

Iranian Volleyball Premier League Finals: Foolad completes fightback to defend title

Sports Desk

Foolad Sirjan defended its Iranian Volleyball Premier League title after defeating Shahdab Yazd 3-1 (25-15, 22-25, 25-16, 25-22) in Game 3 of the Finals in Tehran on Thursday. Having lost the first game of the best-of-three series in four sets, Foolad had to come out victorious in a five-set thriller on Tuesday to force a decider, before Thursday's triumph secured the third Iranian top-flight crown for Behrouz Ataei's men.

Foolad's Ali Hajipour was the star of the show on Thursday, chipping in a game-high 27 points, while outside-hitter Amirhossein Esfandiar and middle-blocker Mohammad Valizadeh contributed with 20 and 10 points for Ataei's side, respectively.

Veteran opposite Amir Ghafour was the only Shahdab player to finish in double figures, scoring 20 points. Hajipour's heroics saw the 23-year-old walk away with the MVP and Best Opposite prizes in the awarding ceremony.

Foolad captain Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi and Shahdab's Masoud Gholami, who scored seven points apiece in the fi-



Foolad Sirjan players and coaching staff celebrate after the victory over Shahdab Yazd in Game 3 of the Iranian Volleyball Premier League Finals in Tehran, Iran, on April 10, 2025.

● RASOUL SHIRDEL/volleyball.ir

day one. My players were caught off-guard in the first game of the finals, but I had no doubt we were going to bounce back in Game 2, and my team was in its best form for today's game," said Ataei, who now has four major titles under his belt with Foolad since parting ways the Iranian national team head coach in October 2023 – all coming at the expense of Shahdab over the past 12 months.

Foolad beat Shahdab to the Iranian league crown last April, and then went on to win the AVC Asian Club Championship final in September, before lifting the Iranian Volleyball Cup trophy in February.

Ataei's side, which also won a precious bronze medal at the Club World Championship last December, settled for a fourth-place finish in the 12-team table of the regular season before defeating Mehregan Nour and Shahrdari Urmia in the playoffs for a place in the final.

nal, shared the Best Middle-Blocker award, while Esfandiar and Pakistani Ali

Usman Faryad of Shahdab were named the Best Outside-Hitters.

Mohammadreza Moazen took the Best Libero prize, with his 47-year-old Shah-

dab teammate Alireza Behboudi claiming the Best Setter award.

"We were confident of winning the title. That's the mindset we had since



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IHF Youth Beach Handball World Championship:

Iran to face Spain, Oman, Puerto Rico in group stage

Sports Desk

Iran was drawn against Spain, Oman, and Puerto Rico in Group A of the IHF Men's Youth (U17) Beach Handball World Championship – starting June 17 in Tunisia.

The draw for the third edition of the event took place in Hammamet, Tunisia, on Thursday, where 16 teams were divided into four groups.

A bronze medalist in the previous edition in 2022 in Greece, Iran booked a place in the showdown after defeating host Thailand to the Asian youth crown last October.

Spain will also be among the favorites in Tunisia, having won the title in the first edition in 2017 as well as the 2018 Youth Olympic gold, while Oman and Puerto Rico are among the nine

debutants in the competition.

Elsewhere in the draw, African sides Tanzania and Kenya were pitted against fellow debutant Hungary, plus Germany in Group B. The host country chose to be placed in Group C, where it will face Thailand, alongside debutants Mexico and the Oceania side, Cook Islands. Tunisia chose to be placed in group C, where

they will face Thailand, alongside debutants Mexico and the Oceania side, Cook Islands.

Brazil – runner-up in 2022 – is in Group D with fellow-South American sides Argentina – bronze winner in 2017 and the 2018 Youth Olympics – and Uruguay, plus Senegal.

Reigning champion Croatia failed to qualify for the finals.

Esteghlal boss Bozovic on the brink after Foolad defeat

Sports Desk

Montenegrin head coach Miodrag Bozovic could see his reign on Esteghlal bench come to a premature end in the coming days after the Tehran Blues suffered a 1-0 defeat against Foolad Khuzestan at home in the Persian Gulf Pro League on Thursday. Foolad midfielder Masoud Sarabadani scored the only goal of the contest with nine minutes from normal time at the Azadi Stadium, finding the net on the rebound after his initial effort from the

spot was saved by Esteghlal keeper Seyyed Hossein Hosseini.

A ninth defeat of the league season saw Esteghlal – fourth-time champion since the introduction of the Iranian Pro League in 2001 – sit 12th in the 16-team table with 28 points with five games remaining.

A fifth coach on Esteghlal bench this campaign, Bozovic is yet to claim a victory with the Blues, who have lost four in seven outings since the Montenegrin was appointed to the role in late February.

In a statement released on Friday, the club described the latest defeat and the poor run of late as "unacceptable", adding: "The results in recent week will not go unnoticed by the club's management and board."

"Understanding the current situation and acknowledging the justified criticism from fans and former players, the club will make prompt decisions," added the statement. Mehr News Agency reported earlier on Friday that former Esteghlal midfielder Mojtaba Jabbari, who joined Bo-

zovic's coaching staff in late March, is likely to replace the Montenegrin for the rest of the season.

Esteghlal could still finish a dreadful campaign with silverware as the Blues are pitted against second-tier club Paykan in the Iranian Hazfi Cup quarterfinals.



Esteghlal head coach Miodrag Bozovic reacts during a 1-0 loss to Foolad Khuzestan in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on April 10, 2025.

● MOHAMMADREZA BOLANDI/ISNA

