

## Iranian Hazfi Cup:

Esteghlal edges Paykan  
to remain on course for silverware

## Sports Desk

Esteghlal edged out second-tier club Paykan 1-0 at Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Saturday to advance to the Iranian Hazfi Cup semifinals.

Ramin Rezaeian found the net with a spot-kick in the 74th minute to help Esteghlal end a nine-game winless run across all competition.

Paykan keeper Hossein Shahriari collided with teenage midfielder Zarqam Saadavi – making a first start in Esteghlal colors – when punching the ball away from a corner-kick, which prompt referee Reza Mahdavi to point to the spot after a VAR review.

Rezaeian sent Shahriari the wrong way for his 12th goal of the season, as interim coach Mojtaba Jabbari got off to a winning start to his role on the Blues bench.

Jabbari took over from Montenegrin Miodrag Bozovic last week to become the sixth coach in the Esteghlal dugout since the start of the season. Ex-Esteghlal midfielder will be eager to steer the Blues to cup silverware and put a lid on a dreadful campaign, which has seen the club sit 11th in the Persian Gulf Pro League table with three

games remaining.

Awaiting Esteghlal in the last-four clash at home on May 23 is San'at Naft Abadan.

San'at, the only second-division club left in the competition, also had a second-half penalty from skipper Taleb Rikani to thank for a 1-0 win against Shahr-dari Nowshahr at home later on Saturday.

Elsewhere, a shootout defeat at Malavan left defending champion Sepahan on the brink of finishing the season without a trophy.

There was little to separate the two top-flight sides throughout the contest, as it finished goalless before Malavan keeper Habib Farabbasi denied Reza Shekari and Reza Asadi from the spot to lead his team to a 4-2 victory.

Malavan will play away to Golgozar Sirjan on May 22 for a place in the final showpiece.

Golgozar enjoyed a comfortable 3-1 victory at Nassaji Mazandaran on Friday to progress.

Senegalese center-back Ousmane Ndong scored twice for the visitors either side of Ali-Asghar Aashouri's strike, with Mansour Baqeri bagging a consolation for Nassaji from the spot with four minutes left clock.



Esteghlal players celebrate their winner during a 1-0 victory over Paykan in the Iranian Hazfi Cup last eight at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on April 26, 2025.  
● MOHAMMADREZA BOLANDI/ISNA



● IRCF

## Western Asia Youth Chess Championship:

## Iranians grab six blitz medals

## Sports Desk

The blitz competitions of the Western Asia Youth Chess Championship saw Iranians win six medals, including two golds, across different age groups in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

There was an all-Iranian top two in the boys' under-12 contests, as FIDE master Ramtin Kakavand collected 8.5 points after nine rounds to walk away with the ultimate prize, with Aihan Rahbar settling for the silver with 7.5 points.

This was Kakavand's second medal in the competitions, following his bronze in the rapid contests.

Mohammad-Hossein Darvishi won a second blitz gold for the country, finish-

ing atop the boys' under-16 standings with 7.5 points, with Uzbekistan's Rauf Kasimov and Indian international master Ethan Vaz in the following spots, respectively, with 6.5 points after nine rounds of play.

Kiasha Mahboubi, meanwhile, tallied eight points for a silver medal in the boys' under-8 division, finishing runner-up to Kazakhstan Adinur Adilbek, who collected nine points.

In the girls' competitions, Saina Kowsari (under-12) and Taraneh Taqizadeh (under-14) added a couple of bronze medals to Iran's haul in the Tajik capital.

Taqizadeh also took her personal tally to two medals, having won a silver medal in the rapid event.

## Iranian Basketball Super League:

Tabiat beats Kaleh in Game 4,  
sets Finals date with Shahr-dari

## Sports Desk

Tabiat Eslamshahr beat Palayesh Naft Abadan 89-82 in Game 4 the last-four series in Abadan on Saturday to progress to the Iranian Basketball Super League.

Arman Zanganeh delivered an MVP performance with a double-double – 14 points and 11 rebounds – to lead Tabiat to a 3-1 win in the best-of-five series.

Tabiat, runner-up to Kaleh in the regular season table, won Game 1 at 79-73 home and then came out on top by a 80-78 scoreline in the second game, before Naft re-



● NAZANIN REZAZADEH/IRIBF

duced the deficit by a 80-72 win in Abadan on Thursday.

Tabiat will defend its title against Shahr-dari Gorgan,

in a repeat of last season's final showdown.

American point-guard Glenn Cosey also contributed with a double-double with 25 points and 11 rebounds, to lead Shahr-dari to a 95-86 home victory over Kaleh Mazandaran on the preceding night for a 3-1 series win. Shahr-dari fell to an 82-76 loss in Game 1, but bounced back to rout Kaleh 122-68 in its own backyard in Amol, before taking a 2-1 series lead with an 89-83 home victory in Game 3 on Wednesday.

Shahr-dari had finished fourth in the regular season with 13 wins in 20 outings.

## World Snooker Championship:

Iran's Vafaei crashes out  
after last-16 loss to Williams

## Sports Desk

Iran's Hossein Vafaei missed out on a last-eight spot at the World Snooker Championship after suffering a 13-10 loss to three-time champion and world No. 6 Mark Williams in Sheffield's Crucible Theatre on Saturday.

Trailing 9-7 going into the concluding session, Vafaei had a golden opportunity to narrow the gap in frame 17

but missed the final brown to a center pocket leading 49-47, handing Williams the chance to pot brown, blue and pink for 10-7. Vafaei made a 70 clearance, from 52-1 down, to snatch the 18th and he led 57-26 in the next only for Williams to clear from the penultimate red for 11-8.

A run of 74 boosted Vafaei's hopes of a recovery. Williams led 35-0 in the next when he missed a red to a

top corner, and the Iranian made 72 to close within one. Williams dominated the next for 12-10, and when Vafaei missed a red to a baulk corner early in the next, the 50-year-old Welshman wrapped it up superbly with 115 to become the oldest quarterfinalist in Crucible for 15 years.

"It was very tight and tense. Neither of us played at our best. We were both tired. I am disappointed with my

performance because I gifted him many frames with my mistakes. I have to work more if I want this beautiful trophy. Mark will always be a tough opponent," said the Iranian world No. 24, who had beaten Englishman Barry Hawkins 10-9 for place in the last 16.

Williams will face Scottish world number three John Higgins in the quarterfinals on Tuesday and Wednesday.