

AVC Men's Champions League:

Foolad outclass Taichung Bank to top Pool C

AVC – Iran's Foolad Sirjan secured their place on top of Pool C and booked a quarterfinal berth at the inaugural AVC Men's Champions League after an emphatic 3-0 (25-17, 25-14, 25-13) victory over Taichung Bank of Chinese Taipei on Tuesday at the Panasonic Arena in Osaka, Japan.

The newly-crowned Iranian champion showcased their firepower and tactical superiority throughout the match, notching their second straight win and collecting a total of 5 points.

Nakhon Ratchasima QminC VC of Thailand took second place with 4 points, while Taichung Bank, winless in both outings, were eliminated.

French star Earvin Ngapeth and Iranian opposite Mohsen Delavari led the scoring for Foolad with 15 points apiece. Cuban middle-blocker Javier Concepcion added 13 points, while Alireza Abdolhamidi chipped in 11.

Foolad's cohesive offense and formidable net defense restricted Taichung Bank to limited opportunities – no player on the Chinese Taipei side reached double digits, with opposite Chen En-De leading his team with just 6 points.

"I'm very happy with our second win. It was important for us to secure this victory," said Concepcion after the match. "We might



Foolad Sirjan players and staff pose for a photo after a straight-set victory over Taichung Bank at the AVC Men's Champions League in Osaka, Japan, on May 13, 2025.

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face Shanghai Bright next in the quarterfinals. They're a strong

team with high-level tactics, so we'll need to push even harder and respond with our own strat-

egies. We're excited and ready for the challenge."

Foolad Sirjan started strong-

ly, asserting dominance in the opening set with explosive attacks, well-placed aces, and a

formidable block. Ngapeth, Concepcion, and Delavari proved unstoppable at the net, racking up points with powerful spikes and timely blocks. Although Taichung Bank showed flashes of resilience – most notably through Tseng Mao-Tsung, who came off the bench to contribute a few late points – the Iranians maintained control to close the set convincingly.

The second set saw Foolad Sirjan elevate their intensity. Ngapeth delivered a series of explosive hits, while Delavari impressed with sharp cross-court spikes and solid blocking. Despite efforts from Liu You-Lin and Li Yuan to stabilize Taichung Bank's attack, the relentless Iranian assault overwhelmed the defense, sealing another comfortable set.

Taichung Bank fought hard in the third set, attempting to break through the Iranian wall with a renewed offensive push. Wen Yi-Kai sparked some hope with aggressive attacks, but Foolad Sirjan's experience and depth proved decisive. Ngapeth and Delavari continued to dominate, combining for a string of aces and kills that left no room for a comeback. Foolad Sirjan closed the set and the match with ease.

Iranian Azadegan League:

Four-way battle as top-flight promotion race goes down to the wire

Sports Desk

Iranian football fans will be treated to the most thrilling Azadegan League finale in years this Sunday, as four teams vie for promotion alongside Fajr Sepasi to the Persian Gulf Pro League.

An emphatic 4-0 victory over Damash Gilan at home on Monday sealed the second-division title for Fajr, which will be back in the Iranian top flight after 11 years next season.

All eyes will be on Paykan, San'at Naft Abadan, Ario Eslamshahr, and Saipa, which sit second to fifth in the table, respectively – separated by just a single

point heading into the final day.

Farshad Mohammadimehr found the net from the spot in the 13th minute, before Abolfazl Akasheh added a second late in the game to help San'at beat Paykan in Abadan in the penultimate round of fixtures and move level on 58 points with the visiting side.

A superior head-to-head record means San'at will overtake Paykan, should the two sides remain equal on points after their final-day matches.

Paykan will host 11th-placed Mes Kerman on Sunday, with San'at visiting Ario in the Iranian capital.

Ario remained in contention for a top-tier debut after a first-half brace from Shahrar Salari and a Reza Sadri's strike on the hour mark led the club to a 3-0 away win against Shahr-dari Astara. Fourth on 57 points, Ario will hope a first win in five outings leads to another on Sunday.

Saipa is the most high-profile of the lot, having won a memorable top-flight title in 2007 under legendary Iranian striker Ali Daei, who served as player-manager.

Saipa had an Alireza Maleki's strike in the first half to thank for a massive 1-0 win at Mes Kerman on Sunday to

stay in the promotion mix. Saipa head coach Ebrahim Sadeqi, who played an integral part in the title-winning campaign 18 years ago, will hope to see his men claim all points against an unenthusiastic Fajr Sepasi on the final day, tough they will still need the results in the other three games to go their way for a return to the Pro League after four years.

San'at Naft's Farshad Mohammadimehr (1) celebrates with teammates after scoring during a 2-0 victory over Paykan in the Iranian Azadegan League in Abadan, Iran, on May 12, 2025.

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Qasempour given second chance for spot at UWW Worlds

Sports Desk



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Freestyle wrestler Kamran Qasempour will still fancy his chances of securing a spot in September's World Championships in Zagreb, despite missing the first phase of the Iranian trials in last week's International Takhti Cup in Isfahan.

A top-podium finish in Isfahan would have sealed the Iranian 86kg slot for Qasempour, but a positive COVID-19 test on the eve of the competition jeopardized his bid for a third world gold medal.

However, the Iranian Wrestling Federation justified Qasempour's absence and announced this week that he could still punch his ticket for the Croatian capital with a head-to-head victory over Abolfazl Rahmani on May 27 in Tehran.

Rahmani defeated fellow-Iranian Amirhossein Kavousi 7-1 to walk away with the ultimate prize of the 86kg contests in Isfahan. The 70kg, 74kg, 79kg, and 97kg spots also remain up for grabs, which will be decided through the Iranians' results at the next UWW

Ranking Series event – starting May 29 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Reigning world champion and Olympic silver medalist Amirhossein Zare' (125kg) and Ali Mo'meni (57kg) won the gold medal in their respective events at the Takhti Cup to seal a spot in the Iranian freestyle team.

Joining the duo in the 10-man squad are Ahmad Mohammadnejad-Javan, Rahman Amouzad, and Amirhossein Firouzpour. Mohammadnejad-Javan will be the Iranian 61kg wrestler at the world event, thanks

to a gold-winning run at the Zagreb Open, as well as an Asian bronze in March. Amouzad, an Olympic silver medalist last year, has been given a shot at a second world 65kg gold after domestic rivals Yassin Rezaei and Ali Khorramdel had below-par runs at the Ranking Series season-opener in February. Firouzpour's impressive run of results in recent months, which has seen him win the Asian and Zagreb Open titles, convinced the Iranian coaching staff to pick him for the world 92kg contests.