

Football in Iran

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Football in Iran is quite possibly the most followed sport, with only wrestling being able to match its popularity. Football has been a part of life for Iranians for many decades now and is played in schools, alleys, streets and football clubs nationwide.

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History of football in Iran

Football was an unknown sport in Iran until British workers introduced the game in the 1930's. At that time they were working at major oil refineries in the province of Khuzestan. The British played among themselves at first, as 22 men in shorts chasing after a plastic ball seemed to be more of a joke than a game to Iranians. The skepticism was short-lived and eventually the Iranian workers started playing as well, and in a small amount of time, football became extremely popular in Khuzestan. Clubs were established, and many travelled to Tehran and other cities to play other teams.

Teams from Khuzestan were always the most successful was the powerhouse the 50's and early 60's, but the game had become very popular in Iran by then. Tehran slowly started becoming the football capital of Iran, and numerous great clubs emerged from there. Shahin FC, Oghab FC, and Taj, were all Tehran teams established in the mid 1940's which even to this day have a great following. As the number of club teams increased the need for a national league became apparent, and ever since 1960, with the exception of a few years, a nationwide football league has existed in Iran. The Takhte Jamshid Cup, Azadegan League and the IPL being the most important ones.

The very first match that the Iranian national football team played was on January 1, 1941 away at Afghanistan. The first two decades of international football for Iran was uneventful, but the 60's and 70's was when Iran established itself as one of Asia's top sides. They won the Asian Cup in 1968, 1972 and 1976, the 1974 Asian Games football tournament, qualified for the 1972 and 1976 Olympic Games and most importantly qualified for World Cup 1978 in Argentina.

The Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War soon occurred and football was downplayed, but the national team has made a comeback in recent years, qualifying for the 1998 Football World Cup and recording their first win ever in World Cup (against the United States) and also qualifying for the 2006 tournament in Germany.

Football structure

The league and national team are administrated by the Iranian FA known as the I.R.I.F.F. The I.R.I.F.F has also been a member of FIFA since 1945 and the Asian Football Confederation since 1958. The Federation receives most of its budget from the Iranian government's Physical Education Department, and also from sponsorships with various companies.

Attendance at football matches

Iran's Islamic law imposes tight restrictions on women. They need permission from their male guardian to travel to foreign countries, and since the 1979 Islamic revolution, have not been allowed to attend public sporting events, specifically football. While women were allowed to eventually attend most other sporting events, the football ban remained. This ban was lifted in April 2006 by the Mahmoud Ahmadinejad government, which ordered the country's sports organisations to provide special seating sections for women and families to attend football matches. [1] (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/iran/story/0,,1760745,00.html>) , [2] (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4938912.stm) However, he was quickly overruled by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Major arenas

- Azadi Stadium, Tehran
- Dr Azodi Stadium. Rasht
- Fooladshahr Stadium, Isfahan
- Hafezieh Stadium, Shiraz
- Iran Khodro Stadium, Karaj
- Naghsh e Jahan Stadium, Isfahan
- Nasiri Stadium, Yazd
- Rah Ahan Stadium, Tehran
- Samen Stadium, Mashhad
- Shahid Dastgerdi Stadium, Tehran
- Shahid Shiroudi Stadium, Tehran
- Shiroudi Stadium, Karaj
- Shohada Stadium, Noshahr
- Takhti Stadium, Abadan
- Takhti Stadium, Ahvaz
- Takhti Stadium, Bandar Anzali
- Takhti Stadium, Tabriz
- Takhti Stadium, Tehran
- Yadegare Imam Stadium, Tabriz

See also

- Azadegan League (Post 2001)
- Football around the world
- Futsal in Iran
- Hazfi Cup
- IPL
- Iran national football team
- Iran national futsal team
- List of football clubs in Iran
- **Sports in Iran**

External links

- Iran Football Center (<http://www.iranFootballCenter.com/>)
- Iran's National Football Federation (<http://www.iriff.ir/>)

- Iran Sports Press (<http://www.iransportspress.com/>)
- National team archive (<http://www.teammelli.com/>)
- Pars Football (<http://www.parsfootball.com/>)
- Persian Football League (<http://www.persianleague.com/>)
- PFDC-Persian Football Dot Com (<http://www.persianfootball.com/>)

Football in Iran 		
League competitions	IRIFF	Cup competitions
Persian Gulf Cup	Iran	Hazfi Cup
Azadegan League (2 groups)	U-23	Iranian Super Cup
2nd Division (2 groups)	League system	
3rd Division (8 groups)	List of clubs	
	List of venues	
	Top Goalscorers (season-by-season)	
	Top Goalscorers (all-time)	

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