

# Iran books FIBA World Cup ticket despite China defeat

## Sports Desk

Iran secured a place at this year's FIBA Basketball World Cup despite an 86-74 defeat against China in the final round of fixtures at the Asian qualifiers. Kazakhstan's 98-53 loss to Australia in the other Group F game meant Saeed Armaghani's men finished fourth in the group to book the last ticket up for grabs in the continent for the men's flagship international competition – starting August 25 in Japan, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Playing without injured star center Hamed Haddadi, Iran started on the front foot and took a 21-20 lead in the first quarter before heading into the halftime break with a three-point advantage (48-45).

However, Qian Wu and Jinqiu Hu inspired a fightback for the Chinese off the bench with 18 and 13 points respectively, while Jiwei Zhao (12) and Qi Zhou (11) also scored in double figures. Behnam Yakhchali chipped in a

game-high 28 points – including three successful attempts from behind the arc – for Iran and Arsalan Kazemi had a double-double with 11 points and 10 rebounds.

Matin Aqajpour contributed with 13 points for Armaghani's team, with Sina Vahedi dropping 11 points during 15:48 minutes on the court.

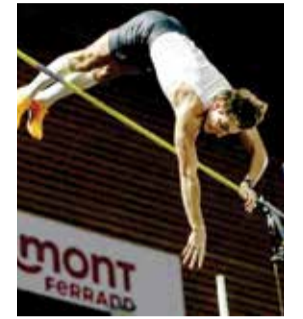
This will be Iran's fourth consecutive appearance at the World Cup in as many total appearances in the event. In the last World Cup in China, Iran was the highest-placed team from Asia at 23rd place.

Iran's best World Cup performance came at the 2010 event in Turkey where the three-time Asian champion finished 19th. All qualification spots available from the FIBA World Cup Asian qualifiers are now decided with Iran joining the cohosts the Philippines and Japan plus Lebanon, New Zealand, Australia, China, and Jordan at the World Cup later this year in Manila, Okinawa, and Jakarta.



Iran's Sajjad Mashayekhi (5) shoots during a game against China at the FIBA Basketball World Cup Asian qualifiers in Tsuen Wan, Hong Kong, on February 26, 2023.   
 ● FIBA

## Sweden's Duplantis breaks own pole vault world record



Sweden's Armand Duplantis clears the bar as he sets a new world record during the men's pole vault event of the World Athletics Indoor Tour Silver meeting in Clermont-Ferrand, central France, on February 25, 2023.   
 ● ARNAUD FINISTRE/ AFP

Sweden's Armand Duplantis has broken his own pole vault record, clearing 6.22 metres to add one centimetre to his previous mark at the World Athletics Indoor Tour Silver meeting in France.

After knocking the bar in his first two attempts at the height, the 23-year-old Olympic champion cleared the mark on Saturday with room to spare on the third try, letting out a cheer as the crowd went into a frenzy of celebration, Al Jazeera reported.

He had barely touched the mat before a spray of sparklers went off and meet director Renaud Lavillenie, the Olympic champion in 2012, ran to embrace him.

Duplantis had the competition won already when he cleared 6.01 metres on the first try, as Australian Kurtis Marschall finished second with a 5.91 metres leap while the Netherlands's Menno Vloon took third.

The Swedish athlete likened his pole vault world record to "an out-of-body experience".

"When you have moments like this, when the energy is so high, and you're going down there for the record, it feels like levitating, it feels like my body never even touched the ground the whole jump," he said.

It was the sixth time that Duplantis has broken the world record.

He set the first in Torun, Poland, in February 2020, when he cleared 6.17 metres to add a centimetre to Lavillenie's previous world record of 6.16 metres that had stood since 2014.

Saturday's effort also marks the 60th time the Swede has cleared six metres or higher.

"Each world record feels like it brings something a bit different out of me," Duplantis said. "Maybe the first one might have been a bit crazier, but this might be number two right now, it's really unbelievable."

He said rewriting the record books no longer left him with any nerves.

"The pressure doesn't really feel the same anymore to me. I've proved a lot the past few years, the past two years especially, and I know what kind of jumper I am, what I am capable of. "I know that I am deserving to be in the spot that I am."

## Iranian Ahmad-Kohani bags silver at Apparatus World Cup

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Iran's Mehdi Ahmad-Kohani grabbed a prestigious silver medal at the first of the 2023 FIG Apparatus World Cup series in Cottbus, Germany.

Representing the country at the rings event, Ahmad-Kohani tallied 14.766 points in the final to

finish next to Greece's Eleftherios Petrounias – a winner of two Olympic medals, including the ultimate prize at Rio 2016, and three World Championships golds.

Armenian Artur Avetisyan settled for the bronze medal.

The competition in Cottbus was the first of four FIG Artistic Gymnastics World Cup series that will deter-

mine the 2023 champions based on a point system that takes placements at individual World Cup events into account, in addition to serving as an individual qualification for the Antwerp Worlds.

The series head to Doha (March 1) and Baku (March 9) before wrapping up in the Egyptian capital of Cairo by the end of April.



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## Messi, Mbappe and Benzema up for FIFA Best award



● AS

Just like in the World Cup final, Paris Saint-Germain teammates Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe go up against one another for The Best FIFA Men's Player prize for 2022 today, with Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema the other contender.

The ceremony takes place in Paris, and Messi appears as the favourite to add another individual gong to his collection after leading Argentina to glory over Mbappe's France in that epic encounter in Qatar, AFP reported.

Messi has won the Ballon d'Or seven times and claimed the FIFA award – inaugurated in 2016 following FIFA's split with Ballon d'Or organisers France Football – once in 2019.

In the last two years Messi has made the podium as Robert Lewandowski has won the title, but the 35-year-old's career-crowning World Cup triumph was the defining moment of 2022. The winner is decided by a jury comprised of the coach and captain of every

men's national team and one journalist from each country, but fans can also vote.

Mbappe became the first player to score a World Cup final hat-trick since Geoff Hurst in 1966 as he dragged France to a 3-3 draw after extra time – despite two goals by Messi – before they eventually succumbed in a shoot-out.

Mbappe, who turned 24 just after the final, was the tournament's top scorer with eight goals, one more than Messi, who claimed the Golden Ball for best player.

He was also comfortably PSG's most important player in the year leading up to the World Cup, despite being joined there by Messi – he was Ligue 1's leading scorer and France's player of the year. However, their World Cup achievements overshadowed everything else.

"Because Messi won the World Cup he has the biggest chance of winning, that's a fact," admitted Ruud Gullit, himself a former Ballon d'Or winner. Dutchman Gullit was speaking in his role as a

member of the Laureus Academy, which recently included Mbappe and Messi among the nominees for their own awards. "But I have so much respect for Mbappe. For me he is on the same level. What he did in the final, to take that responsibility was unbelievable," he added.

### Putellas up for women's gong

Benzema's chances of winning another individual honour were hit after he missed the World Cup due to injury.

Exiled from the French team for five and a half years because of his involvement in a blackmail scandal over a sextape involving a former teammate, Benzema's Ballon d'Or win last October had completed his own career redemption.

The Real Madrid striker, now 35, scored 44 goals in 46 games for his club last season, inspiring them to glory in the Champions League and La Liga. He has continued to bang in the goals this season. "I am really, really proud of my journey," he declared

after claiming the Ballon d'Or.

Current Ballon d'Or Alexia Putellas, who won the Best award last year, is again nominated for the women's prize, despite being out since July with a knee injury.

England forward Beth Mead and US star Alex Morgan are the other finalists.

Argentina's Lionel Scaloni is up for the men's coach's honour along with Real Madrid's Carlo Ancelotti and Manchester City's Pep Guardiola.

Sarina Wiegman, who won Euro 2022 with England, is up for the women's coach award with Sonia Bompastor of Lyon and Brazil's Pia Sundhage.

Brazil star Richarlison's World Cup strike against Serbia is one of three nominees for the Puskas Award for best goal, named after Hungary great Ferenc Puskas.

Marseille's Dimitri Payet and Polish amputee player Marcin Oleksy are also nominated, while there is also a category for the best male and female goalkeeper.