

Persian Gulf Pro League:

Title hopes, reputation on the line
in 105th Tehran Derby

Sports Desk

Persepolis will be looking to salvage its dismal season, while Esteghlal will fight for its reputation when the city rivals square off in the 105th Tehran Derby today.

A hard-fought 1-1 draw at Iralco last time out saw Persepolis fall further behind in the title race. The third-placed Capital Reds are now trailing Tractor and Sepahan by six and five points, respectively, at the top of the Persian Gulf Pro League table and any result other than maximum points could all but finish the champions' bid for an eighth top-flight trophy in nine seasons with nine games remaining in the campaign.

Persepolis has managed a single victory in six games across all competitions under new head coach Ismail Kartal, crashing out of the Iranian Hazfi Cup and the AFC Champions League Elite in the process.

Another disappointing result and performance today could pile pressure on the Turkish manager in the early days of his Persepolis reign, leaving the club on course to finish the season without silverware.

Kartal went on to rue his injury-hit, narrow squad after the Iralco stalemate, and with Oston Urunov, Saeed Sadeqi, and Farshad Ahmadzadeh missing today's game, skipper Omid Aalishah will be the only recognized



● ALI KARIMI/IRNA

winger available for selection. Sitting seventh in the table, Esteghlal has long been out of the title run-in, while having its own injury, and coaching, crises to deal with in recent weeks. However, the Tehran Blues will be eager to build on a decent run of results to chase a first derby triumph since March 2018.

Esteghlal defeated Nassaji Mazandaran 1-0 in the league on Saturday, days after a 2-0 win at Al Rayyan sent the Blues into the round of 16 in the Asian elite clubs' competition. Alireza Koushki was Esteghlal's star of the show with two goals and an assist in the previous two games, while captain and goal-

keeper Seyyed Hossein Hosseini played his part by producing numerous saves to keep back-to-back clean sheets.

Interim coach Sohrab Bakhtiarzadeh walked away from his role after the Al Rayyan game, with the club reaching agreement with former Esteghlal Khuzestan boss Miodrag Bo-

zovic for the job until the end of the season and today's game will be the Montenegrin's first game in the Blues dugout.

Esteghlal's realistic hopes for glory this season lies in the domestic cup, but a derby victory will be a perfect morale-boost for the Blues ahead of Monday's home game against Sau-

di heavyweight Al Nassr in the Asian competition.

Crunch clash in Tabriz

All eyes might be on the game at Tehran's Azadi Stadium, but the Iranian fans could get a glimpse of the next Iranian top-flight champion when Tractor and Sepahan square off in Yadegar-e Imam Stadium in Tabriz earlier in the day. Separated by one point, both sides are in flying form heading into the game, knowing a victory will give them the momentum in the title race.

Sepahan has suffered a single defeat in 20 league games this term, though it came in the reverse fixture earlier in the season when 10-man Tractor had an Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh's strike for the massive 1-0 won.

Tractor, however, has looked vulnerable at times on home turf this season with three of the Tabriz-based club's four league defeats happening in the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium.

Elsewhere, Mes Rafsanjan will host Chadormalou, while Es. Khuzestan welcomes Malavan to Ahvaz.

Fourth-placed Foolad Khuzestan will visit Zob Ahan on Friday, with Nassaji and Shams Azar going head-to-head in Qaemshahr in what will be a decisive encounter in the relegation battle. Iralco will play away to Khaybar, and bottom-club Havadar hosts Golgozar Sirjan.

Asian Water Polo Championship:

Iran hammers Uzbekistan
to continue perfect run

Sports Desk

Iran hammered Uzbekistan 33-9 on Wednesday to continue its perfect start to the Asian Water Polo Championship campaign in Zhaoqing, China.

Amir Qavidel and Alireza Mehri contributed with six goals apiece to top the scoring chart as Iran celebrated a third successive vic-

tory in the competition.

Iran began its Group B campaign with a 19-6 victory over South Korea before routing the Chinese Taipei 37-5 on the preceding day Zhaoqing.

Sitting atop the group, Iran will take on three-time champion Japan today ahead of Friday's likely quarterfinal clash with Singapore or Hong Kong.

Runner-up to China in the previous edition in 2023, Iran will be chasing a maiden Asian title at this year's event, having won double bronze medals in 1984 and 1995.

The Asian championship will also serve as the qualification for the water polo event at the World Aquatics Championships – starting July 11 in Singapore.



● irsf.ir

Iranian Volleyball Cup:

Foolad beats familiar foe
Shahdab for title

Sports Desk



● Veteran middle-blocker Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi hoists the trophy as Foolad Sirjan players and coaching staff celebrate winning the Iranian Volleyball Cup title in Tehran, Iran, on Feb. 25, 2025. ● volleyball.ir

Foolad Sirjan claimed the Iranian Volleyball Cup trophy thanks to a straight-set victory (25-23, 25-21, 25-21) over Shahdab Yazd in the final showpiece in Tehran on Tuesday. Opposite spiker Ali Hajipour stole the show with a game-high 25 points as Behrouz Ataei's men came out on top against their familiar foes in a third major final in less than 12 months.

Foolad had beaten Shahdab in the Iranian Super League final last April, before coming out victorious in the AVC Asian Club Championship showdown in September.

Doncic helps Lakers beat
former team Mavericks

● AP

Luka Doncic's triple-double helped the Los Angeles Lakers to a 107-99 win over former team the Dallas Mav-

ericks in the NBA. The 25-year-old guard joined the Lakers as part of a three-way trade this

month after six seasons at the Mavericks.

Playing against Dallas for the first time since that move, Doncic scored 19 points and made 15 rebounds and 12 assists at Crypto.com Arena.

"In the first quarter, second quarter, I didn't know what was happening. It was just different. I can't even explain how I felt," he told TNT.

"I am just glad we got a win. I can't wait to go to sleep." LeBron James scored 27 points for the Lakers, who are fourth in the Western Conference after a third

straight win, while Kyrie Irving scored 35 for the ninth-placed Mavericks.

The Memphis Grizzlies required overtime to beat the Phoenix Suns 151-148 at home.

The Grizzlies are second in the Western Conference and the Suns 11th.

The Cleveland Cavaliers tightened their grip on top spot in the East with a 122-82 win at the Orlando Magic, their 10th successive victory. Giannis Antetokounmpo's 27 points could not prevent the Milwaukee Bucks from losing 100-97 at the Houston Rockets.