en route to the final, Yousefi dominated Morteza Alghousi by a 10-1 superiority to secure

the ultimate prize of his weight class, throwing down the gauntlet to fellow-superheavyweight Iranians Amin Mirzazadeh and Fardin Hedayati, who are the reigning world senior and under-23 gold medalists respectively. Elsewhere in the three-day event, Iman Mohammadi – a world junior and U23 champion in 2022 – edged out Mohammad-Javad Rezaei 4-3 in a thrilling 72kg final, with Mohammadreza Gholami overcom-

ing Armin Moheb-Sabet 5-2 in the 67kg showdown. Gholamreza Farrokhi cruised to a superiority win (8-0) against Mohammadhossein Azarm-dokht for the 82kg title, while a cagey 97kg final saw Hamidreza Badkan beat Mohammad-Hadi Seydi 2-1. Friday's results came after Mahdi Ahadi had walked away with the 55kg gold on the preceding night in Shiraz, thanks to a 3-1 victory over Kianoush Shamshiri.

Pouya Nasserpour defeated Mohammad-Javad Aboutaleb 4-0 in the 60kg final, and Mohammad-Mahdi Keshtkar won the 63kg gold, courtesy of a 6-1 win against Ali Hajivand. Amin Kavianinejad – an Asian Games silver winner last year – rounded off his campaign with a 5-4 win against Ali Abdi in the 77kg final, with reigning four-time Asian champion Nasser Alizadeh beating Behrouz Hedayat 6-3 for the top podium in the 87kg event.



Iranian wrestler Ali-Akbar Yousefi reacts after the victory in the 130kg final in the Greco-Roman National Championships in Shiraz, Iran, on December 27, 2024.  
● IAWF

## Court rejects Barcelona appeal for Olmo registration



● MARCA

BBC – Barcelona's appeal for the precautionary registration of Dani Olmo for the rest of the season has been rejected, meaning the Spain international may not be able to play for the club from 1 January.

Olmo, 26, was signed from German side RB Leipzig for a reported 60m euros (£51m) in August.

However, the attacking midfielder was registered only for the first half of the season as Barcelona could not meet La Liga's wage cap restrictions.

La Liga welcomed a court's decision to reject the club's

appeal.

"La Liga has today learned of the ruling... rejecting the request for the provisional registration of Dani Olmo until June 30, 2025, on the grounds that none of the necessary conditions for the adoption of an interim measure have been met," said the Spanish league.

"The ruling also stresses that 'the purpose of allowing additional spending is so that a long-term injury does not weaken the team's competitiveness, not to use a long-term injury to allow the registration of players whose salaries exceed the limit,

which is what FC Barcelona is attempting"

Barcelona registered Olmo after their squad was hit by long-term injuries, allowing the club to allocate a portion of their wages to register the player. His four-month allowance will expire at the end of December and the Commercial Court number 10 of Barcelona rejected the club's request to provisionally register him.

Spanish media reported Barcelona have filed an appeal to the magistrate court which will be heard on Monday, a day before the deadline.

La Liga said the decision not to register Olmo, who was a youth player at Barcelona but left for Dinamo Zagreb aged 16, was initially taken by its Budget Validation Body.

It was then confirmed three times by its Financial Fair Play Committee, its Social Appeals Committee and by the Uefa Second Instance Licensing Committee of the Spanish Football Federation.

Olmo, who helped Spain win the European Championship in the summer, has scored six goals in 15 appearances for Barcelona this season.