

## AFC Futsal Asian Cup:

Iran eases past Kuwait,  
lands Kyrgyzstan in last eight

## Sports Desk

Iran defeated Kuwait 4-0 to make a clean sweep of three victories in Group D of the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Bangkok, Thailand.

The top-spot finish in the group means the 12-time champion will square off against Kyrgyzstan, which stood second to Tajikistan in Group C on goal difference, in today's quarterfinal in Bangkok Arena.

Stepping into Monday's game on the back of two unconvincing wins against Afghanistan (3-1) and Bahrain (5-3), Vahid Shamsaei's men saved their best for the last round of group fixtures.

Dominating the early stages, Iran broke the deadlock eight minutes into the contest, when Ali Akrami dribbled past his marker down the right flank before his strike from a tight angle ricocheted off Kuwaiti captain Abdulrahman Altawail's knee to find the back of the net.

Iran had another Kuwaiti player to thank for its second goal in the 17th minute, as the reigning Asian Player of the Year Moslem Oladqobad's effort took a deflection off Ahmad Alfarsi to go past goalkeeper Fahad Alkhawari.

Needing a single point to progress, Kuwait opted for power play to reduce the deficit late in the first half but the decision cost the Middle Eastern debutants a third goal, with Saeid Ahmad-Abbasi intercepting a Naser Alalban's pass before his cool strike from halfway line sealed a fifth goal for the Iranian in Bangkok.

Shamsaei's men took their foot off the pedal after the break but still managed to extend their lead with less than eight minutes left on the clock, courtesy of an Ahmad-Abbasi's spot kick after Salar Aqapour was brought down by Sulaiman Alomran.

The result also saw Afghanistan make history by reaching the knockout phase in maiden appearance in the Asian flagship international event, pipping Kuwait to the runner-up spot on goal difference following a 3-2 win against Bahrain.

Standing between Iran and a last-four place – and a berth in September's Futsal World Cup in Uzbekistan – is an impressive Kyrgyzstan side, which stole the headlines by beating defending champion Japan 3-2 in their group opener.

"I've played against Kyrgyzstan as a player and a coach before, but the mentality that the new coach has given the players has made them a much different team. I'm sure we're going to have a tough but exiting match against them," Shamsaei said of today's opponent.

Japan bounced back from the first-day upset to beat South Korea by five goals but Monday's 1-1 draw against Tajikistan eventually sent the Blue Samurais packing.

"I was really saddened by Japan's exit as they also missed out on the World Cup spot. The performances by other teams show that there are no easy opponents in this tournament. Just watch some of the games in the group stage to see how futsal has improved across Asia," added Shamsaei, who won the tournament as a player on eight occasions.

Elsewhere in the quarterfinals, host country Thailand will take on Iraq, while Tajikistan will face Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan and Vietnam will also go head-to-head with the winner facing Iran or Kyrgyzstan in Friday's semifinals.



Iranian players celebrate a goal during a 4-0 victory over Kuwait in the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Bangkok, Thailand, on April 22, 2024.  
● FFIRI

Veteran Iranian middle blocker Mousavi  
to withdraw from international duty: Report

## Sports Desk

Veteran Iranian middle blocker Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi has no intention of representing the country at the upcoming Volleyball Nations League, according to Varzesh3.

The Iranian website mentioned "a long-time injury" as the main reason behind Mousavi's decision. Mousavi, 36, was part of the provisional 39-man squad for the annual international event, which also serves as the last chance for Iran to book a place in the Paris Olympics in July and August.

A newly-crowned Iranian Pro League champion with Foolad Sirjan, Mousavi has informed new Brazilian head coach Mauricio Motta Paes, who was appointed to the job in February, of his decision though the Iranian federation is yet to confirm his withdrawal.

Mousavi was an essential member of Iran's so-called 'golden generation' in the previous decade, winning four titles at the Asian Championships as well as double gold medals at the Asian Games.

Having been left out of the Iranian squad by former coach

Behrouz Ataei for the 2022 Nations League, Mousavi made a return to the national duty last year, inspiring the team to a third Asian Games triumph in October, though the Asian powerhouse still endured a relatively below-par run over the course of the 12 months.

Iran finished third from bottom in the 16-team table of the Nations League, failing to reach the quarterfinals, before suffering a straight-set defeat against Japan in the Asian Championships final on home soil in August.

The latest episode in a dreadful international season came in Oc-

tober, where Iran conceded six defeats in seven outings in the Olympic Qualification Tournament in Rio de Janeiro.

Iran will be facing a mammoth task to progress to the Games in the French capital when the Nations League gets underway on May 21 as the remaining four slots will be decided through the FIVB Ranking by the end of the VNL preliminary round on June 23.

As it stands in the ranking, third-placed Italy, Argentina (sixth), Slovenia (seventh), and Serbia (ninth) are the favorites to punch their Paris tickets, with Iran lagging behind in the 15th place.

Inter's Martinez delighted  
with Scudetto win in Milan derby

REUTERS – Inter Milan striker Lautaro Martinez said he was close to tears after they became the first side to clinch the Serie A title in the Milan derby following their 2-1 win over AC Milan on Monday.

Francesco Acerbi and Marcus Thuram scored in each half to secure Inter's 20th Serie A title and a sixth consecutive win against Milan, who scored a late goal through Fikayo Tomori.

Martinez, the top scorer in Serie A with 23 goals, celebrated his first Scudetto victory as Inter captain having also won the title in 2021.

"Now, I feel like crying because we worked so hard, suffered so much, we deserved this joy. I dedicate it to my family in Argentina, my children, my team mates and all

the fans," the 26-year-old told DAZN.

"I told the lads, we were in a situation that had never happened before, we had to make the most of this opportunity to win in a Rossoneri stadium."

The Argentina international said he is keen to remain at Inter though they have yet to conclude an extension to his current deal, which expires in June 2026.

"I hope so (to renew), we need to reach an agreement with the club," Martinez said.

Inter CEO Giuseppe Marotta told Sky Italia they were in talks over a new five-year contract with the forward.

"(There will be no problems with renewal), absolute loyalty after winning his seventh trophy with Inter," he added.

Inter Milan's Lautaro Martinez celebrates winning Serie A with fans after the victory over AC Milan in San Siro, Milan, Italy, on April 22, 2024.  
● ALESSANDRO GAROFALO/REUTERS

