

Esteghlal to Take on Malavan in Hazfi Cup Final



TEHRAN – The two finalists in the Iranian Hazfi Cup (knock-

out cup), Esteghlal and Malavan, will play at Aluminium

Arak FC Stadium in the city of Arak in the northwest of Iran on Thursday.

The Tehranian Esteghlal and Malavan FC from the Bandar Anzali city in the north of Iran will face off on Thursday, May 29th in Aluminium Arak FC Stadium in the city of Arak in the northwest of the country.

The Hazfi Cup final match will kick off at 7:45 p.m. Tehran local time at Imam Khomeini Stadium in Arak, Aluminium Arak FC's stadium.

The match will be the tenth time Esteghlal and Malavan have faced each other in the Hazfi Cup. In their nine previous encounters, Esteghlal have triumphed four times, while Malavan secured three victories. Two matches ended in draws, both during the semi-final stage when ties were played over two legs.

Malavan's head coach, Maziar Zare, has yet to secure a victory against Esteghlal in his five previous encounters. His teams have managed two draws but suffered three defeats. The final will reveal whether he can break this winless streak. Notably, Mojtaba Jabbari will face Malavan for the first time as a head coach.

Pacers Top Knicks to Take 3-1 Lead

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - **Tyrese Haliburton delivered a one-of-a-kind performance Tuesday night, and it put the Indiana Pacers one victory away from reaching the NBA Finals for the first time since 2000.**

Haliburton recorded 32 points, 15 assists and 12 rebounds without a turnover to lead the Pacers to a 130-121 victory over the New York Knicks in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference finals in Indianapolis. He is the first player in NBA history to put up that stat line (30-15-10-0) in a postseason game.

In addition to notching his second career postseason triple-double, Haliburton made five 3-pointers and had four steals to help the Pacers take a 3-1 lead in the best-of-seven series.

Haliburton viewed the superlative effort as something he owed to his teammates after the Pacers' Game 3 loss on Sunday.

"I was just trying to be aggressive, trying to respond," Haliburton said. "I felt like I let the team down in Game

3, so it was important for me to just come out here and make plays. Guys put me in position to make plays and play my game. It was a big win for us."

There was no surprise which number Pacers coach Rick Carlisle liked most: the zero in the turnover column.

"He was really throwing the ball ahead tonight, which was really important to us," Carlisle said. "To not have any turnovers in any of those types of situations is pretty remarkable. But this has become his thing. I know he takes great pride in it, and that's a motivating factor."

"He happens to do some impressive statistical things, but he's well aware that all of this far transcends statistics."

The Pacers will try to wrap up the series Thursday in New York.

Pascal Siakam scored 30 points, Bennedict Mathurin added 20 in 12-plus minutes off the bench and Aaron Nesmith contributed 16 points for fourth-seeded Indiana. It was Siakam's second 30-point effort of the series.

Jalen Brunson scored 31 points, Karl-Anthony Towns

had 24 points and 12 rebounds and OG Anunoby added 22 points for the third-seeded Knicks. Mikal Bridges scored 17 points and Josh Hart added 12 points and 11 rebounds for New York.

"We scored 120 points, but our defense wasn't good enough," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said. "Our rebounding was good enough. But our defense and our turnovers hurt us."

Thibodeau attributed Haliburton's historic outing to his team's breakdown.

Towns injured his left knee for the second consecutive game and was hobbling at the finish. Thibodeau said Towns would be examined.

Meanwhile, Nesmith was declared good to go by Carlisle more than an hour before tipoff. The 25-year-old forward had sprained his right ankle midway through the third quarter of Game 3 on Sunday.

Myles Turner added 13 points before fouling out for Indiana, which shot 51.1 percent from the field and 13 of 32 (40.6 percent) from 3-point

range. The Pacers again excelled in transition with a 22-9 edge in fastbreak points to increase their advantage to 65-23 in that category for the series.

The Knicks made 46.3 percent of their shots and were 12 of 28 (42.9 percent) from behind the arc. New York had a 44-33 rebounding edge.

The Pacers scored the first seven points of the second half to conclude a 13-0 burst and grab a 76-64 advantage.

The Knicks cut their deficit to 89-84 after two free throws by Brunson with 3:59 left in the third quarter. However, a 3-pointer by Haliburton made it 99-89 with 55.6 seconds left in the period and the Pacers took a 102-91 lead into the final stanza.

Siakam scored five straight points early in the quarter to give Indiana its largest lead at 111-96. But New York scored seven straight to move within 115-109 after a putback by Towns with 4:24 left.

Indiana maintained its pace and the lead was 126-116 after Obi Toppin drilled a 3-pointer with 45 seconds left.

Lamine Yamal Extends Barcelona Contract Until 2031



BARCELONA (Reuters) - **Barcelona's teenage sensation Lamine Yamal has signed a contract extension that will keep him at the Spanish champions until 2031, the club announced.**

The 17-year-old forward, whose deal was due to expire in 2026, enjoyed a stellar season, helping Barca win LaLiga and the Copa del Rey,

with 18 goals and 25 assists in 55 matches.

Local media have reported that the exciting Spanish international could become the Barcelona squad's highest-paid player if he meets certain performance-related clauses.

Having displayed such entertaining football this season, Yamal is a leading contender for this year's Ballon d'Or.

Djokovic Makes Winning Start to French Open Bid

PARIS (AFP) - **Novak Djokovic began his latest bid for a record-breaking 25th Grand Slam singles title with a commanding win over Mackenzie McDonald.**

The former world number one ended his wait for his 100th ATP singles title in Geneva last week and maintained his recent upturn in form with a 6-3 6-3 6-3 win over the 98th-ranked American.

Djokovic - who turned 38 last week - has now won all 21 of the first-round matches he has played at Roland Garros.

Sixth seed Djokovic will next play Corentin Moutet, who beat fellow Frenchman Clement Tabur in straight sets in the first round.

Djokovic arrived in Geneva without a win on clay in 2025, having

suffered first-round exits in both Monte Carlo and Madrid.

But with his wait for a 100th Tour-level title finally over - one which had gone on since he completed the career 'Golden Slam' at the Paris Olympics last summer - the Serb will feel he is beginning to gain real momentum on this surface.

The one-sided victory over McDonald, completed two minutes short of the two-hour mark, was his fifth successive win following a run of three straight losses.

After that unfamiliar slump in results, Djokovic took the decision to end his six-month partnership with coach and former rival Andy Murray, who he said joked this week that he was winning tournaments

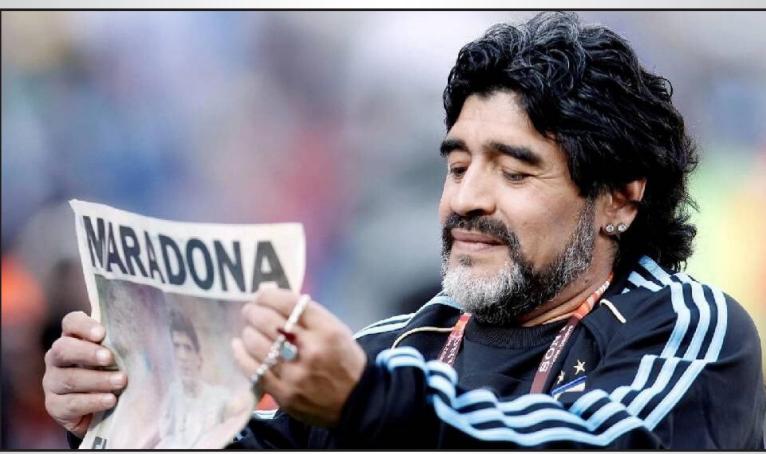


Novak Djokovic has contested every French Open since 2005

now he had "a proper coach".

Asked about his last-minute decision to compete in Geneva, Djokovic said: "I think it was a good move, to be honest, because I was struggling a little bit with [my] confidence level, doubting my game a bit.

Judge in Diego Maradona's Homicide Trial Stands Down Amid Scandal



BUENOS AIRES (Reuters) - **One of the three Argentine judges presiding in the trial of seven members of Diego Maradona's medical team charged with negligent homicide in the soccer star's 2020 death stepped down from the case on Tuesday amid accusations of ethical breaches, leaving the future of the proceedings uncertain.**

Judge Julieta Makintach stood down from the case after video surfaced in recent days showing her apparently being interviewed by a camera crew as part of a documentary in the corridors of the Buenos Aires courthouse and in her office. Court rules forbid such interviews involving a judge mid-trial.

Maradona's trial was adjourned until Thursday to decide next steps.

The trial began on March 11 in the South American country where the World Cup winner

is a revered figure. The defendants have denied the charges of "simple homicide with eventual intent" in Maradona's treatment. If convicted, they could face prison sentences of between eight and 25 years.

Maradona, considered one of the greatest players of all time, died at home in Buenos Aires in November 2020 from heart failure at age 60 while recovering from surgery to remove a blood clot experienced days earlier.

His death prompted an outpouring of grief and finger-pointing in Argentina over who was to blame after Maradona's years-long battle with addiction and ill health. Maradona led Argentina to a World Cup victory in 1986 and scored one of the most memorable goals in sporting history against England.

An eighth member of the medical team faces a separate trial by jury in July.

Del Toro Claims Stage 17 Win, Extends Giro Lead



UAE Team Emirates's Isaac Del Toro celebrates as he crosses the finish line after stage 17.

ROME (Reuters) - **Isaac Del Toro of UAE Team Emirates-XRG maintained his excellent form at the Giro d'Italia to win stage 17 with a perfectly-timed sprint on Wednesday, with the Mexican's first stage victory of the race allowing him to extend his lead in the overall standings.**

The 155-km route from San Michele all'Adige to Bormio was less punishing than Tuesday's stage 16, but featured two difficult climbs -- Passo del Tonale and Passo del Mortirolo -- with a total of 3,800 metres of elevation.

Del Toro was the freshest man at the end of the final ascent and he broke away from Romain Bardet (Picnic-PostNL) and rival Richard Carapaz (EF Education-EasyPost) with just over two km left.

Bardet crossed the line four seconds after Del Toro, with Carapaz in third.

Del Toro's spectacular effort breathed new life into his bid to win a first Grand Tour and assuaged any doubts that arose after the pink jersey holder saw his lead shrink in a chaotic stage 16 on Tuesday.

"I imagined that I could win a stage with the maglia rosa. The Giro has been very good so far,"

the 21-year-old said after his win.

"The fight for the podium is incredible. Today I realized that I will never give up. I will always try to win. I have nothing to lose. It wasn't any easier today than yesterday. With the team, we expected some attacks to take place on the Mortirolo.

"We didn't want to let all the GC riders go. I went across to them and I took it easy a bit. I caught them in the descent. We had made this plan with the team that I would attack on the last small climb."

Del Toro, who became only the second Mexican to win a stage at the Giro d'Italia after Julio Alberto Perez Cuapio in 2001 and 2002, now has a 41-second lead in the general classification.

Ecuadorean Carapaz leapfrogged Simon Yates (Visma-Lease a Bike) into second place, with the Briton finishing the stage in fourth place, 15 seconds behind Del Toro.

Earlier on Wednesday, Jay Vine (UAE Team Emirates-XRG) and stage-eight winner Luke Plapp (Jayco AlUla) both abandoned the Giro.

After a string of mountainous stages, Thursday's stage 18 will be a largely flat 144-km ride from Morbegno to Cesano Maderno.