

Persepolis makes bid for ex-Fenerbahce coach Kartal: Report



● tgrthaber.com

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League champion Persepolis has made a move for former Fenerbahce head coach Ismail Kartal, according to Iranian sports website Varzesh3.

Kartal, 63, has been without a job since parting ways with the Istanbul-based club last June, making way for Portuguese Jose Mourinho ahead of the ongoing Turkish Süper Lig season.

Kartal took charge of the Fenerbahce bench for a second spell by the start of the 2023/24 campaign and led his team to 31 wins in 38 outings as the Yellow Canaries finished second to city rival Galatasaray despite a remarkable 99-point tally.

Persepolis hierarchy has been desperate to appoint a new head coach after sacking Spanish Juan Carlos Garrido in late December, with several

high-profile names, including former Napoli boss Walter Mazzarri and Spanish Rafael Benitez, lined up for the role in the Iranian media over the past four weeks.

Varzesh3 added that the Reds' negotiations with Kartal could fall through as the club is reluctant to meet his massive salary demand of \$3.5 million per season.

Karim Baqeri, an assistant to Garrido, took over from the Spaniard as the interim coach and led the Reds to back-to-back home wins against league strugglers Khaybar (2-1) and Havadar (5-0) before his team suffered a 1-0 loss to Sepahan in the Iranian Super Cup match on Friday.

Baqeri insisted after the Sepahan loss that the game was his last in the caretaker role, urging the club to hire the new manager ahead of a hectic fixtures list.

"I have already said 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," said the Persepolis great, who has been tipped by former teammates and the club veterans to remain at the job until the end of the season.

Chasing an eighth domestic league crown in nine years, Persepolis is third in the table at the halfway point of the campaign with 29 points – three points adrift of Tractor and Sepahan on top.

The Tehran Reds will visit Zob Ahan on return to top-flight action on Tuesday, before taking on Tractor, in the league, and Sepahan, in the Hazfi Cup last 16, 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.

Iranian Mesigar calls time on international beach soccer career

Sports Desk

Iranian beach soccer great Moslem Mesigar brought the curtain down on an illustrious international career during a friendly victory over Belarus in Bushehr, southern Iran, on Saturday.

Movahed Mohammadpour and Ali Nazem were on the scoresheet as Iran came out 2-1 winner in the first part of the double-header against the European opponent in

Mesigar's home town.

Having made his international debut in 2006, Mesigar, 40, was on target to help Iran beat Italy 5-3 to the World Cup third place in Bahamas in 2017, and then captained Team Melli to the same feat in the United Arab Emirates last year – thanks to a 6-1 win against Belarus.

He won three Asian Cup titles with the country in 2013 and 2017, and 2023, claiming the Most Valuable

Player prize in the latest occasion in Thailand.

Mesigar was also an integral part of the squad when Iran lifted the Beach Soccer Intercontinental Cup trophy in 2013, 2018, 2019, and 2022.

Iranian Moslem Mesigar is thrown up in the air by teammates after his final game for the national team in Bushehr, Iran, on January 18, 2025.

● AFP



Alcaraz through to quarter-finals after Draper retires

Carlos Alcaraz reached his second Australian Open quarter-final on Sunday when his opponent Jack Draper retired injured when trailing 7-5 6-1.

The third-seeded Spaniard was well on top in the afternoon match at Rod Laver Arena against the Briton, who exited the court for a long medical time-out between the sets. "This is not the way that I want to get through to the next round. I'm just happy to play another quarter-final here in Australia," Alcaraz said on court.

"But really sorry for Jack. He doesn't deserve to get injured. He couldn't prepare the start of the season well."

It was the second time Draper retired injured against Alcaraz, having cut short their 2023 match at Indian Wells due to an abdominal strain.

Alcaraz will meet the winner of 10-times champion Novak Djokovic and Jiri Lehecka, who play in the evening session, as he bids for a first semi-final at Melbourne Park.



● REUTERS

Draper, the 15th seed, came into the match after winning three five-setters in the opening rounds.

A hip problem had hampered his preparations for Melbourne Park, forcing him to cancel plans to train with Alcaraz in Southern Spain during the off-season and to pull out of the United Cup team event.

Yet he would still have hoped to give Alcaraz a proper match, having proved a handful for the Spaniard previously.

Draper upset Alcaraz on

grass at Queen's in the lead up to Wimbledon last year and took a set off him in their first meeting at Basel in 2022.

The 23-year-old Briton dropped serve in the sixth game on Sunday but broke back to 5-4, leaving a frustrated Alcaraz ranting at the chair umpire about towels and serve clocks.

But while Alcaraz was still in search of his best tennis, Draper gifted him two set points with a wild forehand error.

The Briton saved one with a rush to the net and a

volley into the corner but was picked off on the second as a sprinting Alcaraz whipped a forehand passing shot down the line.

The Spaniard's momentum was stalled briefly when Draper called for a trainer and exited the court for a long medical time-out.

When play resumed, however, Alcaraz roared through the second set in just 38 minutes.

"I had already said before the match that this team has grown a lot. Don't forget that just over two months ago, Atalanta put three goals past us at home," Conte told re-

porters. "I think if we'd had even more time to go through the process, we'd have done even better. The team has above all grown in dealing with difficulties, that is what I want to underline."

Conte acknowledged the challenges his side faced with key player Khvicha Kvaratskhelia having left for Paris St Germain and defender Alessandro Buongiorno sidelined due to injury.

"We are facing some situations, both in terms of injuries and most recently the transfer market, situations that would kill a bull,

but we are still standing," he said. "We don't complain, we keep working and I always say that I have a group of players who are eager to work hard. The improvement of each individual player then allows us to improve collectively too."

Conte declined to talk about finding a replacement for Kvaratskhelia. "I leave the decision to the club. I don't get into the transfer market," he said. Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini took the defeat in stride. "I maintain we emerge stronger from games like this. We now have the Champions League, then Serie A and the Coppa Italia, we are playing every three days, so we do not have time for regrets over a result that didn't go our way," Gasperini told Sky Sports Italia. "It's fine, we have to focus on our journey and perhaps today we paid a heavy price, in other games we were luckier, but overall I saw a great performance."

Conte highlights Napoli improvement after Atalanta win

Napoli manager Antonio Conte praised his side following a narrow win over Atalanta at Saturday, highlighting the significant growth the team has shown over the past few months.

Romelu Lukaku's late header secured a 3-2 victory for Napoli, boosting their Scudetto hopes and avenging their 3-0 home loss to Atalanta in November.

"I had already said before the match that this team has grown a lot. Don't forget that just over two months ago, Atalanta put three goals past us at home," Conte told re-



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