

Asian Handball Championship: Iran falls short against South Korea, to face Japan in main-round opener

Sports Desk

The final round of the preliminary phase in the Asian Men's Handball Championship in Bahrain saw Iran suffer a 26-24 defeat against South Korea in Group B. Having come out victorious against New Zealand (40-13) and China (24-22) earlier in the competition, Majid Rahimizadeh's men started right on the front foot against the record nine-time champion and took a 13-10 lead at halftime before Kim Yeonbin, who finished on a game-high nine goals, inspired the South Koreans to bounce back in the second period and go through to the last eight as the group winner. "That was a really tough game as both sides desperately wanted to win the group," Rahimizadeh said after the game, adding: "We were in front for the best part of the contest and

could have won it. The result would have been different, had we not missed on four one-on-one occasions when leading by two." Jang Dong-hyun also contributed with five goals for South Korea, while Pouya Norouzzinejad topped the scoring chart for Iran with seven goals, followed by Afshin Sadeqi, who had four. The second-place finish sent Iran into Group I of the main round – alongside Japan, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. South Korea, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Iraq are in Group II, with Saudi Arabia, which stood third in the 2022 edition on home soil, battling for the 9-16 spots after finishing behind Japan and Iraq in Group C. Iran will face Japan in Isa Town's Sheikh Khalifa Sports City Hall today – in a repeat of last October's game in the Asian qualification tourna-

ment for the Paris Olympics. Japan beat Iran 25-20 before going all the way to come out on top against host Qatar in the final and punch the ticket for the French capital in July and August. "Japan has improved massively over the past couple of years and will enter the game fresh from October's victory, but I still believe we are capable of beating them [on Thursday]," added Rahimizadeh, who replaced Montenegrin Veselin Vujović following a group exit in the Asian qualifiers. Looking to improve on the fourth place in the previous edition, Iran will play four-time winner Qatar on Friday, before squaring off against the UAE two days later. The top two of the main-round groups will advance to the semifinals, securing a place in next year's World Championship – cohosted by Croatia, Denmark, and Norway.



South Korea's Lee Hyeonsik (71) shoots during a victory over Iran in the Asian Men's Handball Championship in Isa Town, Bahrain, on January 16, 2024.
● IRIHF

Inter 'in pole position' to sign Taremi in summer: *La Gazzetta dello Sport*



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Serie A giant Internazionale is "in pole position" to sign Porto striker Mahdi Taremi, once the Iranian's contract with the Portuguese club runs out on July 1, according to Italian newspaper *La Gazzetta dello Sport*. Taremi has bagged 86 goals and 53 assists in 171 appearances for the Dragons across all competitions, including 22 strikes which saw him finish as the leading marksman in the Portuguese top flight last season. The Iranian, now with the national team at the AFC Asian Cup in Qatar, has only managed six goals in 24 outings for the club this season. The Milan-based daily wrote on Tuesday that Taremi's camp met with Inter representatives last

week and are closing in on a three-year deal, worth €3 million per year, for the former Persepolis and Al Gharafa forward, who was only introduced to the European club football in 2019 with Portuguese side Rio Ave. The newspaper added that Taremi's priority for the next chapter of his career is to join the Nerazzurri as his answer to offers from Turkey and the Saudi Pro League has simply been: "No, thanks." The Iranian was on the verge of signing for Inter's archrival AC Milan last summer, only to see the deal fall through on the transfer deadline day after the two parties failed to agree on personal terms. Inter also considered a move for the prolific striker as a replacement for Romelu Lukaku and Edin Dzeko but refused to meet Porto's asking

price for a 31-year-old player who was entering the final year of his contract and was to go on international duty for two to four weeks in the winter. However, in light of Alexis Sanchez and Marko Arnautovic failing to impress during the first half of the ongoing campaign, Inter head coach Simone Inzaghi sees Taremi as a perfect alternative to Argentine skipper Lautaro Martinez and France international Marcus Thuram. Taremi will hope to inspire the country to a first trophy in the continent's flagship international event since 1976, before seeing out the final months of his four-year spell with Porto, which is third in the Portuguese league – trailing Sporting on top by five points – and will face Arsenal in the last-16 round of the UEFA Champions League.

Hearing date set for Man City's financial rule breach charges: Premier League CEO

REUTERS – A date has been set for the hearing into Manchester City's alleged financial rule breaches, the Premier League's CEO Richard Masters said on Tuesday. City were charged in February with more than 100 alleged breaches of finance rules since their acquisition by the Abu Dhabi-based City Football Group, and were referred to an independent commission for a hearing. "There is a date set for that proceeding. Unfortunately, I can't tell you when that is but it is progressing," Masters told the Culture, Media and Sport

(CMS) Committee of the UK Parliament. When the charges were announced in February, City said they welcomed "the review of this matter by an independent commission, to impartially consider the comprehensive body of irrefutable evidence that exists in support of its position." The charges against City, who are targeting a fourth straight Premier League title this season, are different to those brought against Everton and Nottingham Forest on Monday, Masters told the committee.

"If any club, the current champions or otherwise, had been found in breach of the spending rules, they would be in exactly the same position as Everton or Nottingham Forest," he said. "But the volume and character of the charges laid before Manchester City, which I obviously cannot talk about at all, are being heard in a completely different environment." Everton and Forest are facing potential points deductions – which would be a second for Everton this season after they were docked 10 points in November.



● LEE SMITH/REUTERS

Embiid outshines Jokic as 76ers beat Nuggets

BBC – Joel Embiid scored 41 points as he outshone Nikola Jokic in the Philadelphia 76ers' 126-121 win over NBA champions the Denver Nuggets. It was Embiid's second game in a row with 40-plus points while he also dished out 10 assists and claimed seven rebounds. Jokic finished with 25 points and 19 rebounds for Denver, but reigning Most Valuable Player Embiid starred late on. He scored 11 fourth-quarter points to lead the 76ers to a third straight win.

Philadelphia are third in the Eastern Conference, while the Nuggets stay third in the West, a game and a half behind the conference leading Minnesota Timberwolves. Elsewhere, the Phoenix Suns produced an incredible comeback to beat the Sacramento Kings 119-117 in Arizona. With eight minutes and 22 seconds remaining, the Suns trailed by 22 points before they went on a 32-8 run to snatch the win. Kevin Durant led the way, scoring 15 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter,

and clinched the victory from the free-throw line. Meanwhile, Paul George inspired the Los Angeles Clippers to a 128-117 victory over the Oklahoma City Thunder. The 33-year-old forward scored 38 points against his former side with Kawhi Leonard and James Harden each adding 16 points for the Clippers. NBA commissioner Adam Silver has also announced that the Clippers' new Intuit Dome, which is set to open next August, will host the 2026 NBA All-Star Game.



Nuggets' Nikola Jokic (1) and 76ers' Joel Embiid reach for a rebound during an NBA game in Philadelphia, PA, US, on January 16, 2024.
● MATT SLOCUM/AP