

Persian Gulf Pro League: Hajsafi on target, gets Sepahan off the mark

Sports Desk

Former Iran skipper Ehsan Hajsafi scored a first-half free-kick as Sepahan walked away with a much-needed 1-0 victory over Khaybar in Khorramabad at the Persian Gulf Pro League on Friday. This result ended a four-game winless start to the new domestic league season for the Iranian top-flight heavyweight, easing pressure on head coach Moharram Navidkia. His team was also undone by Al Duhail in the AFC Champions League Elite qualification playoffs in August and was beaten by Jordan's Al Hussein in their Asian second-tier clubs' competition opener less than two weeks ago.

A second defeat of the season saw Khaybar drop to fourth in the table with seven points – trailing Persepolis on goal difference – while Sepahan moved up to 12th with five points.

Sepahan, which will be hosting India's Mohun Bagan in Asia on Tuesday, will be chasing a second league win in a row when taking on Zob Ahan at home in the Isfahan derby next Saturday, with Khaybar playing away to Malavan on Thursday. Elsewhere on Friday, Esteghlal's

poor start to the season continued with a frustrating 1-1 draw at Shams Azar in Qazvin.

Mehran Ahmadi put the visiting Blues in front with a superb finish from outside the box nine minutes after the break, only to see strike canceled out by Shams Azar center-back Saeb Mohebbi 18 minutes later.

The Tehran Blues have managed a single victory in seven games across all competitions under Portuguese head coach Ricardo Sa Pinto – an opening-day 1-0 win against defending champion Tractor in Tabriz.

Eighth in the table with six points, Esteghlal will host Chadormalou in Tehran next Sunday.

A fifth successive stalemate saw Shams Azar, which has been deducted three points by the Iranian Football Federation, sit second from bottom with two points. Shams Azar will visit Iralco on Friday.

In Ahvaz, Amirhossein Jalalivand and Hojjat Ahmadi scored in each half to lead Esteghlal Khuzestan to a 2-0 win against visiting Mes Rafsanjan.

The impressive triumph moved the home side into 11th place with five points, ahead of Thursday's visit to newly-promoted Fajr Sepasi in Shiraz.

Rasoul Khatibi's Mes – rock bottom in the standings on two points – will play at home against Paykan on Friday.

Golgozar goalkeeper Farzin Garousian and his opposite number at Foolad Khuzestan Hamed Lak were in top form, as the two sides played out a goalless stalemate in Sirjan.

The result was still enough to lift the home side into the second spot with eight points, while Yahya Golmohammadi's Foolad was left struggling in 13th with five points. Golgozar will travel to Tehran to play Persepolis in a highly-anticipated game on Friday, with Foolad facing a formidable test in Tractor at home on Saturday.

In Isfahan, Rahman Jafari's spot-kick deep into first-half added time made the difference, helping Irilco edge Zob Ahan 1-0, celebrating back-to-back wins to jump to 10th place with six points. Zob Ahan sits right above the relegation zone with five points.

On Thursday, Persepolis failed to secure a first home victory of the season, settling for a drab goalless stalemate against Malavan FC at Tehran's Shahr-e Qods Stadium. It also finished goalless between Tractor and Fajr Sepasi in Tabriz.



● Sepahan captain Ehsan Hajsafi (L) celebrates his goal with Portuguese midfielder Ricardo Alves during a 1-0 victory over Khaybar in the Persian Gulf Pro League in Khorramabad, Iran, on September 26, 2025.
● FFIIRI



● Iran taekwondo coach Mahrouz Saei (L) celebrates with Mobina Nematzadeh after her bronze-winning campaign at the Paris Olympics.
● WORLD TAEKWONDO

Saei eager to prove doubters wrong at world, ISG events

Sports Desk

Head coach Mahrouz Saei will have a point to prove when Iranian women's taekwondo team is in action at the upcoming World Championships and the Islamic Solidarity Games.

The 27th edition of the World Championships will get underway in Wuxi, China, on October 24, followed by the sixth edition of multi-sport event in Riyadh on November 7.

Saei was unveiled as the new national team coach by the Technical Committee of the Iranian Taekwondo Federation earlier in the month. She replaced former head coach Minou Maddah, who parted ways with the sport's national governing body following last year's historic campaign at the Paris Olympics, where Nahid Kiani and Mobina Nematzadeh

won silver and bronze medals respectively in the women's taekwondo competitions.

Her appointment was met with criticism from many in the country, who believed the decision was motivated by nepotism on the part of Saei's older brother and the chairman of the federation, Hadi Saei, rather than her own coaching credentials.

However, the president of the federation, who had a long-standing feud with Maddah after the Olympics, has always insisted that her sister "has the best CV for the job in the country," noting that she led her club to the Iranian title over the past six years and was also named the best women's coach at the WT President's Cup and the Asian Club Championships in April.

Iran managed to win a single women's medal – a gold by Kiani

in the -53kg category – across eight weight classes at the 2023 World Championships. Saei will now be eager to improve on that haul to cement her status as the right choice for the role.

Saei, who served as a number two to Maddah in Paris and was in Nematzadeh's corner through her bronze-winning campaign, has named two different rosters for the upcoming major events.

Kiani and Nematzadeh will spearhead the six-woman team in Wuxi, with Saiedeh Nasiri, Mahla Momenzadeh, Kowsar Asaseh, and Nastaran Valizadeh also in the squad.

Meanwhile, Saina Karimi, Rozhan Goudarzi, Hasti Mohammadi, Yalda Valinejad, Fatemeh Eskandarnia, and two-time Asian silver medalist Melika Mirhosseini will vie for glory at the Islamic Solidarity Games.

Yazdani to miss Islamic Solidarity Games, Iran coach Dorostkar confirms

Sports Desk

The upcoming Islamic Solidarity Games – starting Nov. 7 in Riyadh – will come too soon for Iranian wrestling sensation Hassan Yazdani to make his long-awaited return from a shoulder injury, national team head coach Pejman Dorostkar has confirmed. Yazdani, 30, underwent a second surgery on his injured shoulder in September last year, before starting his rehabilitation program five months later in Tehran – in a bid for the elusive second Olympic gold medal in Los Angeles 2028.

A winner of a national-high 10 world and Olympic medals, Yazdani last ap-

peared at the 2024 Paris Olympics, where he settled for the freestyle 86kg silver after a 7-1 setback against Bulgarian Magomed Ramazanov.

Speaking about the latest update on Yazdani's recovery on Friday, Dorostkar said: "His condition is improving as he has begun reviewing techniques and will certainly enter the national team selection cycle [for next year's World Championships], but he won't make it to the Islamic Solidarity Games."

Asked whether Yazdani will compete in the 92kg class or the Olympic 97kg category on return to the mat, Dorostkar said: "It's his decision to make, once he resumes full training."

Yazdani had already been out of ac-

tion for eight months before the Ranking Series event in June 2024 – due to a first surgery on his right shoulder – but recovered in time to secure his place in the national team for the Paris Games.

The Iranian showed no signs of an injury on his way to the final showpiece but the problem flared up against Ramazanov as he struggled with the dislocated shoulder from the get-go, calling for treatment on several occasions throughout the six minutes of action. A gold medal in Paris would have seen Yazdani overtake taekwondo legend Hadi Saei as the most decorated Iranian in the history of the Olympic Games with two golds and one silver.

