

Esteghlal, Persepolis to Face Qatari Giants in ACL Quarters



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Esteghlal and Persepolis football teams of Iran will meet Qatari powerhouses in the quarter-final round of AFC Champions League.

Two-time champion Esteghlal set to face off against Qatar's Al Sadd in the Asia West Zone.

The Iranian giant will host Al Sadd on Aug. 27 in Tehran and play the Qatari team in return leg in Doha on Sept. 17.

Persepolis also plays Al Duhail – who has won all eight of its matches in the ACL this year – on Aug. 28 in Doha and hosts the Qatari giant on Sept. 18 in Tehran.

Kashima Antlers from Japan, who has not gone beyond the quarter-final stage, will welcome China PR's Tianjin Quanjian.

Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors, champion in 2006 and 2016, will lock horns with fellow Korea Republic side Suwon Samsung Bluewings, who has also won the title twice - in the 2000/01 and 2001/02 seasons.

Rockets Edge Warriors to Level NBA Playoff Series



James Harden of the Houston Rockets drives past Jordan Bell of the Golden State Warriors during the 2018 NBA Playoffs in Oakland, California (AFP Photo/EZRA SHAW)

SAN FRANCISCO (AFP) - NBA regular-season wins leader Houston, powered by James Harden's 30 points and 27 from Chris Paul, edged defending champion Golden State 95-92 Tuesday to level their semi-final playoff series at two wins each.

The Rockets snapped Golden State's record playoff home win streak at 16 games, the Warriors suffering their first loss since the 2016 NBA Finals, and took their first playoff win over the Warriors in eight all-time tries.

P.J. Tucker had 16 rebounds and Clint Capella grabbed 13 for the Rockets, who host game five of the best-of-seven Western Conference final Thursday in Houston.

Paul hopes the title quest helps the Houston area take relief from a school shooting that saw a teen gunman kill 10 people, much the way the Houston Astros' World Series baseball crown did last year after hurricane flooding.

The series winner will face either Cleveland or Boston in the NBA Finals starting May 31.

Stephen Curry led Golden State with 28 points on 10-of-26 shooting while Kevin Durant added 27 points and 12 rebounds and Draymond Green had 11 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists.

The defeat marks the first time

the Warriors, seeking a third crown in four seasons, have lost twice in a playoff series since Durant joined last season.

Harden made 11-of-26 shots from the floor and Paul hit 10-of-20 to lift the Rockets, who closed the game on a 25-10 run after falling behind 82-70.

The Warriors lacked starter Andre Iguodala with a bruised left leg and saw Klay Thompson strain his left knee in the second quarter while Houston's Paul said his nagging left foot injury was improved.

Curry scored 17 points in the third quarter, three consecutive 3-pointers sparking an 18-3 run to open the big lead.

Stopping Houston took a toll on the Warriors in a physical contest.

Golden State, which opened the game on a 12-0 run, managed only 12 points in the fourth quarter.

Rockets coach Mike D'Antoni said he had never seen his club defend so well.

In the dying seconds, Thompson missed a jumper, Paul hit a final foul shot and Curry missed a desperate 3-point try at the final buzzer.

Harden scored 15 points in the second quarter as Houston, down 28-19 after one quarter, surged ahead 53-46 at half-time.

Yates Holds Giro d'Italia Lead as Froome Moves Up to Fourth

ROVERETO, Italy (AFP) - Britain's Simon Yates has retained the Giro d'Italia leader's pink jersey after 16th stage individual time-trial at Rovereto in northern Italy which was won by Australian Rohan Dennis.

Yates, 25, limited the damage on defending champion Tom Dumoulin, who remains 56sec behind the Briton going into the crucial, final week of racing.

Mitchelton-Scott rider Yates said he was satisfied with his day after finishing the 34.2km stage from Trento to Rovereto in 22nd position.

"I'm very happy even if I have to be careful in the stages to come," he added of the race which finishes in Rome in five days.

Four-time Tour de France winner Chris Froome also had a good day in the saddle moving to up fourth overall after finishing fifth, 35sec behind the Australian.

And the Team Sky rider warned



Yates holds Giro d'Italia lead as Froome moves up to fourth

the final week could see some surprises despite being 3min 50sec off compatriot Yates who looks increasingly difficult to beat.

BMC rider Dennis is now sixth overall,

five minutes behind Yates.

Dennis, 27, finished 14sec ahead of Germany's Tony Martin of Katusha-Alpecin with Dumoulin of Team Sunweb third at 22sec off the pace.

It was the first Giro stage win for the rider from Adelaide who finished second in the opening stage time-trial in Jerusalem behind Dumoulin, and adds to his stage wins on the Tour de France and Vuelta a Espana.

Overall leader Yates lost less time to second-placed defending champion Dumoulin than many observers had predicted.

Italian climber Fabio Aru, who had looked out of the race after losing 20 minutes on Sunday, created the big surprise of the day as he achieved the best time-trial of his career finishing just two seconds behind Froome.

But France's Thibaut Pinot lost more than three minutes on the stage winner to drop to fifth overall, 1min 8sec off Italy's Domenico Pozzovivo who occupies the final podium position.

Wednesday's 17th stage over 155km from Riva del Garda to Iseo, east of Milan, should suit the sprinters.

"I Have Biological Age of 23," Says Ronaldo



MADRID (Reuters) – Real Madrid forward Cristiano Ronaldo has no plans to slow down and feels a decade younger than his 33 years, the Portuguese declared

ahead of the Champions League final with Liverpool, where he is targeting a fifth European Cup triumph.

"Right now I have a biological age of

23," the five-times world player of the year said in an interview with Spanish television program El Chiringuito broadcast on Wednesday.

"I've still got a long time left, I can keep playing until I'm 41. I'm feeling good, happy, I can't complain. We are playing another final on Saturday and the fans are behind Cristiano."

Ronaldo is top scorer in the Champions League for a remarkable sixth year in a row, with 15 goals in 12 games in this season's competition. If he hits the net against Liverpool on Saturday in Kiev, he will become the first ever player to score in four European Cup finals.

The Portuguese has had to take extra responsibility in attack this season for

Madrid as Karim Benzema and Gareth Bale have struggled for form at various stages of the season.

Ronaldo, however, did not appear enthusiastic about press speculation linking Paris St Germain forward Neymar with a move to Real and gave his backing to his current team mates.

"I've been here for eight years and people always say 50 players are coming here but in the end no-one comes. In September people think lots of players are going to come but the ones who take us to finals are always the same ones," he said.

"The best players are already at Madrid. Bale, Benzema, (Lucas) Vazquez, (Marco) Asensio. They are all here."

Ferrari Looking to Get Back on Track in F1 at Monaco GP

MONACO (AP) - For Ferrari to win in Formula One, it needs to stop gifting points to Mercedes.

Things could start to change at this weekend's Monaco Grand Prix. Ferrari dominated the race last year, securing a 1-2 finish as Sebastian Vettel beat Kimi Raikkonen.

Defending champion Lewis Hamilton has won the last two races with Mercedes this season to move 17 points ahead of Vettel in their title battle despite trailing by the same amount after Vettel won the first two. With both drivers chasing a fifth F1 title to move level with Argentine great Juan Manuel Fangio, it is shaping up as a thrilling season.

Providing Ferrari stops conceding points like an unplugged oil leak.

Vettel took pole position in Azerbaijan

two races ago. But in that race he found himself second after a botched pit stop. Then, he made a rash error of judgment late on and dropped down to fourth, rather than consolidating a position of strength against Hamilton.

Vettel struggles to contain his composure at times. Late last season, the German driver threw away the chance to regain the championship lead from Hamilton with a similarly brash move during the Singapore GP. It set the tone for the remaining races, as his title bid spiraled out of control.

The lost points are not all down to Vettel, however. At the Spanish GP two weeks ago, he lost track position after Ferrari called him in for an extra stop for tires and finished fourth again.

Although Vettel defended his team's tactical decision, it seemed overly risky

and revealed a tendency to make panicky calls within the Ferrari team. There is a nervous aura surrounding Ferrari. Last month, a mechanic broke his leg after a botched tire change in Bahrain.

However, although Mercedes grabbed a 1-2 finish in Barcelona, it remains to be seen whether it was a one-off.

Barcelona's track layout and surface suited Mercedes, whereas Monaco's is more awkward. Because of the tight and twisty nature of the 3.4-kilometer (2.1-mile) street circuit, whoever takes pole position on Saturday is favored for victory in the glittering jewel in the F1 calendar.

After a poor race last year - Valtteri Bottas finished fourth and Hamilton was seventh - Mercedes is understandably cautious.

Red Bull has a good chance because

the curvy track has less long straights, thus negating the superior speed of Mercedes and Ferrari. Both Red Bull drivers have shown good speed, although consistency remains elusive.

Daniel Ricciardo won in China, but teammate Max Verstappen is looking for his first win after an incident-packed season.

The Dutch driver has failed to finish twice and has been embroiled in typically controversial moments. Ricciardo crashed into the back of him in Azerbaijan as they fought for position with a podium in sight, and both went out. It earned both drivers a stern rebuke from team principal Christian Horner, but tensions have apparently appeased.

A strong third-place finish in Spain reassured Verstappen heading to Monaco.

Morocco Writes to FIFA as U.S. Territories Permitted to Vote



This is Morocco's fifth attempt to host the World Cup after bids for the 1994, 1998, 2006 and 2010 finals.

LONDON (Dispatches) - The Moroccan Football Federation has written to FIFA to complain about U.S. territories being allowed to vote to decide the 2026 World Cup hosts. Morocco is bidding to host the tournament, against a joint proposal from the USA, Mexico

and Canada. Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico are able to vote on 13 June, but Morocco claim that is a conflict of interests.

The 2026 World Cup finals will be the first to feature 48 teams.