

# Iranian top-flight to resume action after World Cup, League Organization confirms



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## Sports Desk

Iran's Persian Gulf Pro League will resume after the FIFA World Cup – which will be co-hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada from June 11 – the League Organization of the country's Football Federation announced on Saturday. The news brings an end to weeks of speculation over the future of the Iranian league, which has been postponed since February 28, when the United States and Israel initiated a war campaign against Iran. "Taking into account all circumstances regarding the country and clubs, the health and safety of players, as well as the need to prevent potential injuries from a congested schedule, it was decided to suspend the remaining Pro League matches until the conclusion of the national team's games at the FIFA World Cup," the League Organization

said in a statement.

Iran will kick off its World Cup campaign against New Zealand at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California, on June 15, before facing European heavyweight Belgium at the same venue six days later.

The team will then travel to Seattle, Washington, to face Egypt in its final game in Group G at Lumen Field on June 26.

With eight third-placed teams across the 12 groups advancing to the round of 32, Iran will fancy its chances of securing its first-ever knockout spot at the seventh attempt.

Questions still remain as to which Iranian teams will represent the country at next season's continental club competitions, as the national governing body of the sport will have only until May 31 to announce the country's representatives to the Asian Football Confederation. The league champion will be

given a direct berth at the West zone's 12-team table of the AFC Champions League Elite, with the runner-up given the chance to secure the spot through the playoffs, while the domestic Hazfi Cup champion will qualify for the AFC Champions League Two.

Esteghlal leads the Iranian top-flight table with 41 points – two clear of Tractor and Sepahan with eight games remaining. Golgozar Sirjan is fourth with 36 points from 23 matches, while Chadormalou (35) and Persepolis (34) occupy the following spots with a game in hand.

The suspension of the Iranian league will also be a blow to Iran's World Cup preparation, and head coach Amir Qalenei will have to hold several training camps to ensure his domestic players remain in proper condition for the global showpiece.

## Khateri wins gold as Iranians bag four medals in int'l wrestling event

### Sports Desk

Ahoura Khateri headlined Iran's medal hunt on the second day of action at the Champions international wrestling tournament in Antalya, Türkiye, by grabbing gold in the freestyle event.

A former world and Asian cadet champion and silver medalist in last year's U20 Worlds, Khateri walked away with the top prize in the 61kg weight class thanks to a victory over Ali-Asghar Soltani in an all-Iranian showdown on Saturday.

Elsewhere, Mohammad-Mahdi Mamivand, who had finished emp-

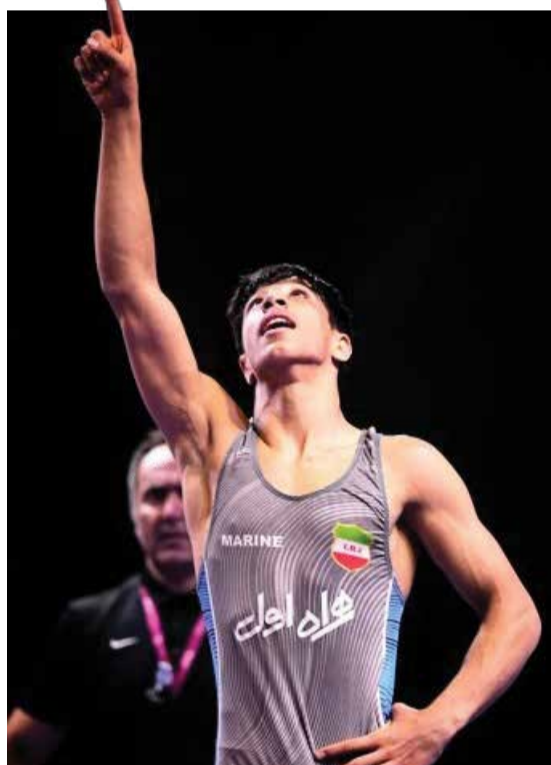
ty-handed in the 79kg class the previous day, settled for silver in the 79kg category, while Amirhossein Khakpakh finished with a consolation bronze in the 92kg class to take Iran's freestyle tally to five medals, following Danial Tavakkoli's 97kg bronze on Friday.

Unlike the first day of the Greco-Roman contests, Iranians missed out on the podium in their respective events, as Amirreza Naqibi (60kg) as well as 72kg contestants Mohammad Kazemi and Ahmadreza Mohammadian crashed out in the early stages, while Mohammad-Mahdi Derakhshan suffered defeat in the

third-place bout of the 87kg division.

Reigning world cadet champion Amir Sam Mohammadi had claimed the Greco-Roman 97kg gold on Friday, while Mohammadreza Gholami took the silver in the 67kg class, with Alireza Amiri (55kg) and former world under-17 gold medalist Amir-Mahdi Saeidi-Nava (77kg) adding a pair of bronze medals.

The three-day tournament featured under-20 wrestlers from global powerhouses of the sport, including Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia.



Ahoura Khateri won the freestyle 61kg gold medal at the Champions international wrestling tournament in Antalya, Türkiye. ● UWW

## AFC Champions League Elite: Ezzatollahi on target to help Shabab Al Ahli into last four

### Sports Desk

AFC Champions League Elite: Ezzatollahi on target to help Shabab Al Ahli into last four Iranian midfielder Saeid Ezzatollahi was on the scoresheet to help Emirati club Shabab Al Ahli defeat Thai champion Buriram United 3-2 in the AFC Champions League Elite quarterfinals in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on Saturday. The Iranian international headed home from close range to double his team's lead four minutes into the second half, after Peter Zulj's 13th-minute own goal had put Shabab Al Ahli in front at the Prince Abdullah al-Faisal Stadium.

the ensuing spot-kick past Hamad Al Meqbali.

Austrian midfielder Zulj found redemption when he waltzed his way to the edge of the box before placing the ball in the bottom corner for the Buriram equalizer.

Shabab Al Ahli, however, had the last laugh as Brazilian defender Renan Victor scored the winner in the third minute of extra time to set up a last-four date against Japanese club Machida Zelvia on Tuesday.

Australian striker Tete Yengi was on target on the half-hour mark to lead the J1 League outfit to a 1-0 win over Saudi Pro League champion Al Ittihad

## Basketball league set to be 'declared null and void'

### Sports Desk

The Iranian Basketball Super League is likely to be "declared null and void without a champion" due to the regional situation and national team commitments, the head of the federation's League Organization has announced. Speaking to IRNA on Monday, Meysam Alipour said that the sport's national governing body held a meeting with representatives of the top-flight clubs, deciding "to cancel the remainder of the league season until the regional situation returns to normal."

All league games have been called off since the outbreak of a military conflict between Iran and a U.S.-Israeli coalition on February 28.

Reigning champion Shahr-dari tops the 11-team

table of the regular season after 19 rounds of matches – level on 35 points and 16 wins with Esteghlal and Kaleh.

"If this decision is finalized, we will not have a

champion, and the league will be declared null and void under the current circumstances," Alipour said. "We do not have the time to give teams an opportunity to get back into

match shape."

The official added that Iran must soon announce its representatives for the West Asia Super League, making a swift resolution necessary.

Asked about the possibility that top teams in the table might demand the league continue to determine Iran's representatives for West Asian competition, Alipour said those clubs would need adequate time to train and prepare.

"With the national team camps for the World Cup Asian qualifiers and the Asian Games looming, we do not have the time to allocate both training periods and league matches," he explained. "Ending the league seems to be the best decision."

Sitting second to Jordan in Group C, Iran is set to play in the third window of World Cup qualifiers in July, with a postponed game against Syria from the previous window likely to be rescheduled for May or June.



● ALI SHARIFZADEH/IRNA



This was Ezzatollahi's second goal in as many games in the knockout stage of the Asian elite clubs' competition this season, following his second-half strike in a 3-0 victory over Iranian top-flight champion Tractor in the round of 16 last Tuesday.

Buriram United showed fighting spirit to restore parity within six minutes.

Ezzatollahi gave Buriram a lifeline in the 64th minute when the midfielder used his hand to block a Supachai Chaided header, with Guilherme Bissoli easily placing

on Friday. The other semifinal contest will see Japan's Vissel Kobe and defending champion Al Ahli Saudi go head-to-head on Sunday in Jeddah. The final showpiece will be staged at the King Abdullah Sports City Stadium on Saturday.