

Four Iranians nominated for AFC awards



Sports Desk

Four Iranian international footballers and futsal players will be among the nominees at the AFC Annual Awards, which will be staged in Doha, Qatar, on October 31 after a four-year hiatus caused by the pandemic. Mahdi Taremi headlines the list of Iranian nominees at the gala, as the Porto striker is shortlisted for the AFC Asian International Player of the Year Award. The 31-year-old Iranian bagged 31 goals, while providing his teammates with 14 assists, in 51 appearances across all competitions for Porto last season – including 22 strikes which saw him finish as the leading marksman in the Portuguese top flight. On the scoresheet for Iran during a 3-1 victory over Jordan on Friday, Taremi has had a relatively slow start with the Portuguese Dragons this season, finding the net twice in 11 outings. Tottenham striker Son Heung-min is the surprise absentee in the category as Japanese winger Kaoru Mitoma, who has scored 13 goals for Brighton & Hove Albion since rejoining the Premier League side in June 2022, and South Korean defender Kim Min-jae, who lifted the Serie A trophy with Napoli before moving to Bayern Munich in the summer, complete the shortlist.

Also competing with the Japanese and South Korean rivals for a prize is Iranian under-23 center-back Mohammad-Amin Hazbavi, nominated for the AFC Men's Youth Player of the Year Award.

Hazbavi, 20, enjoyed an impressive campaign with the Persian Gulf Pro League's Foolad Khuzestan before a summer move to Qatari giant Al Sadd, where he has netted once in four appearances.

FC Tokyo midfielder Kuryu Matsuki as well as Gangwon FC's Lee Seung-won will also fancy their chances for the award.

Iranian duo Moslem Oladqobad – UEFA Champions League winner with Spanish club Palma de Mallorca – and Saeed Ahmad-Abbasi will compete with Japanese keeper Guilherme Kurotomo, who played an integral part in his team's shock victory over Iran in last year's Asian Cup final, in the AFC Futsal Player of the Year category.

The Football Federation of Iran, meanwhile, received a nomination in the AFC Member Association of the Year (Platinum) category – alongside the football associations of Japan and Uzbekistan.

The major prize of the ceremony, the AFC Player of the Year, will be decided between Melbourne City and Australian international striker Mathew Leckie, Qatar's Almoez Ali, who plays a forward for QSL champion Al Duhail, and Al Hilal winger Salem al-Dawsari, best remembered by his winner in Saudi Arabia's famous 2-1 victory over eventual champion Argentina at the World Cup in Qatar last year.

Iran survives late scare against Jordan to set reunion date with Queiroz

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Sardar Azmoun and Mahdi Taremi were both on the score-sheet as Iran held out a late surge by host Jordan for a 3-1 victory in the four-team friendly tournament in Amman.

It was hardly a vintage performance from Amir Qalenoee's men but was still enough to send them into Monday's showdown against Qatar – coached by former Iran manager Carlos Queiroz – which came out victorious against Iraq in the shootout after a goalless stalemate at the Amman International Stadium earlier on Friday.

It seemed to be an easy afternoon for Iran when AS Roma striker Azmoun gave the Asian powerhouse the lead with a composed finish six minutes into the game.

Taremi, who set up Azmoun for the opener, doubled the advantage 20 minutes later, tapping in into the bottom corner on a Ramin Rezaeian's low cross.

Yazan al-Naimat pulled one back for the home side with 15 minutes left on the clock and things could have gone even worse for Iran as the referee blew in his whistle for a penalty when Jordanian star Musa al-Taamari, playing for Ligue 1 club Montpellier, went down in the box by Mohammad Mohebbi in the final minute of normal time.

Jordanian skipper Ehsan Haddad sent Alireza Beiranvand the wrong way but his effort went above the crossbar and then Rouzbeh Cheshmi found his Esteghlal teammate



Iran's Sardar Azmoun (20) and Mahdi Taremi celebrate a goal during a 3-1 victory over Jordan in a four-team friendly tournament in Amman, Jordan, on October 13, 2023.

FFIRI

Mehrdad Mohammadi behind the Jordan backline before the substitute striker lobbed the keeper with a delicate touch to restore the two-goal cushion in the second minute of stoppage time.

This was a seventh successive win in eight outings for Iran under Qalenoee but the ex-Esteghlal and Sepahan manager was left with questions to answer over the team's defensive setup, while his men looked clueless at

times when going forward. Monday's encounter against the reigning Asian champion and its Portuguese head coach, who is best known for devising an accurate defensive gameplan, will surely provide

a trickier test for Team Melli ahead of its quest for a first continental trophy since 1976 in January's AFC Asian Cup in Qatar, where Iran is pitted against the UAE, Palestine, and Hong Kong in Group C.

Iran names men's kumite squad for World Karate Championships



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Sports Desk

The Iranian coaching staff named the country's male kumite squad ahead of the World Karate Championships, starting next Sunday in Budapest, Hungary.

Having last participated in the competitions in 2018, the Iranians will be back in the event after missing out on the previous edition in Dubai two years ago due to positive coronavirus test results for several members of the team.

Tokyo Olympic champion Sajjad Ganjzadeh will head-

line the Iranian squad, eyeing a second major +84kg medal in three months, having won a bronze at the Asian Championships in July before walking away with the ultimate prize at the Hangzhou Asian Games nine days ago.

Ali Meskini will take part in the -60kg class, with Amir-Reza Borzouei and Mahdi Kiani fighting before the team leaves for the Hungarian capital to decide the Iranian slot in the -67kg contests.

Saman Edalati will be the Iranian -75kg contestant in Budapest, replacing the 2018 world

gold medalist Bahman Askari. Mahdi Khodabakhshi, meanwhile, will be looking to bounce back from a first-round defeat at the Asian Games when competing in the -84kg event.

Ganjzadeh, Askari, and Khodabakhshi will also team up with Zabihollah Poursheib, Saleh Abazari, Mahdi Ashouri, and Mahmoud Ne'mati as Iran will be chasing a fourth team kumite gold at the World Championships, having dominated the event on three successive occasions between 2014 and 2018.

Mbappe shines as France qualify for Euros with Portugal, Belgium

REUTERS – France, Belgium and Portugal all blinked in their grasps but clung on for one-goal victories on Friday night which made them the first sides to qualify for next year's tournament.

Belgium led by three goals in Vienna and won 3-2 with 10 men to ensure a top-two finish in Group F and a ticket to the finals in Germany.

France led by two Kylian Mbappe goals in Amsterdam and beat the depleted Dutch 2-1.

Cristiano Ronaldo was another to score twice but Portugal also wobbled with a two-goal lead before beat-

ing Slovakia 3-2 in Porto in Group J.

In Amsterdam, Mbappe leapt to hook home a volley after seven minutes and then added a second eight minutes into the second half with a sumptuous curler.

It was his 42nd international goal, overtaking French legend Michel Platini and putting him fourth in the all-time list.

Quilindschy Hartman replied on his Dutch debut but Mbappe almost clinched his hat-trick, when his late drive hit the crossbar.

Greece won 2-0 in Dublin to eliminate Ireland and pull clear of the Dutch.



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