

AFC Futsal Asian Cup:

Iran rallies past Bahrain to progress to last eight

Sports Desk

Iran came from behind twice to beat a resolute Bahrain side 5-3 and book a place in the last-eight round of the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Bangkok, Thailand.

Stepping into the game on the back of a first-day 3-1 win against Afghanistan, Vahid Shamsaei's men dominated the early stages at the Hua Mark Indoor Stadium, with Alireza Rafieipour hitting the post in the opening minute before Bahraini keeper Sayed Abbas produced a couple of fine saves to deny Mahdi Karimi and Saeid Ahmad-Abbasi.

The 12-time champion was stunned in the 10th minute when Ali Alaraibi gave Bahrain a surprise lead, only to see his goal canceled out by Rafieipour seconds later.

Bahrain struck again with two minutes left on the clock, thanks to Saleh Sanjar's close-range strike, and he could have doubled his side's advantage just before the break, but saw his effort from the second spot well saved by Iranian goalie Baqer Mohammadi.

Iran found a second equalizer through Karimi two minutes after the interval and took a first-time lead in the contest seven minutes later.

Ahmad-Abbasi bagged his third goal in the competition from a tight angle but Iran's lead was short-lived as Alaraibi drew Bah-



Iran's Mahdi Karimi (11) shoots during a 5-3 victory over Bahrain in the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Bangkok, Thailand, on April 20, 2024.

● FFIRI

rain level a minute later. However, Behrouz Azimi's left-foot effort on a corner-kick found the roof of the net to restore Iran's one-goal cushion with less than eight minutes left on the clock, and when Bahrain

opted for powerplay in desperate search of a late equalizer Ahmad-Abbasi was first to a poor pass by Mohamed Alsandi before sending the ball from his own half into an empty net. The result left Iran atop the Group

D table with maximum points, while Kuwait remained on course for a runner-up spot after a 3-3 draw against Afghanistan. "The game became tricky for us due to the pressure our players felt about advancing to the next

round. We performed well in the opening minutes, but after conceding a goal, we were forced into a defensive mode," said Shamsaei, whose team will be chasing a first Asian crown since 2018. A draw against Kuwait today will

be enough for Iran to win the group.

"I believe in my players. They delivered a decent performance today. We face a difficult situation as this is a World Cup qualifying tournament and I just want my men to know that if they play to their abilities, we will win every game," added the Iranian head coach.

The four semifinalists in Bangkok will book a place in the World Cup – starting mid-September in Uzbekistan.

"We made it hard for ourselves. We missed loads of chances in the first half and were caught off guard on the counterattacks. We still showed character to get back in the game," said Iranian skipper Ali-Asghar Hassanzadeh, who is after a fifth Asian trophy with the national team.

Elsewhere on Saturday, defending champion Japan bounced back from a first-day 3-2 defeat against Kyrgyzstan to beat South Korea 5-0, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan shared the spoils in a 2-2 stalemate.

Tajikistan is on top in Group C with four points, leading Kyrgyzstan on goal difference.

Iran's Rezaei wins Asian canoe gold, books Olympic berth

Sports Desk

Iranian Mohammad-Nabi Rezaei won a gold medal at the Asian Canoe Sprint Championships in Tokyo, Japan, to punch his ticket for the Paris Olympics in July.

Representing the country in the men's C-1 1000m final on Sunday, Rezaei clocked 4:10.980 minutes to beat Lai Kuan-chieh of the Chinese Taipei to the ultimate prize, with China's Miao Feilong taking the bronze.

This was a third medal for Iranian men in the championships

following Ali Aqamirzaei's double bronze-winning campaigns in the K-1 200m and 1000m events – with the latter success securing him a second Olympic berth after the Tokyo Games three years ago – as the country finished sixth in the team table. Kazakhstan topped the standing with 11 medals – including sixth golds – followed by Uzbekistan (10 medals, three golds) and China (four medals, two golds.)

Meanwhile, Iranian female rowers won a couple of Olympic quotas in the Asian and Oceanian qualification event in

Chungju, South Korea.

Two-time Asian under-23 gold medalist Fatemeh Mojallal, who was part of the quadruple sculls team that won a silver in last year's Asian Games, secured a spot in the French capital thanks to a third-place finish in women's single sculls event. Zeinab Norouzi and Mahsa Javer also built on a decent performance in the Asian Games, which saw the duo leave Hangzhou with a couple of silver medals, to finish as the runner-up in the double sculls contest and book their Paris tickets.



● yjc

Taylor fails to reach Olympics after shock defeat in US trials



American wrestler David Taylor (l) is seen in action against Aaron Brooks in a freestyle 86kg bout in the US Olympic trials in State College, PA, US, on April 20, 2024.

● CENTRE DAILY TIMES

USA TODAY – One of the biggest stars in US wrestling has failed to qualify for the Summer Olympics.

In a shocking twist, two-time defending world champion and reigning Olympic gold medalist David Taylor will miss out on the 2024 Paris Games after losing to fellow Penn State product Aaron Brooks on Saturday night at the Olympic trials.

Taylor, 33, got an automatic bye to the final at the Olympic trials by virtue of his past performances, needing only to win two of three bouts against Brooks to lock up his spot on Team USA. But he came out flat in the first match at 86 kilograms Saturday morning, losing 4-1. And a 3-1 defeat to Brooks on Saturday night followed, stunning the crowd at the Bryce Jordan Center on the campus where they both previously starred.

"He's one of the first guys to make this program what it is," Brooks said. "It's been a blessing, being around him and watching what he does." It was an almost unfathomable outcome

for the wrestler known by fans as "Magic Man," who has been arguably the most dominant male wrestler for the US over the past five years. Prior to this weekend's Olympic trials, Taylor had won 26 of 27 matches dating back to the start of 2019 and beat opponents by a combined score of 226-19. His lone loss came in the final of the 2021 World Championships against Iranian rival Hassan Yazdani. The two men were heavily favored to face off again in Paris, likely with a gold medal on the line.

Instead, Taylor becomes the latest US star to be foiled by the country's trials system, in which even the most accomplished athletes are forced to earn their place.

Only one athlete per country per weight class is allowed to compete at the Olympic Games.

Ultimately, Team USA's gold-medal hopeful was foiled by Brooks, a 23-year-old who just wrapped up his collegiate career with a fourth consecutive NCAA title.