

Iran to face Spain, Ivory Coast, Brazil at FIBA World Cup



● FIBA

Sports Desk

Iran will take on Spain, Ivory Coast, and Brazil in Group G of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 – co-hosted by Japan, Indonesia, and the Philippines from August 25 to September 10. The draw for the 19th edition of international basketball's flagship event took place in Manila's Ara-

neta Coliseum on Saturday, where 32 teams were split into eight groups. Iran will open its campaign against Brazil in Jakarta's Indonesia Arena on Aug. 26 before facing Ivory Coast in the same venue two days later. The final day of the preliminary group phase will see Iran play defending champion Spain, which is the top-ranked side in the world

and seeking a third title, on Aug. 30.

Iran has become a regular on the global stage as the three-time Asian champion will be playing in the World Cup for a fourth straight time and will be hoping to progress from the preliminary round for the first time.

Ranked 22nd in the latest FIBA Men's Ranking, Iran

collected one win in both 2010 and 2014 editions and then grabbed two victories in 2019, when it finished 23rd.

The top two of each group will advance to the second-round group stage, while the other teams will look for consolation when battling for the 17th-32nd spots.

In other groups, basketball

giant USA will play Greece, Jordan and New Zealand in Group C in Manila.

As well as winning the tournament five times USA is a 12-time podium finisher – both World Cup records – but was knocked out by France in the 2019 quarter-finals when chasing a third successive title.

France – a silver winner at the Tokyo Olympics – will

take on Canada, Latvia, and Lebanon in Group H.

Reigning Asian champion Australia, which won the bronze at the Tokyo Games, is in Group E alongside Germany, Finland, and Japan.

Argentina, which is ranked fourth in the world and was a finalist in 2019, failed to qualify for the World Cup for the first time in 41 years.

Urawa filled with hope after tough ACL final first leg, says coach Skorza

Maciej Skorza paid tribute to his Urawa Red Diamonds players for standing up to a dominant Al Hilal SFC in the AFC Champions League 2022 final first leg on Saturday.

Al Hilal looked to be well placed for a resounding victory after taking a 13th minute lead through Salem al-Dawsari but Urawa not only weathered the storm but equalised through Shinzo Koroki to force a 1-1 draw at the King Fahd International Stadium, leaving next week's second leg tantalisingly poised, AFC reported.

"It was a very tough game against such a good team like Al Hilal but to be honest, I was very disappointed with our performance in the early stages of the first half as we couldn't keep the ball.

"We became calmer as the match progressed and created some chances through counter attacks but honestly, our intention was to play more offensively," said Skorza.

The Polish coach said inexperience played a part in Urawa's hesitant start.

"We have a mix of young and experienced players and we didn't really know what to expect in the final against a team like Al Hilal. "The target in the second half was to play a bit higher and force Al Hilal to make mistakes and from that, Koroki scored a very important goal."

"It is a very good result for us and I have great



Urawa Red Diamonds players celebrate their equaliser in a 1-1 draw against Al Hilal at the AFC Champions League final first leg at the King Fahd International Stadium in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on April 29, 2023.

● AFC

respect for the Urawa players as they fought till the end despite it being such a tough match.

"This experience was crucial for the players and it was also a learning experience for me as well. We have learnt so much from this for the second leg and we are very hopeful of getting a result at Saitama next week."

Skorza also paid tribute to the travelling Ura-

wa fans, with several hundred in the stands.

"They never stopped believing in us and were as vocal as they are in Saitama. I would like to thank them on behalf of the team and assure them that we will do our best to win the title."

Meanwhile, Al Hilal manager Ramon Diaz didn't hide his disappointment but was adamant that the Saudi giant are still very much

in the race to lift the trophy.

Al Hilal paid a heavy price against Urawa Red Diamonds, allowing the Japanese to fight back and losing the talismanic Al Dawsari to a red card.

"We started the match very well, we were good offensively and deservedly scored. However, this is the nature of a final and mistakes can complicate matters," said Diaz, who had seen his Al Hilal side fall to the same opponents in the 2017 final after settling for a draw in the first leg.

"The final, however, isn't over yet. This final is over two matches and we will fight till the end."

Diaz said fatigue wasn't a reason for Saturday's result and neither would it be an issue in the return leg.

"We had prepared well for this match and we had chances to win it. We are used to overcoming difficult situations and we will work very hard to recover and be ready for the return leg."

Diaz admitted his side slightly lost their way after Urawa equalised.

"There was some confusion after Urawa equalised and then came Al Dawsari's red card (in the 86th minute) but we still had chances to score.

"We haven't given up hope and will do our best to be Asian champions again." w

IOC participation plan is 'excessive and discriminatory':
Russian athletes

Russian athletes



● GONZALO FUENTES/REUTERS

The International Olympic Committee's (IOC) recommendation to allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to return to international competition as neutrals is "excessive and discriminatory", the Russian Olympic Committee's (ROC) athletes' commission said.

The IOC sanctioned Russia and its ally Belarus after Moscow invaded Ukraine in February 2022 but last month recommended that their athletes be allowed to return to international competition as neutrals, Reuters reported.

The recommendations include that Russian and Belarusian athletes can compete with no flag or anthem, while athletes who support the war or are contracted to military or national security agencies are excluded.

In March, ROC head Stanislav Pozdnyakov denounced the recommendations, a position backed by the athletes' commission chaired by former Olympic 800 metres champion Yuriy Borzakovskiy.

"The proposed reintegration and admission criteria are excessive and discriminatory – by nationality and by passport, by discipline and sport, and by affiliation to certain entities developing sports for decades in most post-Soviet states," the commission said in a statement.

"In our opinion, a dangerous precedent has been set when no athlete in the world can be sure that his or her human and civil rights will be duly respected from now on, that decisions are taken based on the Law and the Olympic Charter – without exemptions.

"Today we, athletes, are detained as hostages of political games that divide the international sports community and at the same time sow discord within the Olympic family – dictating the parameters of admission, defining who is eligible to perform and who is not."

Table tennis, pentathlon, fencing, judo and taekwondo are among the Olympic sports that have readmitted athletes from Russia and Belarus as neutrals.

The IOC is to decide separately on the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes at the 2024 Games at a later date, while Ukraine has threatened to boycott the Games if Russians are allowed to compete there.

Though the Russian athletes' commission believes the IOC's recommendations to be excessive, others have argued that they are too lenient.

On Tuesday, the British and French sports ministers insisted that Russian and Belarusian athletes must never compete as neutrals, while Ukraine has barred its national sports teams from competing events which include competitors from the two nations.

Former figure skater Oksana Baiul-Farina, Ukraine's first-ever Olympic champion, told Reuters this month that Russians should be barred from the Olympics.