

Persian Gulf Pro League:

Drozdek hits hat-trick as Tractor gets off the mark with Iralco rout

Sports Desk

Tractor striker Domagoj Drozdek scored a first-half hat-trick as the defending champion hammered Iralco 4-1 at home on Friday to record its victory of the new Persian Gulf Pro League season. The Croatian kept his composure to lob goalkeeper Mohammad Khalifeh after being released behind the Iralco backline by Danial Esmailifar in the ninth minute. He then doubled Tractor's lead 10 minutes later by slotting home Mahdi Torabi's low cross into the six-yard box. Drozdek's third of the afternoon at the Bonyan Disel Stadium came in the 41st minute, when he tapped in Mahdi Hashemnejad's cross on the far post. Behrouz Nowruzifard pulled one back for the visitors with right before the interval, but Albanian summer signing Regi Lushkja restored Tractor's three-goal cushion in the 62nd minute, rounding off a well-worked counter-attack. The victory was a morale-boosting result for Tractor, which had been beaten at home by Esteghlal (1-0) on the open-

ing day of the campaign before playing to goalless stalemate away to Mes Rafsanjan, ahead of the club's first game at the new AFC Champions League Elite season against Shabab Al Ahli on Tuesday. However, Croatian head coach Dragan Skocic was dealt a massive blow after integral winger Torabi left the pitch with an injury at halftime and will be a major doubt for the Dubai visit. Elsewhere, Esteghlal suffered a first defeat of the season, falling to a 1-0 loss against Esteghlal Khuzestan in Ahvaz. Spanish goalkeeper Antonio Adán kept out a Hamid Bouhamdan's long-range free kick, but Mohammad Sharifi found the net on the rebound in the 34th minute, as Esteghlal Khuzestan came out on top against the Tehran Blues at home for a second consecutive season. Both sides finished the game with 10 men after Bouhamdan received his marching orders for a second bookable offense in the 78th minute, while Iran international fullback Ramin Rezaeian was shown a straight red for

headbutting in the fifth minute of stoppage time. Stellar summer signing Munir El Haddadi, introduced as an 86th-minute substitute, came close to finding an equalizer for the visiting side with his first touch of the ball, only to see his effort from outside the box come off the bar. Meanwhile, Khaybar and newly-promoted Fajr Sepasi remained unbeaten in their impressive start to the season, sharing the points in a 1-1 draw at Khorramabad's Takhti Stadium. Farshid Esmaili put Fajr in front with a composed finish in the 29th minute, before Ehsan Hosseini drew the home side level on the hour mark. Sepahan missed out on a first win of the season after a 1-1 away draw against Golgozar Sirjan. Former Esteghlal midfielder Omid Hamedifar's effort from the edge of the box went in off Sepahan center-back Mohammad-Amin Hazbavi's leg to give Golgozar the lead inside 12 minutes. Golgozar midfielder Alireza Alizadeh was sent off midway through the first half with two bookings



Tractor striker Domagoj Drozdek (25) celebrates with teammates after scoring during a 4-1 victory over Iralco at the Persian Gulf Pro League in Tabriz, Iran, on September 12, 2025.
● MEHRVARZ AHMADI/NASRNEWS

inside four minutes, but the home side thought still managed to find a second goal through Reza Ja'fari in the 43rd minute, only to see it chalked off by the VAR for a foul on a Sepahan player in the build-

up to the strike.

French signing Enzo Crivelli opened his account for Sepahan by converting a VAR-awarded penalty in the 60th minute, as Moharram Navidkia's team,

which had Omid Nourafkan dismissed with 18 minutes remaining, avoided a second successive defeat following a home setback against Persepolis before the international break.

Asian Cadet & Junior Judo Championships:

Iran ends seven-year drought with three medals



● IRJF

Sports Desk

Iran's wait for a medal at the Asian Cadet & Junior Judo Championships came to an end after seven years as the country collected a silver and double bronzes at the competition in Jakarta, Indonesia. Iranian girl Samira Khakhah defeated Jordanian Taleen Khader and the host's Sashenka Fatimah to reach the final showpiece in the cadet -63kg event, but had to settle for silver medal after a setback against South Korean Hong Dain. Amirhossein Nazari finished his campaign with consolation bronze in the men's cadet -90kg category, recovering from a first-round loss

to Jeon Minseok of South Korea to beat opponents from Kyrgyzstan and Kuwait before coming out victorious against Chinese Taipei's Guo Chang-Yu to share the third podium with Inomjon Bakhodirov of Uzbekistan. A second cadet bronze for the country came in the men's +90kg class, where Mohammadpouria Banaeian defeated Aliasghar Malekzadeh in an all-Iranian third-place bout. Banaeian began his campaign with an impressive win against South Korea's Kim Jaemin but suffered a loss to Uzbekistan's Alibek Durdiev, who went on to beat Mongolia's Munkhbagana Galsandamba in the final showdown.

Elsewhere, Iran's Abolfazl Nazari (-55kg) and Yassin Parhizgar (-60kg) missed out on the podium, falling to defeats in the third-place showdowns in their respective boys' categories, while Sobhan Hakimi finished seventh in the -73kg class. The competition will continue with the junior contests today, with Hanieh Abbaszadeh (-57kg) and Mahshid Safari (-63kg) representing Iran in the women's draw, while Hossein Bakhshi (-73kg), Amirhossein Valizadeh (-73kg), Matin Yaqoubkish (-81kg), Amirabbas Choupan (-90kg), Alireza Nikseresht (-100kg), and Mohammad-Mahdi Elmi will vie for glory across different men's divisions.

Iran to go all out for futsal glory at Islamic Solidarity Games, Shamsaei says

Sports Desk

Iran futsal head coach Vahid Shamsaei said he would name a full-strength squad for the Islamic Solidarity Games as the country has set its sights on the ultimate prize at the multi-sport event, starting November 7 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. "We will face strong opponents in the Islamic Solidarity Games, including futsal powerhouses like Morocco and Kazakhstan. Success in this tournament is of paramount importance to Iran's Ministry of Sports and National Olympic Committee," Shamsaei told Varzesh3 of his approach to team selection. The Iranian futsal great recently named a provision-

al roster for the upcoming events, including the AFC Futsal Asian Cup qualifiers in Kuantan, Malaysia. A winner of a record 13 Asian titles, Iran will begin its qualification campaign against Bangladesh in Group G next Sunday, before taking on the United Arab Emirates two days later at Kuantan's Stadium Tertutup Sukpa. Iran will face Malaysia on the final day of the group fixtures on September 24, with the top team of the group table progressing to next January's finals in Indonesia, while the second team will hope to qualify as one the best seven runner-up finishers across the eight qualification groups.

There were some surprise absentees in the Iranian list, with Asian Player of the Year Saeid Ahmaddabbasi and Salar Aqapour omitted. Saeid is a valuable asset for Iranian futsal. However, he has struggled with consistency after his latest surgery, and I feel he needs time to peak his best form. He has also missed three games in the current Iranian league season. The players' health must be our top priority," Shamsaei said of his decision not to name his prolific player in the squad. "That said, we still have very high expectations of him. If Saeid can prove his form and performance in the coming period, the national team will

be open to a player of his caliber. In my opinion, he needs more rest to fully recover, then focus on increasing his fitness. If he can regain the quality that meets our expectations, we will certainly call upon him," added the Iranian. "Aqapour, meanwhile, could have pushed through with an injection, but why would we risk him and potentially aggravate his injury all at once? We've given Salar rest so he can play the rest of the season with greater fitness and, more importantly, be available for the upcoming tournaments. This is on the condition that he also delivers his best possible performances in the league."



● AFC