

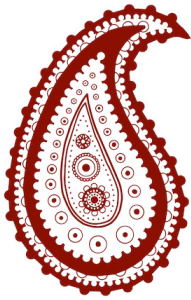
DĀNESH

THE OU UNDERGRADUATE
JOURNAL OF
IRANIAN STUDIES



The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA
College of International Studies
Department of International and Area Studies

Volume 2 (2017)



The UNIVERSITY *of* OKLAHOMA
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FARZANEH FAMILY CENTER
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From the Faculty Advisor

This second volume of *DĀNESH* represents a significant expansion of the journal, both in terms of the scope of topics covered by the published articles, and by the growth of the journal's editorial team. Since its founding in 2016, *DĀNESH* has sought to provide a forum to showcase original research produced by Iranian Studies undergraduate students at the University of Oklahoma. This volume of the journal was produced through the able leadership of **Elizabeth "Libby" Ennenga** (BA, 2017), as the journal's editor-in-chief. Under Libby's editorial leadership *DĀNESH* has continued to thrive as a forum for the study of all aspects of the history, culture, society, and politics of Iran and the Persianate world.

This year also marks the maturing of OU's Iranian Studies program into the newly christened **Farzaneh Family Center for Iranian and Persian Gulf Studies**. As the program has grown, so too has the interest and dedication of OU students in the field of Iranian Studies. The publication of *DĀNESH*, a peer-reviewed journal published under the auspices of OU's Farzaneh Center and the OU College of International Studies, is also dedicated to highlighting the growing undergraduate program in Iranian Studies at the University of Oklahoma.

The name of the journal, *DĀNESH*, comes from the Persian word meaning *knowledge, learning, and wisdom*. We believe this is a fitting name for a journal that seeks to foster deep and compassionate understanding of one of the world's most culturally rich and historically complex civilizations. It is with this in mind that we present the second volume of *DĀNESH*.

Afshin Marashi

Farzaneh Family Chair in Modern Iranian History

Director, Farzaneh Family Center for Iranian and Persian Gulf Studies

From the Editor-in-Chief

I am honored to have been a part of the creation of Volume Two of *DĀNESH*. After an exceptionally successful inaugural edition of the journal, I have been more than impressed to see the quality of this new edition. This journal is made up of outstanding research examining the rich history, numerous religions, complex political climate, and vibrant culture of Iran. I believe in the transformative power of knowledge, and each article published in *DĀNESH* proves the academic dialogue on Iranian Studies is thriving at the University of Oklahoma.

Many students worked diligently to create the second edition of the journal. I would like to acknowledge and thank all of the associate editors who were consistently a positive hardworking team throughout this process. I would also like to recognize the authors of Volume Two; whose distinguished works are the reason the journal is possible. Each author remained professional, involved, and patient throughout the entire process — and for that I thank you. To the University of Oklahoma Libraries and Printing Services, thank you for your necessary assistance to help make *DĀNESH* accessible to readers both digitally and in physical copies.

The quality of work and endless support given to this journal is a direct reflection of the growth of the Iranian Studies Program at the University of Oklahoma. Thank you to the Farzaneh family for their generous donations that have allowed students to continue to pursue their interests in Iranian Studies. Most of all, my sincerest gratitude goes to Dr. Afshin Marashi. Neither this journal, nor the Iranian Studies Program would be possible without your continued support of the students and their work. Your guidance, assistance, and support have made all the difference.

Libby Ennenga (BA 2017)
Editor-in-Chief

Playing with Politics: Where Youthfulness and Politics Collide on Iran's Football Fields

Aubrey Crynes

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Across the globe, the idea that sports are deeply intertwined with politics is not surprising. With the existence of multinational sporting organizations, international competitions, and lucrative marketing deals, it is no wonder the two have become conflated. But even without the interjection of nations, sport at a local level carries huge connotations. Conclusions could be drawn on class, ethnicity, and religious background merely from the jersey a person decides to put on in the morning. Depending on where one is in the world, and the socioeconomic class in which they grow up, football can bring many different images to mind. Does one think of little league games or the new posh sport fad their mom pushed them into? Does football have a community connotation, growing up playing in back yards and rallying around a club or national team? Or does football connote something more sinister, like burned stadiums, riots, and infamous football hooliganism. Across the globe academics and sports fanatics alike have continually dissected these questions, but does any of that matter to those just playing the game?

Sports do not exist in a vacuum, and as much as some may want to just go out and kick a ball around, it can often be much more complex. This is especially true for those living in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the state is intricately intertwined with its citizen's lives. Due to the government's extensive legislation of public sector interaction, something

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as simple as a neighborhood pick-up game can be embedded with political connotation. This puts normal citizens and players at odds with government functionaries and police forces. While there may be no political intent in a game, if any offense is perceived on behalf of law enforcement or paramilitary groups, it can possibly place citizens at risk of confrontation or arrest. Despite these risks, sports, especially football, retain high popularity across Iran. In Iran, football is a way to reclaim youthfulness in the hyper-politicized public sphere, but because of that hyper-politicization, football remains inseparable from politics. The shifting status of football in Iran is best exemplified in the way the government reacts to football, the way Iranians use football as non-movement, and when football becomes purposefully political.

Football and Westoxification

The propaganda of the Islamic Republic often finds itself in a double bind, wanting to draw nationalist sentiment from the rich history of Persian empires of days past, but all the while knowing that was the period of *jahilliyah*, or ignorance, before the coming enlightenment through Islam. In the days after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, many were questioning what life would look like in the new Islamic Republic. The nation needed to transform itself, but how it would accomplish that goal was unclear. As the new government moved forward, it became clear it was more useful to work with the structures of past regimes, spin them, and add a new Islamic flavor. Fortunately for football fans, the holy Qur'an does not denounce the sport. Ayatollah Khomeini's famous statement, "I am not an athlete, but I like athletes" made it seem like football players and fans had been given the call to play on.¹ Despite football's relative popularity and success on the international scale, it was not the sport the government was interested in pushing. Wrestling, an ancient Iranian tradition, was the perfect pastime for mixing storied Iranian history while staying in the parameters of Islam and supposedly sating the public's need for recreational leisure. After all, football was introduced to Iran from the West as a remnant of oil companies and World War occupation, a fire then fueled by the Shah's opulence and indulgence. Clerics across the country felt Iranians would recognize football as a tool for imperialist dominance and turn their backs on the game for good. But the Islamic Republic did not get its wish, as

¹ Houchang E. Chehabi, "The Politics of Football in Iran," *Soccer and Society* (June 2006): 389.

football was too deeply loved by the people and so they began to try to find ways to deal with it instead.

In the classic ‘if you can’t beat them, join them’ spirit, the Islamic Republic and its civilian paramilitary branch, the Basij, began working towards co-opting football matches to showcase Islamic sportsmanship. First came the nationalization of the teams, banning Latin script letters on uniforms, and assigning teams new names that fit into the ethos of Islamic sport.² These reforms were key to the survival of football in Iran—reclaiming even the visual narrative of football from the Shah’s modernization reforms and the trappings of Western European clubs. This meant that while the roots of the game still lay with the government’s enemies, football could still be present in the new Islamic government.

Other attempts to make football more Islamic however, were much less successful. One of the most comical was the government’s attempt to persuade football fans to chant Islamic slogans and religious praises instead of traditional club songs or chants during matches. Football matches had become one of the few public outlets left in the Islamic Republic that were not wholly centered on religion, so when the Basij attempted to bring religious exaltation into the arenas, they were not well received. Instead, they were laughed out of the stadium.³ The Islamic Republic was quickly learning it had to allow some spaces for the public to exist apart from religion; if they could not stop football entirely, they could still influence it.

Club matches inside of Iran are subject to all the rules and guidelines that shape public life in the Islamic Republic, but matches outside of Iran do not meet the standards that clerics championed— Islamic Morality. The government has also recognized what an important tool international football could be for the Islamic Republic. Matches could help grow nationalist sentiment at home, and victory always brought international acclaim. The question was how to hold, participate in, and allow viewing of the international matches that were beyond government control. The Islamic Republic’s response to this problem has been to implement an impressive regimen of television censorship. From blurring out women’s hair in crowd shots, to lowering the volume of the chanting – or even muting it entirely, to just replacing shots of the crowd with other footage; the Islamic Republic relies on a slightly delayed broadcast and an

² Chehabi, “The Politics of Football in Iran,” 390.

³ Franklin Foer, *How Soccer Explains the World: An Unlikely Theory of Globalization* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 229.

experienced censorship team to effectively display only the world they want their citizens to see.⁴

This governmental pre-occupation has turned football from a leisurely past time to a high stakes political venture. The integration of politics in to football has allowed it to become a not-so-subtle political signifier of the technically party-less political landscape. The clash of sports and official politics played out starkly in the 1997 presidential elections. Muhammad Khatami and his reformist movement gained shining endorsements from some of the nation's top football players, while his more conservative opponent aligned himself with wrestling. That same year Mayili-Kuhan, the conservative leaning national football team coach, had barred some Iranian players from joining the squad for a World Cup qualifying match because they played in the German Bundesliga, leading to an international performance so dismal that the situation came before the Iranian parliament.⁵ Between Khatami's landslide victory and the removal of Mayili-Kuhan in favor of a Brazilian coach, football was quickly transforming into the sport of the reformists. Football was there to stay and had become more politicized than ever.

With all this government attention focused on football, the sport was bound to become political. Repurposing football to become a tool for the state was still not enough to get people in opposition of the regime to lose interest in the sport, but it also wasn't pure enough for the hardliners to pick up. What sport you liked, not just what team you supported, became a large blinking political signifier. Football is still just a game, and there are many who play the game for this reason alone, despite any lingering political connotation.

Football as a Non-Movement

When a child picks up a football and goes outside to play with their friends, they are not thinking of political expression, they just want to have fun. As teens join after school programs and play on organized teams, it is not to take a political stand, but to play the game. This unheard of phenomenon of youth just wanting to do things for fun, even in hyper-political areas like Iran, is simply called "*youthfulness*, [which] signifies a particular habitus, behavioral and cognitive dispositions that are associated

⁴ Foer, *How Soccer Explains the World*, 230.

⁵ Chehabi, "The Politics of Football in Iran," 396.

with the fact of being young.”⁶ Iranian youth, like their counter parts from across the globe, love football. But unlike many other youth, there isn’t much else for them to do legally. Because of decades of sanctions, Iran’s economy has stagnated while its population boomed, leading to masses of unemployed youth. With an economy that needs 10% growth annually to absorb its youth only charting an estimated 0.6% and a heavily regulated public sphere, Iran’s youth are desperate for something to do.⁷ Iranian youth struggle under societal pressure to be able to provide for themselves in a crippled economy and lack other outlets of expression. Iranian youth have turned towards sport to ease some of the pressure in their day-to-day lives. Football is by far the most popular sport, and comes in many forms making it more accessible to the average citizen. Whether its attending a match, juggling or “free styling”, or forming local club teams, football can provide a form of escape from the trials of everyday life.⁸ The search for non-politicized spaces is what drives youth to try and take sports back from its government ascribed political connotations. That is to say, just because these youth want football to exist separately from the more difficult parts of their lives in the Islamic Republic, doesn’t mean it does.

The football uniform alone presents obstacles in the Islamic Republic. Men running around with shorts riding up to their thighs is enough to shock a hardline cleric, and that image does not include the scandalous possibility of a woman looking on. While Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa allowing the broadcast of athletes who were not fully covered providing the people watch without lust, Ayatollah Khamenei later ruled it was too much for a woman to look upon an unrelated man who was wearing shorts and a t-shirt – even if she could manage it without lust.⁹ Proper Islamic dress did not just pose an obstacle for women wanting to watch a football game; it made it hard for them to play the sport as well. With Khatami’s reform movement, women began seeing a gradual easing in public morality policing and began to become active in the sport scene. Since football was

⁶ Asef Bayat, “Muslim Youth and the Claim of Youthfulness,” in *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 28.

⁷ Omid Memarian and Tara Nesvaderani, “The Youth” *Iran Primer*, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/youth>, Accessed October 11, 2016.

⁸ Garrett Nada, “Youth in Iran Part 4: Crazy for Sports,” *Iran Primer*, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2013/aug/20/youth-iran-part-4-crazy-sports>, Accessed October 11, 2016.

⁹ Chehabi, “The Politics of Football in Iran,” 394-395.

still too radical of a jump, initially women settled for futsal, an indoor version of football played with smaller, five person teams, and shorter court sizes.¹⁰ The fact that futsal was played indoors made it much more acceptable by the government's standards as the women playing could not be seen by passersby and the futsal uniform could be worn with fully covering layer underneath it if need be. Presently, football is becoming a sport for women in Iran as well.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is not the person that would come to mind when one thinks of a political figure fighting for international women's rights. But when FIFA banned the Iranian women's team from playing in a qualifying match in 2012 for wearing uniforms that adhered to the Islamic Republic's dress code, he took up the cause. Perhaps he was simply looking to regain popular support after the widely questioned 2009 presidential elections, but the fact he fought for their cause was still important for the progression of women's football in Iran. Iran created its women's national team in 2005 spurred on by an invitation to compete in a West Asian Football Women's Championship.¹¹ The team has performed well in continental competition, but due to FIFA uniform regulations, the Iranian women's team is now just beginning to fully break out on the world's stage. Success at the international level has allowed for gradual but continued easement on the government's attitude towards women's football, and sports in general, but some progress is being made. Despite the amount of clothes they are required to wear, women in Iran have continued their interest in the sport and the government is beginning to respond to the demand. There has even been growth in sports where women are seen by men, football being just one of many, something that would have been unheard of in the early days of the Islamic Republic.¹²

However, carving out space for women's sports happened before the government took up the cause. All-girls schools, supportive families, and the players themselves have all worked towards finding a space for these girls to play. In the early 2000's, before the invitation and subsequent creation of a national women's team, provincial school leagues were cropping up around the country. Provincial tournaments were even held and attended by teams across Iran. Though not explicitly illegal, those

¹⁰ Garrett Nada, "Youth in Iran Part 4."

¹¹ Bill Spindle, "In Iran, a Women's Soccer Revolution." *The Wall Street Journal*. August 24, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/in-iran-a-womens-soccer-revolution-1440424818>. Accessed December 06, 2016.

¹² Nikki R Keddie, *Women in Iran Since 1979*, *Social Research* 67 (2000) 431.

playing and in attendance had to be careful as not all approved of the choice to allow the girls to play: boys were not allowed to attend the tournaments at all.¹³ This instance of local level organizing was testing the limits of what was allowed in the Islamic Republic, but was also key in allowing these kinds of changes to occur. By creating these leagues and playing in these tournaments, girls are exercising their “politics of presence”. While the intent of these girls’ leagues may have been to encourage physical activity or teamwork, their outcome made ripples into the political arena of the Islamic Republic.

The youth of the Islamic Republic want to interact with football the same way youth do in the rest of the world. Football is fun. It’s a good way to spend time with friends, and playing on teams is a rewarding experience. But because of the Islamic Republic’s reach into the public sphere, just enjoying the game becomes much harder to do. Simple participation can be political, even if that was not the intent of the actor. Despite its close ties to politics, youth in Iran continue to turn to football as an act of reclaiming their youthfulness with the wish to just be kids for a while.

Football as Purposeful Politics

People in Iran are aware of how everything in the public sphere, including football, is highly politicized. While some seek out the game as a means of escape from daily life in the Islamic Republic, others turn toward football as a platform for their grievances. Many people approach football with the intent of creating change. This purposefully political football can be found in the stands, on the pitch, or in the streets but all of it is an example of Iranians taking the game they love and using it to make themselves heard.

Banning half the population from the nation’s most popular sport does not quite seem like the most well advised policy, but due to the government’s insistence on the upkeep of visible piety of the Islamic Republic, women have been banned from attending matches inside the country. That does not mean they comply. Reports exist of women dressing up as men to attend matches, risking punishment in order to watch their favorite game.¹⁴ The government once opened a match to women, but rescinded the position the next day stating, “Unfortunately, a small number

¹³ Jenny Steel and Sophie Richter-Devroe, “The Development of Women's Football in Iran. A Perspective on the Future for Women's Sport in the Islamic Republic,” *Iran* 41 (2003): 319-320.

¹⁴ Foer, *How Soccer Explains the World*, 218.

of football fans have not been able to conform to the Islamic-human norms of our system. Therefore, we will not be able to admit sisters into football stadiums.”¹⁵ Women could still watch games at home on the television or listen to them on the radio, but at the end of the day it wasn’t the same as being able to physically be at the match. In 1998, after the Iranian National Team beat Australia to qualify for the World Cup—Iranians from all over the country were ecstatic. As the national team arrived in Tehran, thousands of people swarmed the gates of Azadi Stadium to celebrate, including women. When told to return home, the women cried out, “Aren’t we part of this nation? We want to celebrate too. We aren’t ants.”¹⁶ Some women were allowed inside in an attempt to placate the crowd, but everyone eventually made, or forced, their way inside, regardless of gender. This open defiance of the government and its legislated morality were distressing to the Islamic Republic, but the act came at a time of celebration and so they rested easy in the knowledge that the incident had not turned into anything more.

But football is not only used to protest during times of celebration; Iranians can also seize on a disappointing day on the pitch, and use it to air much deeper frustration. In 2001, with a humiliating 3-1 defeat at home in a World Cup qualifying match, and egged on by diaspora radio stations claiming the government had rigged the match in retaliation for the celebrations of 1998, the Iranian people again took to the street but this time in anger. Though set off by the loss, the demonstrations that night had much more to do with the stalled and largely undelivered promises of reform offered during Khatami’s presidential campaign.¹⁸ Football’s ability to give voice to and then unleash citizen’s pent up frustration is found in few other places in the Islamic Republic. The force of the reaction of the Iranian people reminded the government of the sheer power of the masses— a demonstration not often seen. Without a catalyst like football, it is extraordinarily hard to achieve a mass demonstration in Iran due to the government’s control over the public sphere, though it is not impossible.

The Green Movement of 2009 was the largest mass demonstration Iran has seen since the 1979 Revolution. In the days leading up to the election, it was said that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had been hoping for a national team victory in a World Cup qualifying game, saying he could not “afford

¹⁵ Shiva Balaghi, “Football and Film in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *Middle East Report* (Winter 2003): 229.

¹⁶ Foer, *How Soccer Explains the World*, 221.

¹⁸ Chehabi, “The Politics of Football in Iran,” 399-400.

a loss on the eve of the election in such a tight race.”¹⁹ But while Iran won the match, that was not enough to save Ahmadinejad from the protests that erupted after his victory, which was perceived as fraudulent by many Iranians. As the world looked on, guessing and speculating what this meant for the future of the Islamic Republic, the Iranian National Team headed to South Korea for another qualifying match. The football team in which Ahmadinejad had personally invested so much to reinforce his populist brand, walked out onto the pitch, on the world’s stage, with six players wearing green armbands.²⁰ The bands had been removed by half time, but the message remained clear. Iran’s most beloved team did not support Ahmadinejad – or his government.

The scale of this dissent was unheard of in sports politics in the Islamic Republic. While the players’ protest may have only consisted of a few pieces of green cloth, their message was magnified by unprecedented international aspect of the protest. Due to the combination of numerous international sanctions and isolationist policies pursued by the government, many of the actions inside Iran did not make it to international news. But with the sheer size of the Green Movement protests, Iran was facing closer scrutiny than it had in a while. For these football players to proceed with their display of dissent on an international stage, football was forever intertwined with politics in the government’s eyes. When the Islamic Republic was finally becoming comfortable with ideas of sports diplomacy, international competition, and using sports to create and maintain nationalist spirit, those football players reminded them just as the government could use football as a political pawn, so too could the people.

In Iran, the government’s reach into the public sphere means that many otherwise commonplace aspects of people’s lives have been wrapped up in politics. Interacting in the public sphere in any way in the Islamic Republic has some sort of political dimension, whether it is intended or not. Sometimes instead of mitigating those aspects, the citizens of Iran choose to embrace and use the political aspects of their lives for their own gain. Some Iranians feel it is impossible to separate any aspect of public life from the political, so they attempt to swing the politicized public life back at the government. Just as many would rather football exist outside of the government’s reach and attempt to interact with it despite the politics of the

¹⁹ “Iran’s Political Football,” *Majalla Magazine*. June 13, 2014, <http://eng.majalla.com/2014/06/article55250277/irans-political-football>. Accessed December 06, 2016.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

game, others would rather embrace the politics of football head on. By utilizing the wins, losses, and the international stage football provides, Iranians of all walks of life use football to make their voice heard.

Conclusion

Sports live at the intersection of identities, political affiliations, and personal beliefs, but because of the nature of sports, it is sometimes hard to pinpoint its effects. Trying to find information on sport in the Islamic Republic proved to be especially difficult. While there is a decent amount of information on how the Islamic Republic interacts with games like football, there was very little information on how Iranian citizens interact with football in their daily lives. I could not find any detailed sources on class and football in Iran, though extensive studies have been done on the same subject in other nations. There was very little mention of football and politics outside the capital of Tehran, where most of the more major demonstrations regarding football were held. Though the provinces probably have not had such large events related to football, what does and does not happen is still very telling. There also is not much information on the state of youth football in Iran. Is it relegated to neighborhood pick-up games? Are there school level organizations or municipal recreation leagues? To what extent does club football have a following in Iran? Are there any rivalries that exist or is all the attention turned toward the national team? A wealth of knowledge can be drawn from how a nation interacts with football, and it seems a lot about Iran has been either left unconsidered or has yet to be translated.

The unique interest taken in football by the government after the 1979 revolution placed the sport in a complex position, even without the Islamic Republic's reach into the public sphere. Despite setting up football to be inherently political, many across the nation still seek to enjoy the game at its simplest level. Even those just trying to participate in the world's most beloved sport can create unintended political consequences. Others choose to embrace and magnify football's political dimensions, using the space to air frustrations with the government they would otherwise have a hard time voicing. So, while some try and reclaim youthfulness with football in Iran, because of the government's reach into the public sphere, football remains deeply intertwined with the political.