

Khatoon secures 11th league crown, continues reign in Iranian women football

Sports Desk

Bam Khatoon defeated Malavan FC 2-0 on Thursday to secure a record-extending 11th title – fourth in a row – at the Iranian Women's Pro League.

Fatemeh Pasandideh found the net for the visitors in the 42nd minute and Fatemeh Geraeili doubled the lead for Marzieh Ja'fari's girls 10 minutes from normal time.

With one game to spare, Khatoon is top of the 10-team table with 49 points, thanks to 16 wins in 17 outings – scoring 67 goals, while conceding only five.

Thursday's triumph was Khatoon's 61st victory in a remarkable 69-game unbeaten run in the league. Having finished runner-up to Melbourne City in Group B of the AFC Women's Champions League last August, Khatoon will play away to South Korea's Incheon Red Angels in the single-legged quarterfinal of the inaugural competition on March 22.

It was a neck-and-neck race on top of the standings up until last week, before Khatoon walked away with a massive 2-0 win at Sepahan to steer clear of its nearest rival.

Sepahan was held to a 1-1 stalemate at home against fourth-placed Ista Kurdistan on Thursday to remain second with 43 points – nine points clear of Golgozar Sirjan.

Elsewhere, Ava Tehran fell to a 2-1 home defeat against Tam Isfahan to join Setaregan Salimi in relegation to the second division.

Setaregan suffered a 3-0 loss to Golgozar – a 17th defeat in as many games for the bottom club – while Palayesh Gas shared the spoils with Taran Alborz in a 1-1 draw at home to sit third from bottom with 14 points – four above the relegation zone.



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Karate 1 Youth League: Iranians grab nine U21 medals in Fujairah

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Iranians collected nine kumite medals – including triple golds – in the under-21 age group at the first series of the Karate 1 Youth League in Fujairah, UAE, on Thursday.

Abolfazl Hamdamjou came out on top against Saudi Arabia's Sultan Al-Qahtani in the final to walk away with the ultimate prize of the men's -60kg contests. Hamdamjou's fellow-Iranians Mohammad Shirsefat and Sepehr Arabi joined him on the podium

after winning the joint-bronze medals of the podium.

In the women's draw, Fatemeh Yousefi won the -55kg gold, thanks to a final victory over Polina Lavrova – participating as a neutral athlete – while Hannaneh Salehi also finished her +68kg campaign on a high, defeating Arika Gurung of Nepal in the final showdown.

Elsewhere, Paria Alizadeh had to settle for a silver medal in the women's -61kg event, following a final setback against Altana Basangova – also a neutral par-

ticipant – with Iran's Mehrnegar Ahmadi and Belgian Amel Bougrine taking the bronze medals. There were further bronze medals for the country in the men's competitions, with Mohammad-Javad Safari and Siavash Dehqani sharing the third podium in the -75kg class.

The inaugural Karate 1 Youth League will continue with junior and cadet competitions until Sunday, with the event returning with the second series in the Spanish city of Guadalajara on April 3.

Bakhtiarzadeh walks out of Esteghlal interim job

Sports Desk

Interim coach Sohrab Bakhtiarzadeh parted ways with Persian Gulf Pro League club Esteghlal on Thursday – less than 48 hours after leading the Tehran Blues to the round of 16 at the AFC Champions League Elite.

Needing a draw in the final league phase game to secure a knockout spot, Esteghlal walked away with a 2-0 win at Al Rayyan on Tuesday – thanks to second-half goals from Mohammadreza Azadi and Alireza Koushki – to finish sixth in the west zone's 12-team table with nine points.

As if Esteghlal fans needed more reason to celebrate only a second victory in eight outings at the competition, Tuesday's

result saw their city rival Persepolis – eighth in the table prior to the game – drop to ninth and miss out on the knockout phase.

Next for Esteghlal in the revamped tournament is a two-legged tie against Saudi Pro League heavyweight Al Nassr, with Cristiano Ronaldo and co. visiting Tehran's Azadi Stadium on March 3, before the two sides square off in Al-Awwal Park in Riyadh a week later.

Speaking the post-match press conference on Tuesday, Bakhtiarzadeh said: "Esteghlal's future is most important to me and I think now is the right time for the club to bring in a decent manager and coaching staff."

Esteghlal has been reportedly in talks with Italian Walter

Mazzarri for the permanent role in recent weeks with club CEO Mohammad Nazari Jouybari confirming on Friday that the Blues "are nearing agreement" with the former Napoli boss.

Bakhtiarzadeh took the interim role for a second spell this season when former South African head coach Pitso Mosimane walked out the job in late January.

Esteghlal won three games and drew two during Bakhtiarzadeh's second stint – including an extra time 2-1 win at Shams Azar in the Iranian Hazfi Cup last 16.

The Blues are ninth in the Iranian top-flight table with 23 points – trialing the tip by 18 points – ahead of today's home game against Nassaji Mazandaran.



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