

# Tractor vs. Esteghlal to headline Matchday 1 as Iranian top flight gets underway

## Sports Desk

Iranian fans will be treated to another nine months of thrilling action and drama as the new Persian Gulf Pro League season kicks off today.

However, all eyes will be on Tuesday's showpiece in Tabriz, where Tractor will begin its title defense at home against Esteghlal on Tuesday.

This will be a second encounter between the two sides in eight days, after Tractor pulled off a late fightback to beat the Tehran Blues 2-1 in the Iranian Super Cup game in Isfahan last week. Tractor had to part ways with two integral parts of its title-winning run in Portuguese midfielder Ricardo Alves, who joined Sepahan, and new Esteghlal center-back Aref Aqasi, while Iran international goalkeeper Alireza Beirnavand will be out with a four-month suspension.

Esteghlal supporters, meanwhile, are desperate to see Portuguese head coach Ricardo Sa Pinto, who is back on the Blues bench after two years, and new signings – including frontline duo Saeid Saharkhizan and Haiti international Duckens Nazon – make an instant impact, as the club will be looking to improve on last season's ninth-place finish in the table.

Elsewhere in the opening round of fixtures, Esteghlal's archrival Persepolis will host newly-promoted Fajr Sepasi at Thrane's Shahr-e Qods Stadium today.

Nine-time champion since the Pro League introduction in 2021, Persepolis stood third in the table last season – the Cap-



● RASOUL SHOJAEI/IRNA

ital Reds' lowest finish in the Iranian top flight in a decade – under Ismail Kartal, before the Turkish head coach left his role in July in the aftermath of the 12-day war between Iran and Israel.

Persepolis hierarchy was quick to replace Kartal with former Iran international Vahid Hashemian, though his appointment

is widely seen as a major gamble for the club, given his significant lack of experience as a head coach in senior club football. A number two to ex-Iran manager Dragan Skocic during the 2022 World Cup qualifiers, Hashemian will aim to build on his distinguished career as a player, having scored 53 goals in 254 appearances for Bundesliga

clubs VfL Bochum, Hannover 96, Hamburger SV, and Bayern Munich.

A busy transfer window for Persepolis has seen the Reds, who will be chasing an eighth league trophy since 2017, make 10 marquee signings during the summer – including goalkeeper Payam Niazmand and attacking midfielder Reza Shekari, who

joined from Sepahan, as well as former PSG and Tottenham Hotspur fullback Serge Aurier and Montenegrin midfielder Marko Bakić. Sepahan – runner-up to Tractor last season – is also set for a new era under club legend Moharram Navidkia when visiting Malavan FC on Tuesday. Navidkia returned to Sepahan

bench earlier in the summer to replace French coach Patrice Carteron, who also walked out of his job amid the regional tensions.

Navidkia got off to a losing start to his second spell as Sepahan boss, as the club suffered a 3-2 defeat at Al Duhail last week to miss out on a place in the league stage of the upcoming AFC Champions League Elite season. Joining Niazmand and Shekari in leaving Sepahan in the current transfer window were French midfielder Steven Nzonzi, who parted ways with the club for "safety reasons", and prolific winger Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi, who signed for Ittihad Kalba in the UAE Pro League.

Meanwhile, ex-AEK Athens full-back Ehsan Hajsafi has returned to his boyhood club for a fourth stint, with goalkeeper Seyyed Hossein Hosseini and his Esteghlal teammate Arash Reza-vand among the new signings. The bad news for Navidkia is that integral midfielder Mohammad Karimi is expected to be out of action for six months after suffering a torn ligament injury against Al Duhail.

Also on matchday one, Zob Ahan will host newcomer Paykan in Isfahan today, while Golgozar and Iraclo will meet in Sirjan and Mes Rafsanjan will play away to Khaybar in Khorramabad.

Esteghlal Khuzestan will welcome Shams Azar to Ahvaz on Tuesday, with last season's surprise package Chadormalou hosting Yahya Golmohammadi's Foolad Khuzestan, which hopes to improve on the fourth-place finish in the previous campaign.

## Iran wins Greco-Roman title at Ljubomir Ivanovic Gedza Memorial

### Sports Desk

Iranian wrestlers collected an impressive eight medals – including triple golds – as the country claimed the Greco-Roman team title at the Ljubomir Ivanovic Gedza Memorial tournament in Mladenovac, Serbia.

Mohammad-Pouya Asadi (55kg), Reza Qeitasi (63kg), and Mohammadhossein Ostad-Mohammad Me'mar (87kg) walked away with the ultimate prize in their respective weight classes on Saturday.

Former under-23 and junior world champion Iman Mohammadi, meanwhile, had to settle for a silver medal in the 72kg contests after suffering a 2-1 defeat against Belarusian Aliaksandr Liavonchik in the final showpiece.

Elsewhere, ex-cadet world champion Amirmahdi Saiedinava (77kg), Alireza Mohammadhosseini (82kg), Yassin Yazdi (87kg), who was beaten by Me'mar in an all-Iranian semifinal, and Ayoub Hosseinvand (130kg) finished their

campaigns with a consolation bronze medal.

Ahmadreza Mohsennejad, meanwhile, left the event empty-handed following back-to-back setbacks against opponents from Belarus in the 72kg division.

Named after the late Yugoslav wrestler and coach, the one-day event featured some high-profile contestants from the host country, Bulgaria, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Sweden, Romania, Croatia, and Belarus.



● IAWFIR

## Thompson beats Lyles in Olympic final rematch in Silesia



Kishane Thompson (3rd R) crosses the finish line ahead of Noah Lyles (L) in the men's 100m final at the Diamond League in Chorzow, Poland, on August 16, 2025.

● GETTY IMAGES

**REUTERS** – Kishane Thompson laid down a marker ahead of next month's world championships when the Jamaican came out on top in the highly-anticipated 100 metres against Olympic champion Noah Lyles at the Silesia Diamond League meeting on Saturday.

Thompson blasted out of the blocks and never looked like being beaten, while Lyles, with his typically slow start, ran strongly at the end but the Jamaican won in 9.87 seconds, with Lyles clocking 9.90, his season's best. Kenny Bednarek was third.

There were no world records but the sun-soaked crowd were treated to some fine performances, with Olympic and world champions fine-tuning before Tokyo in September.

Faith Kipyegon came agonisingly close to breaking the women's 3,000m

world record and Keely Hodgkinson made a winning return in the 800m. The men's sprint brought together American Lyles and Thompson for the first time since their unforgettable Olympic final last year in Paris, where Lyles beat his rival by five thousandths of a second.

Add Bednarek into the mix, who recently clashed with Lyles, and this was a race that nobody wanted to miss. The two Americans had a heated moment at the U.S. Championships earlier this month, when Lyles stared down Bednarek coming to the line and received a shove in return at the finish. Lyles, whose season was delayed by an ankle injury, looked unperturbed by the defeat, happily signing autographs for fans, and was pleased to have broken 10 seconds for the first time this year. "It is a great stepping stone. I needed

to see a sub-10," Lyles said.

"I took out some really big heads today, people who run 9.7 and 9.8. The more I run, the better I am getting."

**KIPYEGON CLOSE**

Kenya's Kipyegon went after the 8:06.11 set in 1993 by China's Wang Junxia, leaving the rest of the field behind from the start, tucked in behind the pacemakers.

Kipyegon pushed on with more than two laps to go, driving for the line, but the 1,500m and mile world-record holder collapsed with exhaustion after coming in less than a second off the record, in 8:07.04.

"To be honest, I did not see the clock on the finish line because I was so tired," Kipyegon said.

"I saw the world-record red line during the race but today it was very hot."