

AFC Champions League Two:

Tractor boss Skocic rues lack of cutting edge, confident of progress

Sports Desk

Tractor head coach Dragan Skocic was frustrated by his side's poor finishing in the goalless draw against Saudi side Al Taawoun at home in the first leg of their AFC Champions League quarterfinal on Tuesday.

Tractor dominated the best part of the contest at the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium in Tabriz, but visitors' goalkeeper Abdulquddus Atiay pulled off a string of saves, as both sides will have it all to play for in next week's return leg in Buraidah's Wolves Park.

Prolific striker Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh had a glorious opportunity to take his tally to nine goals in the competition, when he evaded his marker and with the keeper stranded, saw his shot rattle off the crossbar in the opening stages of the second half.

Speaking at the post-match press conference, Skocic said he was "not satisfied" with the final outcome but remained optimistic about his team's chances of progressing to the semifinals.

"I said yesterday that this match is not going to end today. We created many chances, but we missed them. We had a strong rhythm, but unfortunately, we did not score. We showed how



Tractor's Mahdi Hashemnejad (red) and Saad Al Nasser of Al Taawoun go up in an aerial challenge during the AFC Champions League Two quarterfinal first leg at the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium, Tabriz, Iran, on March 4, 2025.

● MOJTABA SALEH/MIZAN

chances in the next game and I hope we write fate differently." Meanwhile, Skocic's opposite number Mohammed Al Abdali was pleased with the result, though he blamed the quality of the pitch for his side's performance.

"I am very happy with the result. The ball is still in the field. This was the first half of the match and I hope we advance to the next stage. I would like to thank the players," said the Saudi coach.

"To be honest, one of the factors was the playing field. I don't know what the problem was, but the field affected our performance. We always play possession football, but the field didn't allow us to do that.

"The same problem occurred for Tractor. I don't know if it was because of the hardness of the field or the cold weather but in the second leg, you can be sure that we will have more possession of the ball on our own field."

good a team we are and we are going to win the second leg," said the Croatian.

Asked if he had a reason to wor-

ry after his team played to second goalless draw in as many games, following the stalemate against Sepahan last time out

in the Iranian top flight, Skocic said: "No, it's not a cause for concern that the opportunities were not scored today.

It doesn't worry me. Whenever the players give everything they can on the field, I'm happy. I know we'll have the same



● IAWF

Four Iranians among leaders in UWW Rankings

Sports Desk

Four Iranian wrestlers led their respective weight classes in the latest UWW Rankings, which was released following the conclusion of the Muhamet Malo tournament in Tirana, Albania.

Rahman Amouzad (65kg) and Amirhossein Zare' (125kg) topped their freestyle categories after walking with ultimate prize in the second Ranking Series event of international season last week.

Reigning Olympic champions Saeid Esmaili and Mohammad-Hadi Saravi, meanwhile, stood atop the Gre-

co-Roman 67kg and 97kg rankings respectively, despite missing the competition in the Albanian capital. In other Greco-Roman weight classes, world superheavyweight champion Amin Mirzazadeh (130kg) – also a gold medalist in Tirana – stood second to Cuban great Mijain López, who announced his retirement after winning a fifth successive Olympic gold last year, while Mohammad-Ali Geraei is second in the 82kg category, following Hungarian Erik Szilvassy, who was beaten by the Iranian in the final showdown in last October's World Championships.

An Olympic silver medalist and gold winner in Tirana, Alireza Mohmadi as well as world silver winner Pouya Dadmarz were also the second best in the Greco-Roman 87kg and 55kg rankings respectively, while Hassan Yazdani followed Bulgarian Olympic champion Magomed Ramazanov in the freestyle 86kg class.

Kamran Qasempour, who won the gold on return to his favorite freestyle 92kg class in Tirana, is third in his category, following Russian sensation Abdurashid Sadulaev and Georgian Miriani Maisuradze.

FIBA West Asia Super League:

Buva on double-double as Tabiat edges Sagesse 88-87

FIBA – Croatian center Ivan Buva contributed with a game-high 26 points as well as 11 rebounds to help Iranian champion Tabiat edge out Lebanese club Sagesse 88-87 in their FIBA West Asia Super League opener at the Nouhad Nawfal Stadium on Tuesday night.

American Stedmon Lemon broke the 86-all deadlock to give themselves the lead for good with 33.7 seconds left to play and some stroke of luck afterward would enable the reigning Iran Basketball League champions to come away with the narrow win, joining Amman United Club as the first winners of the West Asia League contest. Buva also had four assists, delivering solidly in the endgame that saw him engage in a shootout with Zach Lofton

as both squads went back and forth. Lemon produced 21 points and six rebounds. Sina Vahedi delivered 11 points and seven assists, while Rasoul Mozafari chipped in 10 markers.

Mozafari himself was responsible for pushing Tabiat ahead, nailing a three-pointer first before following it up with a deuce to give themselves the 86-81 advantage with 2:12 remaining. But Sagesse, of course, refused to quit, with Jad Khalil and Omar Jamaledine joining hands to tie the game at 86-all with 1:18 to go – much to the delight of the Green Castle faithful that trooped to the venue.

Lemon, though, broke the tie with a layup to give the crew 88-86 lead, and it helped them a great deal that Shabazz Muhammad failed to tie it up again

as he only split his foul shots with 28 ticks left.

Sagesse appeared to have gotten a big break when they forced a five-second inbound violation on Lemon, but couldn't maximize the possession they got back as Omar Jamaledine missed his potential game-winning trey. Tabiat shot exactly 50-percent from the floor, including 10 triples – twice what the opposite made. That efficient shooting display was also thanks to the 25 assists they had as a unit.

"In a tournament like this, or in every tournament, the first game, I think, is the most important," Buva said after the victory, adding: "It's gonna be a pretty fast tournament, like four games in five days, so opening up with a win is important."



● FIBA