

# Head coach Qalenoey looking to change Iran's 'decade-long approach'

## Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoey said he has been seeking to change his team's 10-year approach ever since he replaced Carlos Queiroz in March. Qalenoey made the remarks after his team routed cohost Kyrgyzstan 5-1 in Bishkek to win Group B in the CAFA Nations Cup on Friday.

Porto talisman Mehdi Taheri scored a hat-trick before Leverkusen striker Sardar Azmoun bagged a brace in the space of three minutes in the second half with Mirlan Murzayev netting a consolation for the home side – as Iran booked a place in the final showdown against Uzbekistan at Tashkent's Milliy Stadium on Tuesday.

The victory was a second one in the Central Asian tournament for Qalenoey's men, who had thrashed Afghanistan 6-1 in their opener.

"Some may say that Kyrgyzstan is a weak team but that's not the case, as they came close to a 1-1 draw against Russia until the



● CAFA

closing stages [of a friendly] a few months ago before conceding a late goal," Qalenoey said in a post-match press conference, while he was full of praise for his players who played "with such a high determination." "Iran used to play with a dif-

ferent style for 10 years and I've been trying to change the team's approach over the past three months," added the most decorated manager in the history of the Iranian top-flight with five titles. "I've always been an

attack-minded coach throughout my career and a free-flowing football is what I want to instill in the national team. We'll be looking to improve game by game and there are some top-notch players in the squad, who give their best

to help us achieve our goal," added the former Esteghlal and Sepahan manager, who left his role on Golgozar bench midway through the recently-finished Persian Gulf Pro League season to take the Iran job – a second international spell for the

Iranian after his team was knocked out by South Korea in the shootout in the 2007 AFC Asian Cup quarterfinals.

The 59-year-old's comments was a veiled swipe at his Portuguese predecessor Queiroz, who, despite Iran's decent World Cup performances against football powerhouses Argentina, Spain, and Portugal, was often criticized for adopting a defensive game plan in the team.

Queiroz's tactics did little to help Iran against England and USA in last year's World Cup in Qatar as two defeats either side of a victory over Wales saw Iran fail to progress beyond the group stage – bringing an end to the Portuguese's second stint in charge.

Qalenoey will be tasked with steering his side in next January's Asian Cup in Qatar, where Iran will be looking for a first continental silverware since lifting the trophy on home soil in 1976.

Iran is drawn alongside the UAE, Hong Kong, and Palestine in Group C of the 24-team tournament.

## AFC U17 Asian Cup: Abdi hails Iran's patience in Afghanistan rout



Iran head coach Hossein Abdi looks on as his team plays Afghanistan in Group B of the AFC U17 Asian Cup in Bangkok, Thailand, on June 16, 2023. ● the-afc.com

## Sports Desk

Iran head coach Hossein Abdi was delighted to see his young guns overcome a nervy start to their opener in the AFC U17 Asian Cup and walk away with an emphatic 6-1 victory over Afghanistan.

Despite dominating possession in the Group B opener in Bangkok, Thailand, Abdi's boys had to wait 28 minutes to get off the mark, when Hesam Nafari headed home a first goal at the event for the country.

Esmail Qolizadeh doubled Iran's lead from the spot four minutes later but Hakim Khan Niazi's deflected free-kick pulled one back for Afghanistan.

Kasra Taheri scored twice either side of the interval and Qolizadeh netted his second in the 51st minute with Reza Qandipour adding the sixth with one minute left from normal time. The victory saw Iran go joint-top of the group table alongside South Korea, which also thrashed Qatar 6-1 on Friday.

"The first game in every tournament is always a tough one and we were lucky to score after missing so many chances early on," Abdi said after the match.

"These players are a bunch of 16-year-olds who often perform with stress or want to do more than they are capable of.

"The big challenge for a footballer at this age is to remain confident and patient, while following the team's gameplan and philosophy. We stayed patient until we broke the deadlock and goals kept coming for us after that," added the 56-year-old manager.

"We took our foot off the gas after we had a comfortable lead in the second half as the players' fitness is also of high priority for us. That's why we made the substitutions.

"It was important to win the first game as the players will have a better recovery and concentration for the future matches," Abdi added.

Next for Iran is a game against Qatar on Monday before Abdi's side squares off against South Korea three days later.

The top two of the four groups will advance to the quarterfinals of the tournament, with the winners of the four last-eight round qualifying for the FIFA U-17 World Cup later this year.

# NBA suspends Morant for 25 games over gun videos



● JUSTIN FORD/GETTY IMAGES

BBC – Memphis Grizzlies guard Ja Morant has been suspended for 25 games without pay for "conduct detrimental to the NBA".

Morant, 23, was "suspended from all team activities" in May after appearing to hold a gun in a social media video for the second time in two months.

His return is subject to completing an NBA programme that "directly addresses the circumstances that led him to repeat this destructive behaviour".

Morant was suspended for eight games after the initial incident in March.

On that occasion, a video

showed the All-Star guard, who was the second overall draft pick in 2019, holding a gun in a Colorado nightclub, after which he apologised and said he would "get help".

"I take full responsibility for my actions last night," he added in a statement.

Morant said he is "committed to continuing to work on myself" after the latest incident, when during a live broadcast on Instagram he posed with a gun in a car with several other individuals as they left a social gathering in Memphis.

"I know I've disappointed a lot of people who have supported me," Morant said.

"This is a journey and I rec-

ognise there is more work to do. My words may not mean much right now, but I take full accountability for my actions."

The 2023-24 NBA season begins in October, with each team playing 82 regular-season games.

The National Basketball Players Association, the league's players union, criticised the length of the ban.

"We believe it is excessive and inappropriate for a number of reasons," NBPA executive director Tamika Tremaglio said. "It is not fair and consistent with past discipline in our league. We will explore with Ja all options and next steps."

# Crisis deepens for Euro 2024 hosts Germany with Poland loss

REUTERS – Euro 2024 hosts Germany stumbled to a 1-0 loss against Poland in their international friendly on Friday to continue their disappointing run less than a year before they host the continental tournament.

Jakub Kiwior's bouncing header snatched only the second victory for the hosts over the Germans in 90 years. Germany have now won only three of their last 10 international matches.

Four-time world champions Germany, who play Colombia next week in their last international before the summer break, now have less than a year to build a battle-worthy team for their home Euros. Following their disap-

pointing first round World Cup exit in Qatar last year, they have so far failed to show clear signs of recovery even though their second half performance on Friday was improved from their opening 45 minutes. They have managed just one win – over Peru – in their four matches since the World Cup.

"It is still a long way and there is enough time," said Germany coach Hansi Flick. "I am very confident in relation to the path we have to take."

"We will have a functioning team by next June. It is a process we will go together. The team is ready to do it.

"We are in a phase which is not that easy. We will come out of it. We can build on our

second half performance even though the result is, of course, not enough for us." The Germans, who needed two late goals to rescue a 3-3 draw against Ukraine on Monday, were almost caught out when Jakub Blaszczykowski chased down a deep cross but Malick Thiaw's well-timed tackle denied the 37-year-old at the edge of the box.

The hosts kept breaking through the shaky German backline with Jakub Kaminski's shot form a tight angle saved by keeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen.

He was beaten in the 31st when Kiwior's glancing header bounced off the ground first and then floated past Ter Ste-

gen who got a hand to the ball but could not push it wide.

The Germans looked sharper in the second half and piled on the pressure right after the restart, threatening with Robin Gosens before Joshua Kimich saw his effort bounce off the crossbar four minutes after the restart.

Thiaw, making his Germany debut, got close to an equaliser with a fine turn and shot in the box but keeper Wojciech Szczesny produced his best moment of the night to block it.

Germany had a string of late chances but could not find an equaliser that would alleviate some of the pressure they and Flick will now face on their return.



"I had hoped we could celebrate a success in order to change the mood and get the country behind us," said Gosens, whose pace on the wing in the second half did Ger-

many well. "We all know that can only happen with results and wins. We played a good second half but it is time we start getting rewarded for it."



Germany's Kai Havertz (7) is seen in action with Poland's Jakub Kiwior (14) in a friendly match at Stadion Narodowy, Warsaw, Poland, on June 16, 2023. ● KACPER PEMPEL/REUTERS