

Iran beats Thailand for record-extending 13th Asian futsal crown



Sports Desk

Iran defeated Thailand 4-1 to lift the AFC Futsal Asian Cup trophy in Bangkok – a record-extending 13th crown in the competition for the continental powerhouse. Having stepped into the final showpiece on the back of shootout victory over Uzbekistan, Vahid Shamsaei's men started right on the front in front of the capacity crowd at the Bangkok Arena, taking the lead in the

first minute when Mahdi Amiri's low drive found the bottom corner.

Iran, which endured some nervy moments against Bahrain and Uzbekistan earlier in the competition, was quick to double the advantage through Saeid Ahmad-Abbasi as the tournament's top scorer bagged his eighth goal in the Thai capital with a sublime backheel effort in the sixth minute.

Thai skipper Jirawat Sornwichian gave his team a lifeline with a composed finish in the 26th minute, only to see his opposite number Ali-Asghar Hassanzadeh restore the two-goal cushion for Iran a

minute later.

With the host desperately chasing a second goal with powerplay, Iranian keeper Baqer Mohammadi made the most of opponent's vulnerability in the back as his long-range effort from his own goal found the back of an empty net.

Earlier on Sunday, Uzbekistan came out on top in the shootout against Tajikistan in an all-Central Asian third-place contest, while Afghanistan made history on its Asian Cup debut by beating Kyrgyzstan 5-3 in the fifth-place playoff to join Iran, Thailand, Tajikistan, and host Uzbekistan in September's Futsal World Cup.

Iran's Mahdi Karimi (11) celebrates with teammates after scoring in a final victory over Thailand at the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Bangkok, Thailand, on April 28, 2024.
● FFIRI

Asian U20 Athletics Championships: Iranians finish with two medals



Mahdi Haft-Cheshmeh won a second successive hammer throw silver in the Asian U20 Athletics Championships in Dubai, the UAE.

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Iranian nine-athlete squad finished its Asian U20 Athletics Championships campaign in Dubai with a couple of medals, including a historic gold in the women's event. On Saturday, Mahdi Haft-Cheshmeh registered a best throw of 66.64m to settle for the silver in the men's hammer throw contest – a second successive runner-up finish for the Iranian in the

event following last year's 63.96m tally in Yecheon, South Korea.

Ali Sarvari was the other Iranian boy in the discipline but missed out on the podium, finishing fourth.

The pinnacle of the four-day tournament for the country came on Friday when Nazanin Fatemeh Eidian made history by becoming the first Iranian girl to grab an Asian junior gold in the sport.

A silver medalist last year, the sprinter clocked a national record of 58.86 seconds in the 400m hurdles final.

This was a third major continental medal for the Iranian girl in 2024 after she walked away with the 400m silver, while being a part of the country's silver-winning quadruple in the 4x400m relay contest, in February's Asian Indoor Athletics Championships in Tehran. Melika Norouzi (women's hammer throw), Mana Hosseini (women's javelin throw), Sajjad Aqaei (men's 400m), Elnaz Mousaei (women's heptathlon), Mohammad-Hesam Mozaffari (men's 800m), and Arshia Mosaddeqi (men's pole vault) were the other members of the Iranian squad but were unlucky to leave Dubai empty-handed despite some decent performances across their respective discipline.

James scores 30 to keep Lakers play-off hopes alive



Lakers' LeBron James (23) shoots during a victory over the Nuggets in Los Angeles, CA, US, on April 27, 2024.
● MARK J. TERRILL/AP

BBC – LeBron James scored 30 points to help the Los Angeles Lakers beat the Denver Nuggets and keep their Western Conference first-round play-off hopes

alive. The Lakers were 3-0 down in the best-of-seven series but fought back on Saturday to win 119-108 in Los Angeles.

James was supported by Anthony Davis, who registered 25 points and 23 rebounds to end an 11-game losing streak against the Nuggets.

"We've given ourselves another life, another lifeline," James, 39, said.

"The only opportunity for us is just to play the next game." James is searching for his fifth NBA title and his first with the Lakers since 2020. The fifth game takes place in Denver tonight.

In the Eastern Conference, Jayson Tatum scored 22 points with 11 rebounds and six assists in the Boston Celtics' 104-84 win over the Miami Heat, who were at home.

The Celtics, who are the NBA's top seeds, lead the series 2-1.

The Orlando Magic beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 112-89 to level their play-off at 2-2, while the Oklahoma City Thunder took a 3-0 lead with a 106-85 victory over the New Orleans Pelicans.

Iran coach Paes shrugs off seniors withdrawal ahead of Volleyball Nations League



Iran head coach Mauricio Motta Paes (R) sits next to Vahid Moradi, the vice-president of the Iranian Volleyball Federation, during a press conference in Tehran, Iran, on April 28, 2024.
● volleyball.ir

Sports Desk

Iran's head coach Mauricio Motta Paes said he was unfazed by the decision by some of the senior members of the national team to withdraw from international duty ahead of the upcoming Volleyball Nations League.

Veteran middle blocker Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi and prolific opposite spiker Amir Ghafour as well as libero Mahdi Marandi were all named the provisional list for the annual event before they announced their decision in recent days.

Speaking in his first press conference in Iran, the Brazilian coach said: "I don't think the absence of star players would play a significant role as the important thing will be to build a decent squad. Many of these players were part of the team over the past two years but the results were still not good enough."

"We don't have much time to prepare and it is important for the players to play with their hearts. If a player does not believe in our goal, he would better be away from the team," added Paes.

A former number two to fellow-Brazilian Bernardo

Rezende on France bench in 2021 and 2022, Paes, 60, took over from Behrouz Ataei in February, after the Iranian stepped down from his role in the aftermath of a 3-1 defeat against the Czech Republic midway through last October's FIVB Olympic Qualifying Tournament in Rio de Janeiro, where Iran finished second from bottom in the eight-team table and failed to secure direct qualification for the Paris Olympics.

As if Iran needed more motivation to go all out for success in this year's Nations League, the remaining quotas for the Games in the French capital will be on the line when the preliminary round of the tournament gets underway in Antalya and Rio de Janeiro on May 21.

With Germany, Brazil, Poland, Canada, USA, and Japan having already joined host France, and Egypt likely to take the African slot for the Olympics, only four quotas remain up for grabs, which 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.

However, Paes said he is "optimistic" about the daunting task on his hands.

"Everyone knows that Iran has top-notch players, specially in the age-group levels. The mission ahead of us is surely a tough one but we all believe our goal is achievable and I feel optimistic about steering the team toward that objective," Paes said.

Asked if Iran needs a miracle to qualify for the Olympics, Paes said: "I think there is no such thing as miracle in sports and if it is going to be an impossible mission it will apply to all the other teams chasing the Olympic berth."

Paes still refused to make any promises about the quest for a place in Paris, saying: "All I can say is that I will put in all my efforts into the job. What is clear is that we will work hard together as a team and if we don't win that would probably be because our opponent has been a better team."

Iran will begin its VNL campaign against Serbia on May 22 in Rio de Janeiro before taking on Italy, Cuba, and Argentina in Week 1.