

Esteghlal relieves pressure after 2-0 win at PGPL

Sports Desk

Esteghlal FC claimed a 2-0 victory against their rival from the south-east of Iran, Esteghlal Khuzestan, on the 8th matchday of the Iranian Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL) on Thursday.

Mosimane had signed with the Persian Gulf Pro League team based in Tehran in October 2024. Sohrab Bakhtiarizadeh has been named the Esteghlal football team's interim coach. After Esteghlal's 2-0 win over Esteghlal Khuzestan, Bakhtiarizadeh

there is a future for Esteghlal this season, Bakhtiarizadeh emphasized: "Football is like life, and you should always have hope. The fan has the right to be upset, and maybe they talk about different options. Fans want Esteghlal not to be in this position in the table."



Esteghlal FC players celebrate a penalty goal by Ramin Rezaeian (standing R) against Esteghlal Khuzestan on Matchday 8th of the Iranian Persian Gulf Professional League in Tehran, Iran, on January 30, 2025.
● IRNA

Ramin Rezaeian scored both goals for the Tehranian team at the minutes of 72 and 90+2 both from the penalty spot. With the win, Esteghlal moved up two spots on the PGPL table, relieving the increased pressure after their South African Coach Pitso Mosimane suddenly canceled his contract on Tuesday following the club's failure to observe its financial obligations.

dodged the question of whether Mosimane would have played with the same lineup if he were still at Esteghlal, saying, "I had the least share in today's win, as the players really tried hard and had good discipline. The players fought with motivation and had good support from the fans." In response to the fact that Esteghlal fans are disappointed with the team on social media and whether

Esteghlal currently sits 8th in the Iran league's 16-team table, while Esteghlal Khuzestan are in the 11th place on the table. In a moment of honesty, he maintained, "I have had tough days and am still having them, but I have learned that football is like a family, and if I have any discomfort or complaint, I will never say it in front of the cameras because we are like a family."

"I was asked to help after the previous technical staff in such a critical situation, and I came without any expectations. If the club does not want to cooperate with me at any moment, I will leave with honor, and I will even proudly say that I would do menial tasks for Esteghlal."

Stressing that he was not as close to Mosimane as his four non-Iranian assistants, with whom he had been working for 10 years, Bakhtiarizadeh claimed that he was not upset about this "because when a coach comes to a new team, at first, he does not ask what someone like Sohrab says; rather he goes to his assistants."

"I was with the technical staff and had no interference in choosing the lineup," he concluded.

The Esfahani team Sepahan are standing at the top with 38 points, followed by the Tabrizi team Tractor with 35 points in second place. Foolad are in the third place with 34 points, followed by Persepolis in the fourth spot with 33 points.

However, the table is bound to change as other teams, especially all the top four teams, play their matches from Friday to Sunday.



Sohrab Bakhtiarizadeh, the interim coach of Esteghlal FC

English teams reach Europa League last 16

Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur were joined by Rangers as three British clubs secured their spots in the Europa League last-16 on the final round of group games on Thursday. United, who like Tottenham have endured a disappointing Premier League season, won 2-0 at Steaua Bucharest to continue their recent upturn in form, Reuters wrote. Second-half goals by Diogo Dalot and Kobbie Mainoo silenced a raucous home crowd as United finished third in the table behind Lazio and Athletic Bilbao.

"When you get to this stage of any competition, anything is possible and they can prove they can win against anybody," United manager Ruben Amorim said. Tottenham eased to a 3-0 victory over Swedish side Elfsborg with youngsters Dane Scarlett, Damola Ajayi, and Mikey Moore all netting their first goals for the club. The victory saw Spurs finish fourth, although their joy was dampened slightly by an injury to defender Radu Dragusin. "I'm sure those boys won't sleep tonight, but we needed that. We needed some energy — we

kind of designed the game today. We're trying to protect some of our players; we've got a big week coming up, and we were going to need the young boys today, and they stood up," under-pressure manager Ange Postecoglou said. Rangers began the evening outside the top eight but a 2-1 home victory against Belgians Union Saint-Gilloise and results elsewhere enabled them to jump into eighth place and avoid having to enter the knockout phase playoffs. Nico Raskin headed the opening goal and Vaclav Cerny slotted a second for Rangers.

Lazio finished top of the rankings although they suffered a 1-0 defeat at Braga. Ricardo Horta's sixth-minute goal proved enough for the Portuguese side although they bowed out after finishing 25th in the league. Second-placed Athletic Bilbao beat Viktoria Plzen 3-1 with Nico Williams, Yeray Alvarez, and Javier Marton on target. AS Roma secured their place in the playoffs with a 2-0 home win over German side Eintracht Frankfurt who still reached the last-16 automatically by coming fifth. Goals from Angelino and Eldor Shomurodov made sure Roma finished in 15th spot. Olympique Lyonnais secured direct entry to the last 16 despite a lackluster 1-1 home draw against already-eliminated Ludogorets. Corentin Tolisso opened the scoring early in the second half after benefiting from a defensive blunder before Dinis Almeida leveled with 13 minutes left. Greek side Olympiacos finished seventh to go directly to the last 16 after a resounding 3-0 win over Qarabag. Jose Mourinho's Fenerbahce scraped into the playoffs in 24th position with a 2-2 draw at Midtjylland proving just enough as other results went in their favor. Former European champions Porto also flirted with elimination but a 1-0 win over Maccabi Tel-Aviv courtesy of a Nico Gonzalez goal helped them to 18th place and playoff.



Manchester United player Diogo Dalot (20) celebrates after scoring the opener against Steaua Bucharest at National Arena on January 30, 2025.
● ANDREEA ALEXANDRU/AP

Iran volleyball to play Italy in friendly match

Iran's national volleyball team will play Italy in a friendly match. Team Melli, headed by Italian coach Roberto Piazza, is preparing for the 2025 Volleyball Nations League (VNL). The volleyball federation of Iran has also reached an agreement with Argentina for a friendly match. Iran will commence the tournament on June 11 with a match against host Brazil and face the US and Slove-

nia in the subsequent days. The Persians will also meet Ukraine on June 15. Iran's volleyball team will lock horns with hosts Serbia on June 25 in Belgrade in Week 2. Team Melli will also play Argentina (June 27), Germany (June 28), and the Netherlands (June 29). Iran, in Week 3, is scheduled to play host Poland on July 16 in Gdansk. It will face China (July 17), France (July 19), and Bulgaria (July 20).



Iran's national volleyball team (front) plays against Italy in the 2024 Volleyball Nations League (VNL) on May 25, 2024.
● AMIRHOSSEIN KHEIRKHAH/I.R. IRAN VOLLEYBALL FEDERATION