

# 3 Teams Gear Up For Stiff Competition

The 33rd week of Iran's Premier League will continue today with Sepahan, Saba Battery and Persepolis vying for victory.

Sepahan, the top team of the league, play against San'at-e Naft-e Abadan. Both teams need three points; Sepahan for championship and the Abadani team for avoiding elimination from the premier league.

Persepolis lost the best opportunity for overtaking Sepahan by drawing 1-1 with Barq-e Shiraz last week. They need to beat the tough Saba Battery this week to revive their hope.

Persepolis should contemplate victory only today, especially since tens of thousands of fans are expected to pack Tehran's Azadi Stadium, ISNA reported.

Sepahan top the table with 55 points while Persepolis and Saba Battery are chasing the Isfahani club with 53 points and 52 points, respectively.

Persepolis and Sepahan will play the long-awaited match in the final week of the competitions on May 17. Both teams have high hopes for winning the crown.

However, the war among the bottom of the table teams will be more ruthless than the race for championship. Pegah meets Barq-e Shiraz and Malavan will encounter Moqavemat-e Sepasi. To remain in the league, Malavan should forget about all its previous defeats and only think about victory.

Amid all the sensitive matches, the showdown between Esteghlal and Zob-e Ahan seems to offer a break for football fans. After all, it may not be so bad to watch the two compete at Takhti Stadium far from the excitement that surrounds the league given the stiff rivalry for championship.



Nikbakht of Perspolis (c) vies with Saba player  
Fixtures of other games:

- Saippa - Abu Moslem Mes - Rah Ahan
- Shirin Farza - Paykan Esteghlal Ahvaz - Pas

## Iranians Enter Futsal Quarters

Iran's futsal in the third match of the Asian Championship, defeated Tajikistan 14-0 and advanced to quarterfinals.

Before this game, Iran fought hard to break China with Ali Asghar Hassanzade and Vahid Shamsaee each netting twice, while Mohammad Reza Heidarian, Majid Latifi, Kazem Mohammadi and Mohammad Taheri, who was sent off for a second yellow card, were also on target.

It was yet another fearsome display by Hossein Shams' side which defeated Kuwait 12-0 on Sunday and are top of Group D, ISP reported.

China, which suffered an 8-0 reverse to the national team of Japan last year, acquitted themselves well, harassing and haranguing in defense but they were starved of possession and worn down by the tournament favorites.

Taheri's blistering shot put Iran ahead after three minutes but China held firm until Shamsaee's inventive finish after nine minutes.

Shamsaee, with his back to goal, controlled a long ball from goalkeeper

Mostafa Nazari on his chest and tucked the ball under advancing China stopper Zheng Tao.

China then had an effort disallowed after Nazari held on to the ball for four seconds resulting in an indirect free-kick.

Wu Zhuoxi passed the ball into the goal and thought the ball had taken a deflection, but the strike was ruled out by the officials.

China held firm until Zheng failed to hold Heidarian's shot and Hassanzade chipped in six minutes into the second half.

Seconds later Iran's captain Heidarian was on target himself with a ferocious shot.

Shamsaee netted his second and Iran's fifth before Latifi slotted a sixth. Hassanzade thundered in a seventh before Taheri was dismissed for a second bookable offense.

Liang Shuang's shot crept under Nazari as China got on the scoresheet, but Mohammadi struck a left-foot volley for Iran's eighth.

## Inter's Final Without Cambiasso

Argentina midfielder Esteban Cambiasso is out of Inter Milan's final league match of the season against Parma on Sunday due to an ankle injury, Italian press reported on Monday.

The 27-year-old's loss is a big blow to the leaders and champions who have been showing signs of cracking in the title run-in.

Two matches ago they looked stone-cold certainties to land a third straight title as they needed only three points from their final three games to be crowned champions.

But they lost the derby against AC Milan and were then held to a 2-2 draw at home by Siena on Sunday.

That has allowed AS Roma to close the gap at the top from six points to one with just one match remaining.

Both teams have tricky final matches away to clubs fighting for their Serie A survival. Parma have to beat Inter or they will be relegated while Roma travel to Catania, who can ensure their safety if they win.

Cambiasso, who was injured against Siena, will apparently also miss the Italian Cup final on May 24 against Roma. Meanwhile Parma, which is in the bottom three and risk losing their Serie A status, announced on Monday that they had taken a collective vow of silence ahead of this weekend's crunch clash.

Neither Argentine coach Hector Cuper, a former Inter boss, nor the players will speak to the media until after Sunday's match.

## Murray Advances In Hamburg

Andy Murray moved into the second round of the Hamburg Masters with a comfortable 6-4 6-1 victory over Russia's Dmitry Tursunov.

The Scot broke Tursunov in the third game and, despite missing a break point at 5-3, served out the first set, BBC reported.

Desperately searching for form ahead of the French Open, Murray advanced on Sunday to a litany of unforced errors.

The 20-year-old was dominant in the second set as he booked a second-round meeting with Frenchman Gilles Simon.

The winner of that match could face three-times French Open champion Rafael Nadal in the third round.

Nadal, like all the top eight seeds, has a bye in round one.

Australian Open finalist Jo-Wilfried Tsonga staged an impressive recovery to join Murray in the second round as he saw off fellow Frenchman Nicolas Mahut 0-6 7-6 (7-5) 6-3.

But 10th seed Mikhail Youzhny is out, beaten 6-3 6-2 by Spain's Fernando Verdasco.

And Marat Safin—who had to come through qualifying—also reached the second round with a 7-5 6-2 win over Croatia's Marin Cilic.

Murray, who turns 21 on Thursday, is back at the scene following the wrist injury he suffered 12 months ago, which put him out of Roland Garros and Wimbledon.

That spell on the sidelines means he has no points to defend this year until August so a good run in Hamburg could see him edge further towards the top 10 from his current ranking of 14.

## Bennati Wins Third Giro Stage

Italian Daniele Bennati of the Liguigas team won the third stage of the Giro d'Italia in a sprint finish in Milazzo.

Bennati edged out Mirjam's German veteran Erik Zabel at the end of the 208km stage, with another German, Danilo Hondo Diquigiovanni third.

The stage, which saw Franco Pellizzotti retain the leader's jersey, was marred by several crashes,

the worst of which ended Australian Brad McGee's Giro, BBC said.

Briton Mark Cavendish, unable to find a gap in the sprint, finished ninth.

Four of the other British riders finished in the main bunch on the same time: David Millar, Geraint Thomas, Steve Cummings and Bradley Wiggins.

Charly Wegelius, however, was a further seven minutes 57 seconds back in 187th place.

Italian Riccardo Ricco, who won Sunday's stage and was one of the pre-race favorites to finish in the top three, was also caught up in a crash, and is expected to go to hospital for an X-ray on his hand.

"It's probably broken, we'll see," Ricco said. "This course was too dangerous."

Bennati shared Ricco's view about the stage, but was delighted with his win.

"The first days of a stage race are always dangerous, but today was particularly dangerous. I've won at the Tour de France and the Vuelta a Espana but never at the Giro, so this is special," Bennati said.

The Giro moves onto mainland Italy on Tuesday with a 187km leg from Pizzo Calabro to Catanzaro Lungomare.

## News in Brief

### Wrestling Gold for Iran



Iranian wrestler Meysam Mostafa-Jokar won the gold medal in the Aliev Wrestling Cup in the Russian city of Makhachkala.

Jokar defeated his Russian rival in the final game of the 74-kg weight class on Sunday and won the championship, MNA reported.

Iran participated in the tourney with five wrestlers, namely Saeid Ahmadi in 60-kg weight class, Iman Mohammadian and Meysam Mostafa-Jokar in 74-kg, Reza Yazdani in 84-kg and Ali-Reza Heydari in 96-kg.

Aliev Cup is a two-day wrestling tournament held at Ivan Yarygin's sports palace in Makhachkala.

### ACL Knockout Stage Unclear

The AFC Champions League quarterfinal lineup will be clear on May 21 after the final round of group matches though only three groups (C, E and F) are yet to be decided.

The teams which have already qualified for the home-and-away knockout phase after topping their respective pools are Uzbekistan's Kuruvchi (Group A), Saipa of Iran (Group B), Kuwait's Al Qadsia (Group D) and Gamba Osaka of Japan (Group G), AFC reported.

Reigning Asian club champions Urawa Red Diamonds of Japan, who received a bye through the group stage, join the fray at this point.

Important dates for the AFC Champions League knockout stage are September 17 and 24 (quarterfinals), October 8 and 22 (semifinals) and November 5 and 12 (finals).

In the AFC Cup, Home United of Singapore (Group D) have booked their place in the last eight, and with the five group leaders and three second-best runners-up from among the groups advancing to the knockout stage, another team from Singapore, the Singapore Armed Forces FC are set to qualify as either Group E toppers or runners-up.

The AFC Cup quarterfinals are scheduled for September 16 and 23, followed by the semifinals on October 7 and 21. The finals will be held on October 31 and November 7.

### Pogrebnyak Out of UEFA Cup



Russian champions Zenit St. Petersburg will go into Wednesday's UEFA Cup final against Scotland's Glasgow Rangers weakened by the absence of top striker Pavel Pogrebnyak.

The 24-year-old Russian international, who is this season's UEFA Cup joint top scorer on 10 with Bayern Munich marksman Luca Toni, will miss the final after being booked in the return semifinal with the German champions.

However, Zenit manager Dick Advocaat insisted that the absence of his top striker would not sink his side's chances of a first European trophy.

"Pavel (Pogrebnyak) has performed well in European cups this season," Advocaat told AFP. "I'm very pleased with his form. His absence is a serious loss but definitely not a tragedy for us."

"During this season we have repeatedly been forced to play without our top players, but nevertheless have managed to reach the final. I believe we can find a worthy substitution for Pogrebnyak."

Zenit, who were given a rest from the domestic league to better prepare for UEFA Cup final in Manchester, were holding their practice sessions in the Netherlands.

On Saturday they recorded a 2-2 draw in a friendly with the Dutch league side AZ Alkmaar.

Zenit trailed 2-0, but managed to draw level with defender Roman Shirokov and Pogrebnyak netting one apiece.

Despite Pogrebnyak's absence, Zenit will be able to call on a near full-strength squad with striker Andrei Arshavin and midfielders Radek Sirl and Fernando Ricksen having served suspensions in the return semifinal with Bayern.

### Formula One to Quit Magny-Cours



Formula One supreme Bernie Ecclestone says this year's French Grand Prix will be the last held at Magny-Cours.

Ecclestone has long argued that the Circuit de Nevers, 155 miles (250km) south of Paris, is inaccessible and not up to modern F1 standards.

He said in an interview with French sports daily L'Equipe, "The concern is the location—2008 will be the last time we continue like this."

"I would really love a French Grand Prix in the streets of Paris."

Ecclestone added, "Prime Minister Francois Fillon told me we would see if we could have a Grand Prix in Paris or just outside but that would not necessarily be for 2009, rather for 2010."