

Controversy erupts as Iranian trio named for Asian club competitions

Sports Desk

The Iranian Football Federation's decision to name three clubs as the country's Asian club representatives for next season has frustrated title rivals in the Persian Gulf Pro League.

Esteghlal, Sepahan, and Tractor were selected as continental competitors after the League Organization of the national governing body announced on Saturday that the remaining eight rounds of the domestic top flight – postponed since February 28, when the United States and Israel initiated a military campaign against Iran – will be staged after “the conclusion of the national team's games at the FIFA World Cup (June 11–July 19).” With the Asian Football Confederation setting May 31 as the deadline for confirming the 2026/27 continental club lineup, the Iranian federation, according to the League Organization's Saturday announcement, was left with no choice but to put forward the league's

current top three for the two tournaments.

Sitting atop the table with 41 points from 22 games, Esteghlal has been given a place in the West zone's 12-team table of the AFC Champions League Elite, while Tractor – second on 39 points – will have the chance to secure a spot through the preliminary playoffs.

Third-placed Sepahan, trailing Tractor on goal difference, will be Iran's representative in the AFC Champions League Two.

“The result must be decided on the pitch,” Golgozar head coach Mahdi Tartar, whose team is fourth in the table with 36 points from 23 matches, said on Monday. “We played away to Tractor one day before the start of the war and lost. That's fine – football has its wins and losses. But what matters is that the result is determined on the field and the standings are decided through football,” added the Iranian coach.

Tartar, whose Golgozar side remains within striking distance

of the top three, continued: “We are fourth in the table and still a title contender. We managed to beat the league leaders and also had decent results against Persepolis and Sepahan.”

Persepolis CEO Peyman Haddadi, meanwhile, described the decision as “unfair,” insisting that “the league continue and that Iran's representatives be selected based on a full footballing process and on actual matches.”

“We have also put forward transparent and fair proposals to ensure that, if it becomes impossible to complete the league, Iranian clubs in Asian competitions are chosen according to a just and equitable solution,” added the Tehran Reds' official.

A seven-time champion over the past nine seasons, Persepolis sits sixth in the table – seven points off the top – but recent league history favors the Reds as the capital heavyweight has relied on late surges in the closing stages to secure multiple title-winning campaigns over the past decade.



The photo shows Tractor (red) and Esteghlal in action during a goalless draw in the Persian Gulf Pro League in Tabriz, Iran, on January 18, 2026.

MAJID JARRAHI/IRNA

Gitipasand crowned national futsal champion with seventh title



Gitipasand players pose with the trophy after winning the Iranian Futsal Super League in Shazand, Iran, on April 20, 2026.

VARZESH3

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Gitipasand Isfahan secured a commanding away victory against Palayesh Naft Shazand to defend its crown and clinch a record-extending seventh title in the Iranian Futsal Super League.

The 28th edition of the domestic top flight concluded on Monday, with Gitipasand emerging as the most decorated club in Iranian futsal history. The top prize was decided in Shazand, where the defending champions delivered a flawless 4-0 performance to finish the campaign with 65 points – one point clear of their long-time rivals, Mes Sungun.

With both giants in contention for the title heading into the final round, and Palayesh Naft Shazand and Beheshtisazi Gorgan fighting to avoid relegation at the bottom of the table, the stakes could not have been higher. Gitipasand rose

to the occasion, securing a third consecutive championship and a fourth title in the last five seasons under head coach Mohammad Keshavarz.

Goals from Mahdi Asadshir, Ali Khalilvand, and Mohammad-Javad Safari, along with an own goal by Erfan Mohammadpour, sealed the victory in Shazand. Iranian international pivot Saeid Ahmadabbasi finished as the champions' top scorer with 21 goals.

Mes Sungun, despite thrashing Shahr-dari Saveh 6-2, settled for second place with 64 points – their third straight season as runners-up.

At the other end of the table, Beheshtisazi and Javad al-Aemeh Shahr-e Kord were relegated to the first division after just one season in the top flight. Goharzamin Sirjan, who finished third for the third consecutive year, defeated Gorgan 4-1 to confirm their rivals' fate.

Elsewhere on the final day, Arshia Shahr-e Qods edged Foolad Hormozgan 1-0, Palayesh Naft Isfahan sent Javad al-Aemeh down with a 4-0 thrashing, and San'ich Saveh played out an eight-goal 4-4 draw with Pardis Qazvin.

Despite a 50-day league stoppage due to the country's military conflict with the United States and Israel, the hiatus appeared to have little effect on attacking quality, with several high-scoring and entertaining encounters.

Goharzamin superstar Hossein Tayyebi claimed the league's Golden Boot with 28 goals.

With this triumph, Gitipasand extends its record as Iran's most successful futsal club, now boasting seven championships and eight runner-up finishes. The title-winning campaign secures Gitipasand's place as Iran's sole representative in the AFC Futsal Club Championship next season.

Iran to compete in double IJF Grand Slam events in May

Sports Desk

A three-man Iranian squad will take part in two upcoming IJF Grand Slam tournaments in Dushanbe and Astana, the Iranian Judo Federation confirmed.

The third Grand Slam event of the international judo season will kick off in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on May 1, followed by a three-day competition in Astana, Ka-

zakhstan, from May 8 to 10.

A gold medalist at the Casablanca African Open in January, Elyas Parhizgar will compete in the -81kg weight class across both tournaments. Amirabbas Choopan – bronze medalist at February's Tunis African Open – will vie for glory in the -90kg division.

Iranian prodigy Mohammad-Pouria Banaeian, who claimed an impressive junior

gold medal in the Tunisian capital, will look to build on that success when competing in the +100kg contests.

The two tournaments will serve as a significant part of Iran's preparation for the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in September, after the country missed out on April's Asian Championships in Ordos City, China, as a result of the military conflict with the United States and Israel.



Iranian judoka Elyas Parhizgar (white), pictured in last November's Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, will compete in the men's -81kg event in May's IJF Grand Slam events in Dushanbe and Astana.

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Naderi declares Iran as 'beach soccer favorites' at Asian Beach Games

Sports Desk

Iran's beach soccer head coach Ali Naderi has declared his side the leading contender for gold at the Asian Beach Games, vowing that the team will give its all to bring glory to the country.

The sixth edition of the multi-sport event kicks off with the opening ceremony in Sanya, China, today, with the beach soccer contests getting underway on Thursday.

Drawn in Group B alongside the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand, Iran will begin its campaign against the UAE at the Sanya Bay Yuhai Club Venue on the opening day of the beach soccer event.

Speaking after a dominant 11-1 friendly victory over Palestine on Tuesday, Naderi expressed confidence in his squad's readiness despite a 50-day interruption in training.

“We are gradually improving through our training sessions and have reached relative readiness,” Naderi said. “Despite the 50-day halt in training, we have had good sessions during these 11 days here in Sanya.”

“The overall condition of the team



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is good, and we have what it takes to win the gold – to repeat the title and raise our country's flag,” added Naderi, who led Iran to a third-place finish at the 2024 World Cup in the UAE.

Naderi acknowledged the growing strength of several regional rivals, noting that beach soccer has its own unique dynamics.

“Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Oman are in very good shape and have made long-term investments in the sport,” he said.

The coach also pointed out that Japan is not participating in this edition. Nevertheless, he emphasized that the teams that have traveled to

Sanya have arrived well-prepared, with solid logistics and training camps behind them.

“Regardless of the obstacles we have faced, we remain the favorites for the top prize, and we will face our opponents with every effort to achieve success,” Naderi concluded.

The beach soccer competition in Sanya features seven teams, with China, Oman, and Palestine completing the lineup in Group A.

Iran will face Thailand on Friday before concluding the group fixtures against Saudi Arabia the following day.

The top two from each group will advance to the semifinals.