

Iranian young guns seeking U-20 World Cup berth against Iraq



Iranian players celebrate a 3-1 victory over Vietnam in the AFC U20 Asian Cup in Fergana, Uzbekistan, on March 7, 2023. AFC

Sports Desk

A place at the FIFA U-20 World Cup later this year will be up for grabs when Iran and Iraq square off in Tashkent's JAR Stadium today. Amin Hazbavi, Saeed Saharkhizan, and Mohammad-Javad Hosseinnejad were on the scoresheet as Iran beat Vietnam 3-1 last Tuesday to progress to the AFC U20 Asian Cup quarterfinals as the top team in

Group B. Hosseinnejad's stoppage-time strike meant Samad Marfavi's side finished above Australia and Vietnam – though all three were level on six points – due to better head-to-head results among the trio, with the young Soccerroos also advancing thanks to a 9-1 thrashing of Qatar on the final day of the group fixtures.

Iran began its quest for a fifth continental title, and

first since 1976, with a 1-0 victory over Qatar, before falling to a 3-2 defeat against Australia.

"We were in a really tough group but thank God we managed to qualify as the group winner. The three games were truly demanding but helped us improve as a team and gave us confidence for the rest of the way," Marfavi said in a press conference on Friday.

"Saturday's match will be also a difficult one for both

Iran and Iraq and we'll have to enter the pitch with high concentration and determination," added the former Iran and Esteghlal striker.

Marfavi's opposite number on Iraq's bench is a familiar face for Iranian fans. Emad Mohammed Reza spent the best years of his career as a player in Persian Gulf Pro League outfits Sepahan and Foolad Khuzestan and Marfavi praised the ex-Iraqi international

as a "top-quality striker in the Iranian football", for whom he has "utmost respect."

"Iraq surely deserves to be in the knockout stage and will be a formidable opponent for us, but we have analyzed them properly," Marfavi said.

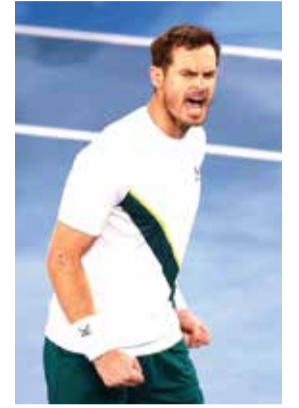
A first-day 2-0 win against Indonesia was followed by a 1-0 loss to Uzbekistan and a 1-1 draw against Syria for Mohammed's team, which piped Indonesia to the run-

ner-up spot in Group A.

The winner of today's game will face either Japan or Jordan, which will battle for a semifinal spot on Sunday. Elsewhere in the last-eight round, Uzbekistan will play Australia today, with the winner taking on South Korea or China in the other semifinal on Wednesday.

The four semifinalists will join host Indonesia at the 2023 U-20 World Cup – starting May 20.

Murray's late career goal is 'to give best effort'



CARL RECINE/REUTERS

Andy Murray said that at this stage of his career he measures his success by the effort he gives on the court and not the ranking points he accumulates along the way.

By that standard Murray's gutsy 6-7(5) 6-1 6-4 win over Argentina's Tomas Etcheverry at Indian Wells on Thursday was a triumph, as the Scot was forced to dig deep in the hard fought battle, Reuters reported.

"There are certain things I would like to achieve and certain goals that I set for myself but the number one thing is to give my best effort every single day," he told reporters.

"And if I do that I'll finish my career on a high note and know that I've left it all out there regardless of which ranking I get to or which tournaments I win. "I always said my goal was getting to the latter stages of the majors, and that's still a big goal for me and I still believe I have that in me. But also what happened in Australia was an incredible experience for me."

At Melbourne Park Murray battled through two grueling five setters before falling in the third round to Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut. Despite that, he left Australia satisfied with his performance.

"I've had many people come up to me since then saying it was inspiring," he said.

"So there are a lot of positives that come out of not having deep runs in majors. It's all about the effort. That's the most important thing."

Still, the 35-year-old former world number one's solid start to the season has seen him break back into the top 60 and he expects to rise further despite maintaining a limited schedule.

"I think I'll get to the highest ranking I've been at since I had the operations," he said.

Murray underwent hip surgery in 2018 and 2019 and there have been times since then that it appeared he would hang up his racket for good, but his competitive drive continues to burn as bright as ever.

"I'm going to keep working like I have been, fighting like I have in all the matches and we'll see how far I can push this," he said.

Murray faces Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta in the second round today.

Grizzlies rout Warriors, Bucks hold off Nets in NBA

The Memphis Grizzlies produced a devastating first-quarter scoring spree in a blowout 131-110 victory over the Golden State Warriors in the latest installment of their rivalry with the NBA champions on Thursday.

The Grizzlies erupted for 48 points in the first period to take a stranglehold on the contest as Golden State's suspect defense was exposed once more, AFP reported.

Tyus Jones led the Memphis scorers with 22 points while Desmond Bane and Jaren Jackson Jr. had 21 points apiece as six Grizzlies players finished in double figures.

The emphatic victory was a welcome piece of good news for Memphis after a challenging week that saw star point guard Ja Morant dropped by the team and put under investigation by the NBA for posting a video on social media of himself waving a handgun in a strip club. The win also gave Memphis bragging rights over a Golden State team with whom they have developed an increasingly fractious rivalry in recent seasons.



Grizzlies' Tyus Jones (21) drives to the basket during an NBA victory over the Warriors at FedExForum, Memphis, TN, US, on March 9, 2023. JOE MURPHY/GETTY IMAGES

The Warriors beat the Grizzlies in the Western Conference playoffs last season en route to the NBA title, and the build-up to Thursday's game had been marked by public feuding between Memphis' Dillon Brooks and Golden State's Draymond Green. The bad blood threatened to spill into Thursday's clash,

with the two men getting into a tense confrontation in the second quarter which ended with them being separated by a member of the officiating crew.

Brooks stoked controversy last week by voicing his antipathy towards Green and the Warriors, stating: "I don't like Draymond at all. I

just don't like Golden State. I don't like anything to do with them."

Green later returned the fire, declaring on Wednesday on his podcast: "I quite frankly wouldn't like a team that beats me all the time either." Nevertheless it was Brooks and Memphis who had the last laugh after completing a

wire-to-wire victory.

"We've had a rough couple of weeks but we've got dogs on our team," Brooks told an on-court interviewer from broadcaster TNT, before adding: "You should give that mic to Draymond so he can keep talking about me and making me play better." Green brushed off Brooks'

verbal volley in postgame comments to reporters, dismissing once again suggestions that Memphis were serious "rivals" to the Warriors dynasty.

"Rivalries are created by you know, 'You win, I win'. Our organization has won four championships (since 2015) and I think their organization has won zero championships," Greensaid.

"I don't consider that a rivalry. Nobody can win a game in March. What does that mean? I have a hard time getting out of my bed in March." Elsewhere on Thursday, the Milwaukee Bucks overcame the absence of Giannis Antetokounmpo to extend their lead at the top of the Eastern Conference with a 118-113 win over Brooklyn.

Bobby Portis led the Bucks scorers with 28 points while Brook Lopez added 24 and Grayson Allen 19.

The Bucks jumped out to a 22-point lead early in the second quarter but Brooklyn chipped away and got within two points with less than a minute remaining. Milwaukee held on for victory and now lead the East by 2.5 games from the Boston Celtics with a 48-18 record.