

## AFC Futsal Asian Cup:

## Iran up to winning start against Afghanistan

## Sports Desk

Iran began its quest for a record-extending 13th title at the AFC Futsal Asian Cup with a 3-1 victory over Afghanistan in Bangkok on Thursday.

Heading into the competition without injured talisman Hossein Tayyebi, Vahid Shamsaei's side dominated the early proceedings at the Hua Mark Indoor Stadium but had to wait until the closing stages of the first half to get off the mark, when a Salar Aghapour's delicate back-heel pass found Mahdi Karimi steaming through on the left to slam his strike past goalkeeper Mohammad Safari.

A second goal for the Asian powerhouse came seconds after the restart, with Saeid Ahmad-Abbasi dancing his way past a couple of Afghan players before unleashing his strike into the roof of the net.

The Iranian bagged his brace in no time, drilling home from a slight angle less than a minute later.

The Iranians took their feet off the gas afterwards but could still have extended their lead through Behrouz Azimi, whose effort hit the crossbar on 24 minutes. Making an Asian Cup debut un-



der Iranian head coach Majid Mortezaei, Afghanistan found the courage to push forward for a maiden goal in the event and was rewarded when Mehran Gholami

fired home with 14 minutes left on the clock. Shamsaei's side sat on the two-goal until the end and is on top of the Group D table on goal difference,

with Kuwait in second after a 2-1 win against Bahrain later in the day. "The first game is always a tough one so I'm happy it's out of the way and I was pleased with the

result against Afghanistan," said Shamsaei, whose team will face Bahrain today.

"We will do our best against Bahrain because we are aiming to go



Saeid Ahmad-Abbasi fires home Iran's second goal in a 3-1 victory over Afghanistan in the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Bangkok, Thailand, on April 18, 2024. ● CHALINEE THIRASUPA/AFP

all the way and win this championship. We have analyzed them in detail and prepared our strategy so that we can bring all our power against them," added the Iranian coach, a three-time Asian Player of the Year, who won the competition as a player on eight occasions but had to settle for a runner-up finish behind Japan on his managerial debut on Iran's bench in 2022.

Japan, meanwhile, kicked off its title defense with a shock 3-2 defeat against Kyrgyzstan in the Bangkok Arena on Thursday.

Samat Dzhanat Uulu, Maksat Alimov and Kairat Kubanychov found the back of the net before Yusei Arai and Yuta Tsutsumi pulled two back for the champion but the Central Asian side staved off a late Japan fightback to take the maximum points in Group C. Elsewhere in the group, first-half goals from Idris Yorov and Fayzali Sardorov gave Tajikistan a 2-0 victory over South Korea.

## Nagelsmann to remain Germany coach till 2026



● MATTHIAS SCHRADER/AP

AFP - German national team coach Julian Nagelsmann has signed a contract extension to remain in post until at least the 2026 World Cup, the German Football Association (DFB) said Friday.

"This is a decision from the heart. It is a great honour to coach the national team," Nagelsmann said in a statement. The announcement comes just a few weeks before Germany is set to host the 2024 European championships in June and July. Nagelsmann said he had been "moved by the enthusiasm of the fans" after victories in the recent friendlies against France and the Netherlands.

"Together, we now want to have a successful home Euros," Nagelsmann said.

The DFB was already "absolutely convinced" of the need to keep Nagelsmann beyond this year's tournament, national team director Rudi Voeller said in the statement.

The manager's decision to extend his stay to the 2026 World Cup in North America sent a "strong signal," DFB president Bernd Neundorff said in the statement.

The announcement puts to bed speculation that Nagelsmann would return to club football after Euro 2024. The 36-year-old coach was "on

the wish list" for a lot of top clubs in Europe, Neundorff said. Nagelsmann was strongly linked with a return to Bayern Munich, who parted ways with the native Bavarian last year.

The perennial winners have, however, struggled since dumping Nagelsmann, surrendering their Bundesliga crown to Bayer Leverkusen this season and ending a streak of 11-straight titles.

Despite remaining in the hunt for the Champions League, Bayern's poor league form was enough to cost Nagelsmann's replacement Thomas Tuchel his job.

Nagelsmann, who initially only signed a contract with the national team through to the end of this summer's tournament, will not however be the one to replace Tuchel.

Germany will be looking to compete at Euro 2024 after being dumped out of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar at the group stage.

A miserable run of results following the tournament was enough for DFB management to decide they could not continue with coach Hansi Flick.

Germany's fortunes have since picked up with Nagelsmann at the helm, and the team will head into the championships in good form.

## Iran's Aqamirzaei bags Asian canoe sprint bronze

## Sports Desk

Iran's Ali Aqamirzaei grabbed a bronze medal at the Asian Canoe Sprint Championships in Tokyo, Japan.

Representing the country in the men's K-1 200m final, Aqamirzaei clocked 39.53 seconds to finish third to gold-winning South Korean Cho Gwang-hee and Denis Onufriev of Uzbekistan.

Elsewhere, Iranian girl Elnaz Shafieian booked her place in today's K-1 500m final showpiece, thanks to a top-spot finish in the semifinals with 2:13.259 minutes.

With this year's championships serving as the qualifiers for the Paris Olympics in the summer, a top-two finish in the final will see Shafieian punch the ticket for the French capital.

Aqamirzaei will also begin his quest for an Olympic berth in the K-1 1000m contest today, with Mohammad-Nabi Rezaei chasing a place in Paris in the men's C-1 1000m event.

The Iranian duo of Adel Mojallali and Kia Eskandari failed to qualify for the Olympics after standing fifth in the men's C-2 500m final.



● JAMARAN.NEWS

## James to headline another US 'Dream Team' in Paris



● MIKE STOBE/AFP

REUTERS - The NBA's all-time leading scorer LeBron James and reigning most valuable

player Joel Embiid headline an all-star lineup named to the United States men's basketball

team for the Paris Olympics, USA Basketball announced.

James, who has won two Olympic golds and a bronze but sat out the last two Games, will be joined by Los Angeles Lakers team mate Anthony Davis, Phoenix Suns three-time Olympic champion Kevin Durant and Golden State Warriors' Stephen Curry.

"We know we have a collection of incredible talent for this summer. And a lot of guys are experienced," USA Basketball men's national team managing director Grant Hill told reporters.

"They know very well just how difficult this is. We can't just show up, you know, we have to come. We have to play. We have to compete."

Also named to the squad were Bam Adebayo (Miami Heat), Devin Booker (Phoenix Suns), Anthony Edwards (Minnesota Timberwolves), Tyrese Haliburton (Indiana Pacers), Jrue Holiday (Boston Celtics),

Kawhi Leonard (L.A. Clippers) and Jayson Tatum (Boston Celtics).

All 12 members of the Paris "Dream Team" have been NBA All-Stars and it includes four NBA MVPs and six NBA champions.

Hill said that an "overwhelming" number of players wanted to be a part of the team and that James committed to competing in Paris in a passing conversation not long after breaking the all-time scoring record.

"I just went up to him and said, 'Hey, man, I need to you in Paris'. And he was like, 'I'm in'," said Hill.

"He deserves - because of all that he's done and what he's still doing - to be on this roster. And so we're thrilled."

The U.S. will play in Group C with Serbia, South Sudan and the winner of a qualifying tournament in Puerto Rico on Aug. 3.

The Paris Olympics are scheduled for July 26 to Aug. 11.