

Persian Gulf Pro League:

Persepolis completes derby double to close in on top two

Sports Desk

Ali Alipour scored a 71st winner as Persepolis defeated Esteghlal 2-1 at the Azadi Stadium on Thursday, completing a first Tehran Derby double in a decade in the Persian Gulf Pro League. The massive victory helped third-placed Persepolis close the gap on Tractor and Sepahan to four and three points, respectively, following the goalless stalemate between the top two in the table in Tabriz's Yadegar-e Imam Stadium earlier in the day.

There wasn't much to separate the Tehran archrivals in the first half but the Capital Reds still managed to take the lead from the spot right before the interval. Alipour was released behind the Blues backline by skipper Omid A'lishah's long ball and burst into the box before being brought down by Esteghlal goalkeeper Seyyed Hossein Hosseini.

Serdar Dursun had his effort saved by Hosseini, but luck was on his side as the spot kick was repeated after a VAR review showed Esteghlal keeper off the goal line when the Turkish striker struck the ball.

Center-back Hossein Kan'anizadegan, who scored the winner from the spot late in September's reverse fixture, stepped in to take responsibility for the



Persepolis striker Ali Alipour celebrates after scoring the winner during a 2-1 victory over Esteghlal in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on Feb. 27, 2025.

● SOHEIL SAADATMANDI/FFIRI

A derby triumph was perhaps what Persepolis head coach Ismail Kartal needed, after his team had managed only a single win in six outings across all competitions since the Turkish boss took the helm in January, crashing out of the domestic cup and AFC Champions League Elite in the process.

"We dominated the ball possession throughout the 90 minutes and kept Esteghlal at bay, as all they could do was sending long balls from the right flank. We're now back in the title race and will give it our all to win the league again," said the Turkish coach, who gave special praise to Rafiei and Alipour, tipping the duo to receive an international call-up for March's World Cup qualifiers.

Meanwhile, Kartal's Montenegrin opposite number Miodrag Bozovic, who was only appointed to the job on the eve of the derby, was given a reality check of the task on his hands ahead of Monday's home game against Saudi heavyweight Al Nassr in the Asian Champions League last 16.

second attempt and put the Reds in front in the fourth minute of first-half added time.

It took Esteghlal 10 minutes after the restart to find the equalizer, with substi-

tute Alireza Koushki heading home Ramin Rezaeian's cross for his third goal in as many games.

Unbeaten in the Tehran derby since March 2018 – barring a couple of

shootout setbacks in the Hazfi Cup – Persepolis restored the lead 16 minutes later.

Soroush Rafiei's pinpoint free-kick found Alipour unmarked in the Blues box,

before his deft touch went past Hosseini – a ninth league goal for the striker this term, and fifth in the history of the fixture.

Esteghlal desperately pushed for a second goal,

but Persepolis held off the pressure and could have even doubled the advantage through Issa Alekasir, who was denied by Hosseini in a one-on-one situation deep into stoppage time.

UWW Ranking Series:

Qasempour buries ghosts of past to win gold in Tirana

UWW – "Today when I was standing on the podium, I remembered it."

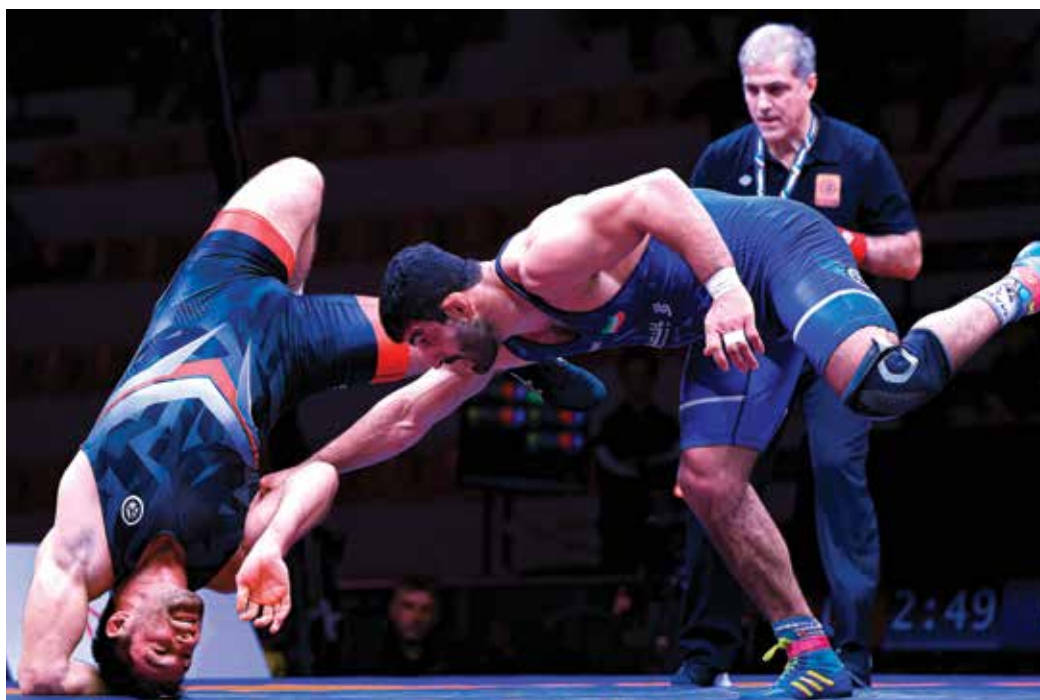
Kamran Qasempour replays the match in his mind as he speaks. He remembers the move and the loss clearly.

At the World Championships in October last year, Qasempour was four seconds away from upsetting Abdulrashid Sadulaev but the latter pulled off an incredible move to beat the Iranian in the semifinal. While the Russian won the gold, Qasempour returned empty-handed after losing his bronze-medal bout to American David Taylor.

Qasempour may not be able to completely erase the memories of that loss with the freestyle gold medal he won at the Muhamet Malo Ranking Series event on Thursday, but he says it will help him move on.

"Last year, in this very hall, it was a very bad scene for me," Qasempour said. "Even today when I was standing on the podium, I remembered it. I should have finished on the top podium [at the World Championships]. The regret remained. But well, it's wrestling, and that's part of the sports. I tried to forget it and continue on my path."

On Thursday, Qasempour returned to Tirana at 92kg and showed once again why he is one



Iranian wrestler Kamran Qasempour (R) is seen in action against Russian Alan Bagaev in the freestyle 92kg final at the Muhamet Malo Ranking Series event in Tirana, Albania, on Feb. 27, 2025.

● KADIR CALISKAN/UWW

of the best in the world in his favorite weight class. Wrestling in three bouts, he did not give up a single point (28-0), and scored two technical superiority wins including the final.

"The competition went well," he said. "I was able to wrestle with three good opponents in this tournament and fortunately, I managed to achieve first place. The wrestler [in the final] was a

good competitor. I had watched his matches beforehand and planned well. My goal was to put on a good performance, and thankfully, I succeeded."

In his first bout against Georgian world silver medalist Miriani Maisuradze, Qasempour ran to an 8-0 lead before moving to defense. He then gut-wrenched Feyzulla Akturk of Turkey and in the final, he broke Russian Alan

Bagaev with ease to win with two minutes remaining.

"I've been wrestling in the 92kg weight class for several years," he said. "Despite that unfortunate result [last year], this arena was a good field for me. I'm trying to increase my readiness and participate in the next competitions."

Paris Olympic silver medalist Amirhossein Zare' added a second gold medal to Iran's haul on Thursday as he defeated Zelimkhan Khizriev in the 125kg final.

Leading up to the final Zare', who had his elbow tapped, looked shaky in his movements on the mat but, come the final, he made sure Khizriev wasn't much of a problem, easing to a 10-0 triumph.

A third Iranian could have won gold medal but Japan's Arash Yoshida Erfan Alizadeh in the 97kg final.

Yoshida led 1-1 on criteria at the break and then got the point for Alizadeh's passivity and scored a stepout to lead 3-1 with 90 seconds left on the clock.

Alizadeh managed to score a stepout with seven seconds on the clock but Yoshida closed it out to win 3-2.

Thursday's results came after the Iranians had collected three medals, including double golds, on the preceding night in the Al-

banian capital.

Rahman Amouzad, also an Olympic silver medalist last year, made it to the 65kg final as expected, before a 5-1 victory over former world bronze winner Taiyrbek Zhumashbek Uulu of Kyrgyzstan saw the Iranian, a world champion in 2022, walk away with the ultimate prize.

Ali Mo'meni, who was in Tirana last year for the U23 World Championships and won a bronze medal, grabbed the 57kg gold, thanks to fall victory over Aiaal Belolyubskii of Tajikistan.

The young Iranian was down 2-1 at the break but never looked worried and a half whip-over from Mo'meni in the second period caught Belolyubskii unbalanced and the Iranian was quick to hold him on the mat to seal the victory.

Mo'meni's gold more or less confirms his place in April's Asian Championships as he also defeated fellow-Iranian Hadi Rezaei in the first round to make a claim for the spot in Amman.

In the 74kg contests, two-time world bronze medalist Younes Emami bounced back from a last-four 8-3 setback against the host's Chermen Valiev to beat Kyrgyzstan's Orozobek Toktomambetov 6-1 and share the third podium with Hungary's Murad Kuramagomedov.