

Persian Gulf Pro League: Tractor ends goal drought with Mes rout

Sports Desk

Tractor ended a three-game scoring drought in the Persian Gulf Pro League by hammering Mes Rafsanjan 4-1 at home on Thursday.

The defending champion, which had last found the net in a 2-1 win against Paykan on December 14, took the lead through league top scorer Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh. He netted his ninth goal of the campaign with a composed finish 13 minutes into the game at an empty Yadegar-e Imam Stadium.

Dragan Skocic's men had to wait until the 56th minute for a second goal. Hosseinzadeh's close-range effort struck the post but bounced off Mes goalkeeper Nima Mirzazad and into the net.

Ahmadreza Zenderuh had a chance to reduce the deficit for the visitors 10 minutes later, only to be denied from the penalty spot by Iranian international keeper Alireza Beiranvand.

Tractor fullback Danial Esmailifard extended the lead in the 76th minute, and Croatian striker Domagoj Drozdek added a fourth six minutes from full-time. Farnam Arab pulled one back for Mojtaba Jabari's Mes in the 88th minute, but it proved too little, too late. The victory lifted Tractor to second in the table with 29 points ahead of Friday's

fixtures, while Mes remained rock-bottom with 11.

Elsewhere, former Esteghlal and Persepolis players impressed on their debuts for new clubs as Malavan and Foolad Khuzestan shared the points in a thrilling 2-2 draw at the Sirous Qayeqran Stadium.

Ehsan Mahrouqi gave Foolad the lead six minutes after the break, slotting home on the rebound after ex-Esteghlal fullback Ramin Rezaeian's effort was saved by Malavan keeper Farzad Tayyebipour.

An own goal from Argentine striker Gustavo Blanco drew Malavan level in the 73rd minute. The home side was then reduced to 10 men following a VAR-upheld straight red card for Amirreza Afsordeh in the 87th minute.

Malavan still managed to take the lead two minutes later. Substitute Mojtaba Fakhrian, who joined on loan from Persepolis earlier in the month, rounded off a well-worked counter-attack with a sublime curling strike from the edge of the box.

Just when Malavan appeared to be on course for a hard-fought victory, Mohammad Qoreishi headed home Rezaeian's corner-kick in the fifth minute of stoppage time, allowing Foolad to salvage a point in Hamid Motahari's



Tractor players celebrate a goal during a 4-1 victory over Mes Rafsanjan in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium, Tabriz, Iran, on January 22, 2026.
● MASOUD VAEZ/TASNIM

first game as head coach.

In other action, Khaybar and Irzalco also played to a 2-2 draw in Khorramabad.

Amirhossein Farsi and Mehrdad Qanbari put Khaybar ahead twice, only to see their goals canceled out by goals

from the visitors' Rahman Jafari and Sasan Hosseini, with the second equalizer coming in the 91st minute.



Iranian outside-hitter Hosseinkhanzadeh joins Qatar's Al Arabi

Sports Desk

Iranian international outside-hitter Poriya Hosseinkhanzadeh has signed for Qatar's Al Arabi.

"Look who's here, Poriya Hosseinkhanzadeh; welcome!" wrote the reigning Qatari Volleyball League (QVL) champion, ending weeks of speculation about the future of the Iranian volleyball star, who joins from Italian SuperLega heavyweight Lube Civitanova. A former player of Foolad Sirjan and Shahdab Yazd in the

Iranian top flight, the 21-year-old will be looking for a fresh start after receiving limited playing time over the past year and a half at Lube.

Hosseinkhanzadeh joined Lube last summer with high hopes, planning to develop at one of Europe's top clubs. However, despite promises from the management and technical staff for more opportunities, he primarily served as a bench player and was unable to meet expectations.

Initially, rumors linked him

to Russia's Super League and Dynamo Ural, with preliminary agreements reportedly reached. However, the transfer ultimately fell through, costing him the opportunity to continue his career in one of top European leagues.

While Al Arabi is a prominent team in Qatar, the quality of competition is not comparable to Italy's Serie A or even Iran's Super League. The transfer represents a choice focused more on maintaining match rhythm and securing regular playing time rather

than professional advancement at the highest level.

A world U21 champion with Iran in 2023, Hosseinkhanzadeh was a key player for the senior squad in last year's Volleyball Nations League and the FIVB World Championship, where Iran reached the quarterfinals before falling to the Czechia.

Al Arabi, who beat Al Sadd in straight sets on Thursday, sits second in the QVL table with nine wins and 27 points from 11 games – trailing Al Wakrah by a single point.

WTT Youth Contender 2026: Faraji finishes joint-third in U19 singles for second trophy in Doha

Sports Desk

Iranian table tennis wonderkid Benyamin Faraji secured a second trophy at the latest WTT Youth Contender event, finishing joint-third in the U19 boys' singles category in Doha.

The young Iranian relinquished a two-game lead to suffer a 3-2 setback (8-11, 9-11, 11-9, 15-13, 11-9) against Lin Ching-Ting of Chinese Taipei in Thursday's semifinals, adding the third-place prize to the under-17 title he had won at the Lusail Sports Arena on Tuesday.

Lin still had to settle for a runner-up finish following a 3-1 loss to South Korea's Lee Seungsoo in the final, with Chinese Taipei player Hung Che-Yen taking the other third-place prize.

Given a first-round bye, Faraji began his campaign with a 3-2 win against



India's Punit Biswas and then defeated South Korean Ma Yeongmin by the same scoreline – a repeat of their under-17 semifinal clash earlier in Doha. A straight-game victory (11-6, 11-9, 11-5) over Slovakia's Samuel Arpas sent Faraji into the semifinals. Iran's Arshia Lorestani and Mohammad Habibi also competed in the un-

der-19 event in Doha, but their campaigns ended in the round of 16. Lorestani defeated Vietnam's Li Ki Ho 3-2 but was undone in straight games by India's Priyanuj Bhattacharyya, while Habibi overcame the host's Yousif Abdulla in five games before suffering a 3-1 defeat against Hung.

Iran coach Shamsaei confirms final squad for Futsal Asian Cup

Sports Desk

Head coach Vahid Shamsaei has unveiled Iran's final 14-man squad for the upcoming AFC Futsal Asian Cup, which kicks off on Tuesday in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Iran opens its bid for a record-extending 14th title against Malaysia in Group D on Wednesday. Shamsaei's team will then face Saudi Arabia on Friday before closing the group stage against Afghanistan – coached by Iranian Majid Mortezaei – two days later at the Jakarta International Velodrome.

This will be the third meeting between Iran and Afghanistan at a major tournament in less than two years. Iran won 3-1 at the 2024 Asian Cup but drew 2-2 at the Islamic Solidarity Games last November in Riyadh.

The top two teams from each group advance to the quarterfinals. Nine players from the current roster were part of the squad that lifted the Asian trophy in Thailand two years ago, courtesy of a 4-1 victory over the host in the final. Meanwhile, Mahdi Rostamiha, Mahdi Mahdikhani, Amirhossein Gholami, and Hossein Sabzi will make their debuts

at the flagship continental event. Despite a hampered preparation that saw two friendlies called off in recent weeks, Shamsaei's men will be looking to build on their commanding ISG campaign in Riyadh, where they defeated African powerhouse Morocco 5-0 in the final. The following is Iran's 14-man squad for the 2026 AFC Futsal Asian Cup:

Goalkeepers: Baqer Mohammadi, Mahdi Rostamiha

Sweepers: Mohammad-Hossein Derakhshani, Amirhossein Gholami, Hossein Sabzi

Right wingers: Masoud Yousef, Moslem Oladqobad, Mahdi Karimi

Left wingers: Salar Aqapour, Ali Khalilvand, Mahdi Mahdikhani

Pivots: Hossein Tayyebi, Saeid Ahmadabbasi, Behrouz Azimi.



● MOJTABA JANBAKHSH/FFIRI