

## Esteghlal, Persepolis share the spoils in cagy Tehran derby

### Sports Desk

A boring Tehran derby on Saturday saw Persian Gulf Pro League giants Esteghlal and Persepolis play to a goalless stalemate at Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Clear-cut chances were few and far between in the match – featuring two teams which had shared just 17 goals between them after seven rounds of games into the new campaign – with Vahid Amiri going close to break the deadlock for the Reds on a couple of occasions early in the second period.

The Iranian international's header went just wide two minutes after the interval before his left-footed effort in the box was well blocked by Rouzbeh Cheshmi.

Esteghlal, meanwhile, had a major appeal for a spot kick late in the game after Beninese striker Rudy Gestede "was tripped" by Persepolis center-back Farshad Faraji.

The draw still saw Persepolis, which is seeking a record-extending sixth successive league title, cut the deficit on top of the table to one point, as league leader Sepahan was stunned by a 4-2 defeat at Golgozar Sirjan.

Armin Sohrabian gave Golgozar the lead with just two minutes into the game before summer signing Mehdi Tikhari doubled the lead five minutes before the interval.

Tikhari scored a third goal for the home side in the 54th minute but Danial Esmailifard pulled one back for the visiting side two minutes later.



Esteghlal striker Rudy Gestede (C) is in action against Persepolis midfielder Kamal Kamyabinia (L) during a Persian Gulf Pro League match at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on December 4, 2021.

points later.

Saeed Sadeqi secured the three points for Amir Qaleno'i's men two minutes from normal time as an Esmailifard's second deep into stoppage time proved to be just a consolation for Moharram Navidkia's side.

The result saw Golgozar move equal on 16

points with Sepahan, only to stand second on goal difference.

Esteghlal is fourth in the table, one point adrift of its city rival, but could go further down the standing, should Aluminium Arak – on 13 points with a game in hand – beat Tractor in Tabriz today.

## Iran's Rostami wins world para powerlifting silver

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Iran's Rouhollah Rostami bagged a silver medal at the World Para Powerlifting Championships in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Representing the country in the men's up-to-80kg weight class, Rostami settled for a runner-up finish with a best lift of 230kg – equal with China's Gu Xiaofei, who was handed the ultimate prize due to a lower body weight.

Egyptian Mohamed Elefant snatched the bronze with 217kg.

This was a second major medal of the year for Rostami, after the Iranian powerlifter had claimed the gold at the Tokyo Paralympics in late August with 234kg – 19kg above silver medalist Gu, while Elefant had also grabbed the bronze.

Rostami holds the world record of the class with 241kg – a feat he achieved during the Para Powerlifting World Cup in Bangkok, Thailand, in May.

It was also a fourth world medal for the Iranian, having won the gold in 2019, as well as the 2014 and 2017 silvers.

Rostami's compatriot Amir Jafari – a silver medalist in Tokyo – had also finished his campaign in Tbilisi with a second-spot finish in the men's 65kg class.

Jafari lifted 193kg, trailing Algeria's Hocine Bettir – bronze winner in August's Games – by one kilogram.

The competition is one of the compulsory events to qualify for the 2024 Summer Paralympics in Paris.



Iran's Rouhollah Rostami (L) poses for a photo on the podium with his silver medal at the World Para Powerlifting Championships in Tbilisi, Georgia, on December 3, 2021.

## Djokovic still coy about playing in Australian Open

Novak Djokovic is still uncertain whether he will take part in the 2022 Australian Open but will soon make a decision, the world number one said after Serbia's 2-1 defeat by Croatia in the Davis Cup semi-finals.

Djokovic, 34, has repeatedly declined to reveal whether he has been vaccinated against COVID-19, with his father Srdjan telling Serbia's Prva television last week that the world's top-ranked player would probably pull out of the tournament, Reuters reported.

"I know what you want to ask but I am not going to give you an answer tonight," Djokovic told a virtual news conference on Friday after a question about when he might be expected on court again.

"Obviously, Australia is just around the corner so you'll know very soon.

"I will use the next days to recover and forget about tennis. I am really tired from this season and this whole year. I need some family time now and we'll see what the future holds," he added.

Organisers of the season's first Grand Slam at Melbourne Park have said all players have to be vaccinated to take part, which Srdjan Djokovic called "blackmail". The state of Victoria sports minister, Martin Pakula, dismissed the criticism.

Should Djokovic miss the Jan. 17-30 event he has won a record nine times, he will pass up an opportunity to top the men's all-time list of major winners as he is tied on 20 Grand Slams each with peers Rafa Nadal and Roger Federer.

Djokovic looked grim-faced after his valiant effort to propel 2010 champions Serbia into the Davis Cup final fell short against traditional ri-

vals and twice former winners Croatia, who won the decisive doubles to claim a 2-1 overall victory.

Djokovic hauled Serbia into the tie with a straight-sets win over Marin Cilic after Croatia's Borna Gojo overpowered Dusan Lajovic, but Djokovic and Filip Krajinovic could not stop world number ones Mate Pavic and Nikola Mektic in the crunch rubber.

"We always knew this was going to be the toughest match of the tie," said Djokovic. "In order to win the Davis Cup (again), we need to have more doubles players, we need a doubles team."

"These guys are the best in the world. They always know exactly where the ball is going to land and if you don't hit a perfect shot, you're in trouble."



Serbian Novak Djokovic is in action against Croatia's Marin Cilic at the Davis Cup semifinals in Madrid, Spain, on December 3, 2021.

## Messi worthy of seventh Ballon d'Or victory, says Xavi

Barcelona manager Xavi Hernandez said former team mate Lionel Messi deserved his Ballon d'Or win, describing the Argentine's record-extending seventh victory as "total justice".

Paris St Germain forward Messi, 34, beat Bayern Munich striker Rob-

ert Lewandowski and Chelsea's Jorginho to lift the prestigious award after winning the Copa America for the first time with Argentina in July, Reuters reported.

"I think it's football justice. He is the best footballer in the world, and the best of all time. And he deserves

this seventh award. No doubt about it," Xavi said.

"We may think that maybe Lewandowski also deserved it, or other players, but this is the same debate every year... The moment they open the envelope and they say Messi won it, then it's fair."



Lionel Messi poses for a photo with the Ballon d'Or award in Paris, France, on November 29, 2021.



DAVID RAMOS/GETTY IMAGES

## Curry stars as Warriors end Suns' 18-match winning streak

Stephen Curry led the charge as the Golden State Warriors ended the Phoenix Suns' 18-match franchise-record winning streak with a 118-96 victory.

Curry made 23 points, five rebounds and five assists to make up for his below-par performance against the Suns earlier in the week, when he scored 12, BBC Sport reported.

His six three-pointers on Friday leave him needing just 28 more to top the NBA all-time list.

Hall of Famer Ray Allen currently leads on 2,973.

Andrew Wiggins added 19 points as the Warriors extended their winning run at home to 11, while Deandre Ayton top-scored for the Suns with 23 points.

Elsewhere, Luke Kennard hit two late three-pointers as the Los Angeles Clippers defeated city rivals the Los Angeles Lakers 119-115.

The Lakers welcomed back LeBron James from his one-game absence under the NBA's health and safety protocols, after a positive COVID-19 test kept him out of Tuesday's win over the Sacramento Kings.

The Philadelphia 76ers narrowly defeated the Atlanta Hawks 98-96 with Joel Embiid scoring 28 points,



CARY EDMONDSON/USA TODAY SPORTS  
Warriors guard Stephen Curry (30) drives past Suns center Deandre Ayton (22) during an NBA game at the Chase Center, San Francisco, CA, US, on December 3, 2021.

including a 13-foot jump shot with 42 seconds remaining that gave the Sixers the lead for the first time.

The Cleveland Cavaliers brushed aside the Washington Wizards 116-101 while Eastern Conference leaders the Brooklyn Nets beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 110-105.

There were wins too for the Utah Jazz and the Miami Heat over the Boston Celtics and the Indiana Pacers respectively, while the New Orleans Pelicans comfortably defeated the Dallas Mavericks and the Houston Rockets claimed a two-point win over the Orlando Magic.