

Hangzhou Asian Games: Kiani grabs wushu silver; triple taekwondo bronzes for Iran

Sports Desk

The fourth day of the 19th Asian Games saw Iranian girl Zahra Kiani bag a talou silver in the wushu contests, while there were three more taekwondo bronzes for the country in Hangzhou, China.

Wushu

A two-time world bronze medalist, Kiani grabbed a second successive silver at the Asian Games after a 19.436 score in the women's jianshu & qiangshu event.

China's Lai Xiaoxiao tallied 19.600 for the gold medal, with Vietnamese Duong Thuy Vi taking the bronze with 19.426 points.

Taekwondo

Three Iranians saw their campaigns come to a disappointing finish in the semifinals, as the country's wait for a taekwondo gold dragged on for another day. Melika Mirhosseini overcame opponents from Nepal and Jordan in straight rounds, only to suffer a 2-1 defeat against Feruza Sadikova of Uzbekistan, sharing the third podium of the women's -67kg class with Vietnam's Bac Thi Khiem, who was beaten by the host's Song Jie in the other semifinal.

The Chinese girl beat Sadikova in the final. In the men's -68kg contests,



Iranian wushu participant Zahra Kiani performs during the women's talou contests at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, on September 27, 2023. hangzhou2022.cn

Matin Rezaei, a world bronze winner in May, suffered a 2-1 defeat against Jordan's Zaid Abdul Kareem.

In the final showdown, however, the Jordanian came short against Uzbekistan's Ulugbek Rashitov, who had avenged his world last-

four loss to South Korean Jin Ho-jun earlier in the semifinals. Mehran Barkhordari claimed a third bronze for Iran on

Wednesday after a 2-1 setback against South Korea's Park Woo-hyeok – a world champion last year – who went on to beat

Saleh Elsharabaty of Jordan for the ultimate prize of the men's -80kg category.

Iran has now collected seven taekwondo medals in the Asian Games.

Alireza Hosseinpour (men's -63kg) and Mahdi Hajimousaei (men's -58kg) settled for a couple of silvers in their respective weight classes, while Mobina Ne'matzadeh took a -49kg bronze in the women's competitions.

Marjan Salahshouri had opened the account for Iran, finishing third in the women's pomsae event.

Football

Iran's under-23 side progressed into last eight thanks to a 2-0 victory over Thailand.

Amir-Arsalan Motahari – one of three senior players in the squad – got Iran off the mark 13 minutes into the game when a Thai keeper's long ball was intercepted by the Esteghlal striker and found the back of the net.

Persepolis midfielder Yassin Salmani sealed the win from the spot with 10 minutes left on the clock after Mahdi Mamizadeh was brought down in the box by the goalkeeper.

Handball

A nervy 23-23 draw against Saudi Arabia was enough for Iran to advance into the main round.

Mojtaba Heidarpour scored five, with Mohammad-Mahdi Behnamnia and Hossein Jahani bagging four apiece, as Veselin Vujovic's men held out a late Saudi surge to finish above the opponent in Group D of the preliminary round – runner-up to Japan. Elsewhere in the Games, the Iranian men's 3x3 basketball side defeated Japan 22-13 in Pool B – a second victory for the country after a 22-6 triumph over Maldives on the preceding night.

Iran heads to Olympic qualifiers after morale-boosting gold in Hangzhou

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Iran head coach Behrouz Ataei will hope his men will be inspired by a gold-winning run at the Asian Games when they begin their quest for a berth at next year's Paris Olympics on Saturday.

Iran is drawn against Brazil, Italy, Cuba, Ukraine, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Qatar in Pool A of the Olympic Qualifying Tournament, taking place in Rio de Janeiro.

Ataei's side left Hangzhou for Brazil on Tuesday night, hours after rallying from behind to beat host China in four sets (19-25, 25-14, 25-22, 26-24) and walk away with the ultimate prize at the Linping Sports Centre Gymnasium.

Shahrouz Homayounfarmanesh chipped in a game-high 17 points, while Amirhossein Esfandiari and Saber Kazemi contributed with 14 apiece as Iran won a third successive volleyball gold at the Games.

Tuesday's triumph comes as a consolation for Ataei and his team who had finished third from bottom in the 16-team table of the preliminary round in the Volleyball Nations League in July and then fell to a straight-set defeat against Japan on home soil in the Asian Championship final last month.

"I'm glad this medal made the Iranian people happy following



Iran's Mohammad Valizadeh (27) goes up for a spike during a victory over China in the men's volleyball final at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, on September 26, 2023. volleyball.ir

a couple of disappointing tournaments. China was the host and eager to win the gold after they refused to bring their best squad to the Asian Championship," Ataei said after the final. The Iranian coach, however, knows the scale of the task in

Rio is in stark contrast with the one his team had in Hangzhou as Brazil and the reigning world champion Italy remain the favorites to finish as the top two in Pool A and guarantee a place in the French capital. Iran will get its campaign under-

way against Germany – in a repeat of a VNL encounter in June when the Asian powerhouse came out on top in straight sets – and then face Ukraine on Sunday. Ataei's side will take on Qatar and the Czech Republic respectively, before the massive double

header against Italy and Brazil. The final game of the tournament for Iran comes against Cuba on October 8. Having missed out on the Asian Games glory, Arman Salehi and Mobin Nasri are to join up with the rest of the team in Rio, while

prolific outside hitter Milad Ebadipour has again been ignored by Ataei for the Olympic qualifiers.

"I hope this gold would bring the confidence back to the squad ahead of the upcoming matches as we will have a tough job in Brazil," said Iranian captain and middle blocker Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi, adding: "We can't afford to come up with any more excuses. We'll put in all our efforts to win an Olympic quota in Brazil. I wish I'll have the chance to finish my career at the Olympics."

Teams will still have a second chance to book the Paris ticket as the remaining slots will be filled by the top five nations – not yet qualified – in the FIVB World Rankings by the end of the preliminary phase of the 2024 Volleyball Nations League. However, Ataei is fully aware that his job could be well on the line in Brazil.

When asked after the Asian Championship final if there would be any change on Iran's bench for the Olympic qualifiers, Mohammadreza Davarzani, the head of the country's Volleyball Federation, said that he would not act impulsively, though he dropped a vague hint on the long-term future of the national team, saying: "We will surely come up with a more proper decision for next year's VNL and the Olympic Games."