



shababalahi.ae

## UAE Pro League: Azmoun continues dazzling form as Shabab Al Ahli edges Al Ain

### Sports Desk

Iranian striker Sardar Azmoun was on target yet again as Shabab Al Ahli defeated Asian champion Al Ain 1-0 in the UAE ADNOC Pro League.

A ninth victory in 11 games saw Shabab Al Ahli move atop the Emirati top-flight table with 29 points – one point clear of Sharjah.

Azmoun's tap-in from close range on Guilherme Bala's low drive went in off goalkeeper Khalid

Eisa's hand to take the Iranian's tally to eight goals in nine league games, leaving him third in the leading marksmen's chart following Al Ain's Kodjo Laba (14) and Syrian Omar Khribin (10) of Al Wahda.

Laba had the chance to add to his haul five minutes before the interval, only to see his effort from the spot kept out by Hamad al-Meqebaali.

Azmoun, who left Bundesliga outfit Leverkusen to join Shabab Al Ahli in

the summer, has been enjoying a prolific debut season in the Asian club football, contributing with a remarkable 17 goals and four assists in 19 appearances across all competitions.

The 30-year-old's most productive campaign came in the 2019/20 season, when he bagged 21 goals in 38 games, including 17 strikes in the league to help Zenit St. Petersburg lift the Russian top-flight trophy. He netted 19 goals the

following campaign to inspire the Russian heavyweight to a third successive league crown, while claiming the Player of the Season prize.

Elsewhere in the latest round of fixtures in the Emirati League, Iranian forward Shahriyar Moghanlou found the net twice for Ittihad Kalba but Al Nasr pulled off a sensational fightback, with Othmane Boussaid scoring the winner in stoppage time, for a 3-2 win.

### 2025 Karate 1-Series A:

## Iranians collect double golds, one silver on Day 1

### Sports Desk

The first day of the Karate 1-Series A event in Tbilisi, Georgia, saw Iranian contestants bag three medals, including double golds. Four-time Asian bronze medalist Fatemeh Sadeqi defeated Lo Sum Man of Hong Kong (41.4-40) in the final to walk away with the ultimate prize in the women's kata event on Friday.

Portuguese Natacha Fernandes and Mai-Linh Bui of France won the joint-bronze medals of the category.

In the men's kumite contests, an all-Iranian final showpiece saw Mahmoud Ne'mati overcome Mohsen Safarnejad for the gold in the +84kg weight class, with Turkey's Fatih Sen and Russian Kovalev Kirill – participating as a neutral athlete – sharing the third podium.

Elsewhere on Day 1, Greek girl Kyriaki Kydonaki came out victorious against Zeyna Gaballa of Turkey in the women's kumite +68kg final, while Oshiguchi Syota beat fellow-Japanese Ken Okamoto to the men's kata gold.

More than 1100 karatekas from 87 countries take part in the three-day opening event of the international karate season.

The Karate 1-Series A will be back in Larnaca, Cyprus, on February 14, with Salzburg and Kuala Lumpur also hosting the series throughout the season.



Iran's Fatemeh Sadeqi (R) poses with her women's kata gold at the Karate 1-Series A event in Tbilisi, Georgia, on January 10, 2025.

INSTAGRAM



## Kyrgyz international Kojo joins Esteghlal

### Sports Desk

Kyrgyz international striker Joel Kojo joined Persian Gulf Pro League club Esteghlal on Saturday. The contract will see Kojo, 26, who joins from Dinamo Samarqand in the Uzbekistan Super League, commit his future to the Theran Blues until the end of the 2027/2028 season.

The financial terms of the deal remain undisclosed, but Dinamo coach Vadim Abramov said after the league's final game in December that the Kyrgyz international, who had a year left on his contract with the Uzbek club, would be released if "his \$300,000 asking price is met."

Kojo netted 11 goals and provided his teammates with four assists in 27 games across all competitions, as Dinamo finished eighth in the top-flight 14-team table.

Capped 23 times for Kyrgyzstan, the Ghana-born striker has 10 goals under his belt since making his international debut in June 2023 – including a double during a 3-2 home defeat against Iran in



AFC

the World Cup Asian qualifiers last November.

Kojo is the second winter signing for Esteghlal's South African head coach Pitso Mosimane, following Kenyan forward Masoud Juma, who has one goal in three games since joining the Blues as a free agent in November.

Kojo's first game for Esteghlal, which is 10th in the Iranian top-flight table with 18 points, will

come at home against Shams Azar on January 20.

The Capital Blues are eighth – last qualification spot for the knockout phase – in the West Zone's 12-team table of the AFC Champions League Elite with two games to spare.

Mosimane's side will host bottom-club Al Shorta of Iraq on February 3, before visiting Qatari outfit Al Rayyan two weeks later.

## Alcaraz reaping rewards of Sinner rivalry

REUTERS – Four-times Grand Slam champion Carlos Alcaraz said having a rival like world number one Jannik Sinner was good for his game as it pushes him to be at his best every time he walks on court.

Alcaraz won the French Open and Wimbledon titles last year while Sinner claimed the Australian Open and U.S. Open trophies as the pair heralded a new era for the men's game by shutting out 24-times Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic. "When you face the best player in the world, you have to do something different, different preparation, or have a different mindset," said Alcaraz, who won all three of his matches against Sinner last year to improve his head-to-head record to 6-4.

"If I have a bad day against

Jannik, it's 99% that I'm going to lose. That's what is in my mind every time I'm going to play against him," the world number three added.

Alcaraz, 21, is bidding to become the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam at the Australian Open, which begins today. Reclaiming the top ranking is another goal for the Spaniard.

"The good thing for me is when I'm seeing him

winning titles, when I'm seeing him at the top of the ranking, it forces me to practice harder every day," Alcaraz told reporters at Melbourne Park on Saturday.

"In practice, I'm just thinking about the things that I have to improve to play against him.

"That I think is great for me, having him, have such a great rivalry so far, just to give the best of me every day."



GETTY IMAGES