

## Roma, Leverkusen in race to sign Zenit's Azmoun: Report



fc-zenit.ru

**Sports Desk**

Zenit St. Petersburg's Iranian striker Sardar Azmoun is reportedly on the verge of leaving the club after eight years in the Russian top-flight. Mixed reports in recent days have suggested that either Serie A giant AS Roma or Bundesliga side Bayer 04 Leverkusen will be the next destination of the Iranian international. Italian website Tuttomercatoweb said that the prolific striker has reached personal terms with Leverkusen and a move to the German club is pending an agreement with Zenit, who are believed to be asking €20 million for Azmoun. Meanwhile, Russian sports website Championat reported AS Roma are still eager to sign Azmoun, having seen an initial €18m offer rejected by Zenit. According to Championat, Roma are willing to offer

one of Spanish winger Pedro, French midfielder Steven N'zonzi, or Swedish keeper Robin Olsen as part of the deal for Azmoun. The reports come after Zenit had made it clear to Roma and their new Portuguese manager Jose Mourinho that Azmoun would not be for sale this summer. A Zenit's tweet read, "Mourinho, ignore him," after Azmoun had scored the opening goal of the new Russian Premier League campaign for the defending champions on Saturday in a 3-1 away victory over Khimki. However, with Azmoun's contract running until summer of 2022, Zenit can't afford to let their valuable player leave on free transfer. Having joined Zenit in February 2019, Azmoun has scored 54 goals, coupled with 19 assists, in 85 appearances for the Russian giant. He has also found the net on 37 occasions in 55 international caps.

## Esteghlal to face Golgothar, Foolad playing Malavan in Hazfi Cup semis



MOHAMMADREZA ABBASI/MEHR NEWS AGENCY

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Esteghlal will square off against Golgothar Sirjan in the Hazfi Cup semifinals at Tehran's Azadi Stadium on August 4. The draw for the last-four stage of the Iranian domestic cup competition took place on Monday, where Foolad Khuzestan was pitted against second-tier side Malavan Bandar Anzali. Malavan, one of the most decorated teams in the history of the competition, beat Kheybar Khorramabad in the shootout, following a goalless draw, on Saturday to book their place in the semis. Esteghlal will be heading into the clash against their former manager Amir Qalenoee on the back of a shootout victory over arch-rivals Persepolis, as Farhad Majidi's men are eager to finish their decent season, which

has seen them secure a third-place finish in the league, with silverware. The last time these two sides met, the Tehran-based Blues beat Qalenoee's side 2-0 in the league at home in late June, courtesy of early strikes by Mohammad-Hossein Moradmand and Mehdi Mehdipour. Meanwhile, Foolad, also shootout winners against Sepahan in the quarterfinals, will be looking to book a place in next season's AFC Champions League (ACL) by lifting the trophy in the August 8 final. While only the top three in the league will be guaranteed a spot in the Asian elite clubs' competition, Foolad are trailing fourth-placed Golgothar by a single point, heading into the final round of fixtures on Friday. Should Esteghlal win the Hazfi Cup, the fourth team in the league table will be granted an ACL spot.

## Iran bids for hosting ACL knockouts

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Iran Football Federation on Tuesday launched a bid to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) for hosting the AFC Champions League (ACL) knockout rounds – from the quarterfinals onwards – in the West zone, including the final showpiece. The AFC had announced in early July that the November 23 final, which was initially set to take place through a two-legged tie on November 21 and 27, would be played in the West zone, as it was forced to change the schedule due to the coronavirus-related issues across the continent. The Asian football governing body had also confirmed that the quarterfinals and semifinals of the Asian elite clubs' competition would be held in a centralized format in West and East. Iran will be represented by Persepolis, Esteghlal, and Tractor in the round of 16 of the competition. Esteghlal and Tractor will take on Saudi sides Al Hilal and Al Nassr, respectively, while Persepolis – runners-up in 2018 and



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2020 – will away to Istiklol Tajikistan, the surprise package at this year's tournament. Esteghlal will face Al Hilal at the Zabeel Stadium – home ground of Emirati club Al Wasl – on September 13, with Tractor and Al Nassr going head-to-head at Doha's Jassim bin Hamad Stadium a day later. Political tensions between the two Persian Gulf states had seen Iranian and Saudi clubs squaring off in neutral venues since 2016, before Esteghlal and Foolad Khuzestan flew to Saudi Arabia in April to play their centralized group fixtures of the Asian elite clubs competition in Jeddah and Riyadh.

## Iran move up to 10th in FIVB ranking



volleyballworld.com

Iran's Amir Ghafour (top) is in action during a 3-2 victory over Poland at the Tokyo Olympics on July 24, 2021.

**Sports Desk**

Iran moved up one spot to stand at 10th place in the latest FIVB Men's World Ranking, released on Tuesday. Iran collected 265 points to sit two points clear of Japan, who jumped to 11th following impressive recent results at the Volleyball Nations League and the Tokyo Olympics. Iran have also started their Olympics campaign in emphatic fashion, beating gold favourites Poland in a five-set thriller on the open-

ing day, before easing to victory in straight sets against Venezuela. The last two fixtures in Pool A of the Olympics will see Vladimir Alekno's men square off against Canada, Italy, and Japan respectively. The top nine of the world ranking remained intact, with leaders Brazil (432 points) being followed by Poland (382 points) and Russia (357 points). USA, France, Slovenia, Serbia, Italy, and Argentina are fourth to ninth.

## Japan's Osaka in shock Olympics tennis exit

Japanese superstar Naomi Osaka suffered a surprise exit in her home Olympics as Czech Marketa Vondrousova earned a straight-set win in Tokyo. Osaka, 23, has been one of the faces of the Games in the Japanese capital and had the honour of lighting the Olympic cauldron in last week's opening ceremony, BBC Sport reported. But the four-time Grand Slam champion could not back that up by winning a medal, losing 6-1 6-4 to the world number 42 in the third round. "I definitely feel like there was a lot of pressure for this," said the world number two. "I think it's maybe because I haven't played in the Olympics before and for the first year it was a bit much." Osaka, who is the reigning US Open and Australian Open champion, had won 25 of her previous 26 matches on a hard court. It was Osaka's first tournament after withdrawing from the French Open in June, when she revealed she had "suffered long bouts of depression" since winning her first Grand Slam title in 2018. "I think I'm glad with how I played, with taking that break that I had," she said. "I've taken long breaks before and I've managed to do well. "I'm not saying that I did bad right now, but I do know that my expectations were a lot



EDGAR SU/REUTERS

Naomi Osaka of Japan is seen before her third round match against Marketa Vondrousova of the Czech Republic in the Tokyo Olympics on July 27, 2021.

higher. "I feel like my attitude wasn't that great because I don't really know how to cope with that pressure so that's the best that I could have done in this situation." Following impressive wins in the first two rounds, Osaka looked to be shaping up nicely for a gold-medal bid but produced 32 un-

forced errors in a rusty performance against former French Open finalist Vondrousova. The 22-year-old Czech hit 18 winners against 10 unforced errors as she converted five of her 11 break points in the match. Osaka's exit follows that of Australian top seed Ashleigh Barty in the first round, leaving the women's singles draw wide open.