

# Sepahan wins Iranian Clasico to lift Super Cup trophy



Sepahan players celebrate lifting the Iranian Super Cup trophy after a 1-0 victory over Persepolis at the Imam Khomeini Stadium, Arak, Iran, on January 17, 2025.

## Sports Desk

Steven Nzonzi's early strike saw Sepahan edge Persepolis 1-0 in Arak's Imam Khomeini Stadium to win a maiden Iranian Super Cup title on Friday.

Former France international headed home an Arya Yousefi's long throw two minutes into the game as the Hazfi Cup champion lifted a first trophy under French head coach Patrice Carteron. Persepolis dominated the ball possession in both halves but was again wasteful in front of the goal, with Sepahan keeper Payam Niazmand denying the Tehran Reds on several occasions, as Karim Baqeri suffered a first defeat in three outings as the interim coach.

An assistant to his Spanish predecessor Juan Carlos Garrido, Baqeri went on to confirm in the post-match press conference that this was his last game in the caretaker role, urging the club hierarchy to hire the new manager ahead of a hectic fixtures list. Chasing an eighth domestic league crown in nine years, Persepolis will visit Zob Ahan on return to top-flight action on Tuesday, before taking on title rivals Tractor and Sepahan in the league and cup, as well as Saudi giants Al Hilal and Al Nassr in the AFC Champions League Elite, during a seven-game schedule over the next 30 days.

"We had more of the ball throughout the game but failed to capitalize on our chances and an error in marking in the early stages eventually cost us," Baqeri said after the game.

When asked about his future on the Reds bench, Baqeri said: "I already said yesterday that I wouldn't be the head coach under any circumstances after the Super Cup game. The club is working hard on it and I just hope the new manager is unveiled as soon as possible."

Meanwhile, Carteron was thrilled by the "morale-boosting" victory for his men in the quest to end their decade-long drought in the Iranian top division.

"The result will definitely have a positive impact on our campaign. Our team has had a better head-to-head record against Persepolis over the past 10 years, but they have won more trophies. So, we will just have to build on the confidence to continue with the right mindset and make sure we won't lose much points in the future league games," said the Frenchman, whose team has been unbeaten in seven games, winning five, since he took over from Portuguese Jose Morais in November. Sepahan is second to Tractor in the table on goal difference – three points clear of Persepolis in third – at the halfway point of league, resuming the competition at Chadormalou on Tuesday.

## Iran confirms lineup for Karate 1-Premier League event in Paris

### Sports Desk

Tokyo Olympic champion Sajjad Ganjzadeh will headline the Iranian squad in the upcoming 2025 Karate 1-Premier League season opener – starting Friday in Paris.

Ganjzadeh will be joined by former Asian champion Saleh Abazari and Mahdi A'ashouri in the men's kumite +84kg contests, with Ali Meskini – an Asian silver and bronze medalist – and Amirreza Borzouei taking part in the -60kg and -67kg events respectively.

Bahman Asgari – world champion in 2018 – will be among the favorites

for the ultimate prize in the -75kg weight class, and two-time world gold medalist Mahdi Khodabakhshi will represent the country in the -84kg competitions.

In the women's draw, Fatemeh Sadeqi will be chasing a second individual kata gold in two weeks, having stood atop the podium in the Karate 1-Series A event in Tbilisi earlier in January.

Ma'soumeh Mohsenian will be the Iranian girl in the kumite -50kg contests, while Taravat Khaksar (-55kg), Atousa Golshadnejad (-61kg), and Mobina Heidari (-68kg) will be looking to build on their bronze-win-

ning campaigns in last September's Asian Championships when making a first international appearance of the year.

Some 400 karatekas from 70 countries, including all 12 grand winners of last season's competitions, will vie for success in the French capital. The event comes after Iranians bagged 12 medals – including six golds through Sadeqi, Sara Bahmanyar, Mehrnegar Ahmadi, Vahab Shamir, Mahmoud Ne'mati, and Morteza Karimi in different men's and women's categories – to finish atop the table in the first Karate 1-Series A event in 2025.



Tokyo Olympic champion Sajjad Ganjzadeh (R) will represent Iran in the men's kumite +84kg contests at the Karate 1-Premier League event in Paris.

## Sinner swats aside Giron to reach Australian Open fourth round

Italy's Jannik Sinner is in action during his Australian Open third-round match against American Marcos Giron in Melbourne, Australia, on January 18, 2025.

● KIM KYUNG-HOON/REUTERS



REUTERS – Defending champion Jannik Sinner was not at his fluent best but still had too much firepower for unseeded American Marcos Giron as he sealed a 6-3 6-4 6-2 win and reached the fourth round of the Australian Open on Saturday. Sinner came into the contest on Rod Laver Arena having won all 13 of his previous Grand Slam meetings against players from the United States and the Italian made a quick

start and never looked back as Giron's hopes faded with the setting sun.

"Every match has its own difficulties," said Sinner, who produced 35 winners but also had 37 unforced errors in a little over two hours of action.

"I struggled to return the first serve. I have room to improve but every win is great in these conditions. I'm happy to be in the next round." The top seed saved a late break

point and then served an ace to take the first set in only 34 minutes, before shrugging off a series of uncharacteristic errors on his forehand in the next to extend his lead in the match with a rasping winner. World number 46 Giron pulled back a break early in the next set but a foot injury left him unable to move freely and Sinner got his nose in front again and closed out a comfortable victory on serve.

## PSG sign Napoli forward Kvaratskhelia until 2029

Paris St-Germain have signed Napoli forward Khvicha Kvaratskhelia until June 2029.

The Georgia international, who was linked with Liverpool and Chelsea, asked to leave Serie A leaders Napoli last week after failing to agree a contract extension.

While no details of the transfer fee have been disclosed, reports say French champions PSG have paid 70m euros (£59m) plus add-ons for Kvaratskhelia.

"It's a dream to be here," said the 23-year-old winger. "I've heard so many positive things about PSG."

"I feel immense pride in joining this great club and I'm really looking forward to wearing my new colours."

Kvaratskhelia – who was part of the Georgia side that reached the last 16 at Euro 2024 – was dubbed 'Kvaradona' by supporters during Napoli's title-winning campaign, after the club's iconic player Diego Maradona.

He joined Napoli in 2022 for £9m from Georgian club Dinamo Batumi and has claimed a

combined 54 goals and assists in 107 appearances.

Kvaratskhelia is PSG's first signing of the January transfer window and becomes the first Georgian player in the club's history. "Khvicha is one of the most exciting players in world football – a fantastic talent, but also a

player who has courage and fights for the team above all else," the club said.

PSG are seven points clear of Marseille at the top of Ligue 1 and visit Lens on Saturday, before hosting Manchester City in the Champions League on Wednesday.

