

## Fury, Usyk separated during face-off in London



● REUTERS

BBC – Tyson Fury launched a tirade of abuse towards Oleksandr Usyk and pushed his head into the Ukrainian at their face-off before the two were separated by security in London.

Briton Fury, 35, takes on Ukraine's Usyk in Riyadh on 17 February – the winner will be crowned the first undisputed heavyweight champion in the four-belt era.

Usyk, 36, is the WBA, WBO and IBF champion with Fury holding the WBC belt. "You are all dossers. He's going to get knocked out. And you two are going to work for me slinging my bags," Fury told Usyk and his promoter, Alexander Krassyuk and manager, Egis Klimas.

A composed Usyk remained undeterred and reluctant to engage in a war of words. "Enough? My friend. Have you stopped? Enough? Have you stopped talking?" he asked.

Fury boasts an undefeated record of 34 wins and one draw but is coming off October's unexpectedly close fight against Francis Ngannou.

French-Cameroonian Ngannou, a former UFC champion, was making his boxing debut. Fury edged a split-decision points victory in the non-title bout, although many ringside observers felt Ngannou should have been awarded a shock victory.

But any suggestion the below-par Ngannou performance would humble the champion were quashed when a dancing Fury strutted to the stage on Thursday evening with a swagger.

It took Fury mere minutes to lay into Usyk, interrupting Krassyuk's opening statement.

"You're getting smashed to pieces. Sausage. You're fighting the best British heavyweight there's ever been," he shouted, adding a number of expletives.

Ever unpredictable, Fury then began to compliment the undefeated Usyk's boxing skills and achievements, but the praise was short lived.

Usyk – who has won all 21 pro bouts – defended his titles against Londoner Daniel Dubois in August. He was dropped in the fight by a punch which the referee declared a low blow.

"I think he got hit in the body and he didn't want to get up for five minutes," Fury said. "Crying to the referee. That's what he did."

Usyk replied: "I absolutely don't care what Tyson thinks of that."

Fury looked to provoke his opponent by forcefully driving his head into Usyk, who held his ground before security intervened.

# Iran routs Hong Kong for comfortable start in World Cup qualifiers

## Sports Desk

Sardar Azmoun bagged a brace as Iran began its quest for a spot in the 2026 World Cup with an easy 4-0 win against Hong Kong, China at Tehran's Azadi Stadium in the second-round Group E of the Asian qualifiers.

Roma striker scored twice in similar fashion, side-footing from close range, in the space of three minutes to give Amir Qalenoeei's men a two-goal cushion inside 15 minutes.

Porto forward Mahdi Taremi added the third with three minutes left on the clock before Ramin Rezaeian's curling free-kick rounded off the victory in the stoppage time.

"We had a flying start and netted two early goals, but we took our foot off the gas after that. It's hard to play against the teams with multi layers of defense, although I believe we created enough chances for more goals. Our players were so unselfish today, which was the positive aspect of our game," Qalenoeei said after the game.

Iran's starting XI on Thursday will more or less be the one to begin the game against Palestine in the AFC Asian Cup opener in January. Qalenoeei has been criticized in recent days for making minimum changes to the squad that was the oldest under his predecessor Carlos Queiroz in last year's World Cup.

While Sepahan prodigy Mohammad-Javad Hosseinnejad has been the only significant young talent to make his international debut since Qalenoeei was appointed to job earlier in the year, Karim Ansarifard and Omid Ebrahimi, who are both well past the peak of their careers, received a call-up for the double header in the qualifiers.

"It is a gradual process," Qalenoeei said of bringing in new players,



Iranian players celebrate a goal during a 4-0 victory over Hong Kong, China in the World Cup Asian qualifiers at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on November 16, 2023. ● SOHEIL SAADATMANDI/FFIRI

while praising the likes of AEK Athens fullback Ehsan Hajsafi, 33, for his contribution to the national team.

"We have a full assessment of all of our assets. Ehsan, for instance, was one of the best players on the pitch today. He can surely help the team as he is still capable of keeping up with the pace at the European club football," the Iranian head coach said.

"We have at least two good players in every position. There are three to four decent midfielders in the squad, some of whom were not even on the bench today but still

deserve to be in the starting eleven."

Ahmad Nourollahi was not in the 23-man squad and was ousted from the Iranian camp later on Thursday for what was described as "unprofessional behavior" by the Al Wahda midfielder. Meanwhile, Alireza Jahanbakhsh was among the senior Iranian players in action against Hong Kong but was replaced by Reza Asadi in the second half after suffering an injury.

"I am a bit worried. It seems to be a minor injury but I'll have to wait for the MRI result. I hope it's not

serious as we have another game [against Uzbekistan] and then there is the Champions League on my return to the club duty," said the Feyenoord winger. Iran will play away to Uzbekistan in the group on Tuesday, in what will be the Asian powerhouse's final outing before the Asian Cup in Qatar.

When asked about the high average of the Iranian players' age, Jahanbakhsh said: "This team will have to get results in the Asian Cup and I believe the experience of the senior players playing alongside each other for years will surely be

a great help in the tournament." "Winning the ultimate prize in the Asian Cup is the prime target for every one of us. We were unlucky in the last-four defeat against Japan in the previous edition, but we will give it our best shot this time around as the path to the final showdown seems to be an easy one for us," added Jahanbakhsh.

Chasing a first trophy in the Asian flagship international tournament since 1976, three-time champion Iran is drawn against Palestine, the United Arab Emirates, and Hong Kong.

## Colombia fight back to shock Brazil, Uruguay beat Messi's Argentina

Colombia's Luis Diaz (R) is in action against Brazilian Raphinha in World Cup South American qualifier in Barranquilla, Colombia, on November 16, 2023. ● LUISA GONZALEZ/REUTERS



REUTERS – Brazil lost their second consecutive World Cup qualifier match as Colombia fought back to win 2-1 against the five-times champions, who dropped to fifth place in the South American standings on Thursday.

It was a cathartic evening for Liverpool forward Luis Diaz, who scored twice within four minutes late in the second-half to give his country the shock win just days after Colombian guerrillas freed his kidnapped father. Brazil started well and dominated early proceedings, taking the lead in the fourth minute through a strike by Gabriel Martinelli, assisted by Vinicius Jr.'s fine first touch pass.

The jet-heeled Real Madrid winger was forced out due to a thigh injury halfway through the first-half after which the home side slowly took control, roared on by the crowd at the sold-out Metropolitan stadium in Barranquilla.

Luis Diaz alone created 10 attempts on target for Colombia, but was denied the equaliser by a string of fine saves from his Liverpool team mate Alisson, before defensive mistakes helped him net two headers in the 75th and 79th minutes.

Diaz burst into tears as he dedicated the win to his father who was celebrating emotionally in the stands.

Winless in the last three games, Brazil will be under heavy pressure as they are set to host long-time rivals Argentina at the iconic Maracana in Rio de Janeiro on Tuesday.

**Argentina outclassed**  
Argentina will also be looking to

bounce back after dropping their first points in five games in the South America World Cup Qualifiers, losing 2-0 at home to Uruguay on Thursday but keeping their place at the top of the standings.

Goals in each half from Ronald Araujo and Darwin Nunez gave Uruguay victory over Lionel Messi's Argentina in a nervy affair at the World Cup champions' Bombonera stadium in Buenos Aires.

The visitors were the better side from start to finish and the win put them second in the standings on 10 points, two behind Argentina.

Araujo scored in the 41st minute with a first time strike from inside the box that was just beyond goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez, and Nunez secured the points with a tidy finish in a counter-attack in the 87th.

"They are a strong and physical team and played with more intensity. We struggled mightily to find ourselves and our game," Messi told TyC Sports. "We never felt comfortable, didn't find a way to end up with the ball or the control of the actions, were not able to have long possessions, didn't create chances and played the game that they wanted, in their rhythm. They are a physical team that bring a lot of danger in the counter-attacks and they showed that with the goals they scored."

Colombia are third on nine points, one ahead of Venezuela who were held to a goalless draw at home by sixth-placed Ecuador, who are one point behind Brazil, who are fifth on seven points.