

World Cup Asian qualifiers:

Iran coach Qalenoey pleased with performance in Hong Kong win

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoey said he was satisfied with his team's performance and quality in the 4-2 away victory over Hong Kong, China in the World Cup Asian qualifiers preliminary round.

Mahdi Taremi gave Iran the lead from the spot 12 minutes into the game, only to see his strike canceled out two minutes later by Ma Hei Wai, whose effort from a tight angle went in through goalkeeper Payam Niazmand's legs.

Taremi restored the advantage thanks to a second spot-kick in the 34th minute and completed his hat-trick with a sublime curling effort from the edge of the box 11 minutes after the break.

substitute Anthony Pinto gave the home side a lifeline with his first touch of the game on the hour mark before Sardar Azmoun's composed finish made it 4-2 as Iran remained top of Group E – equal on 13 points with Uzbekistan, which will visit Tehran to take on Qalenoey's side on the final day of the preliminary-round fixtures on Tuesday.

"We had two opponents tonight. One was a decent Hong Kong team and the other was the high humidity, which made it very challenging for us," Qalenoey said after the game.

The Iranian coach, who has embarked on a rejuvenation project within his aged squad after February's AFC Asian Cup, fielded new faces in young defender Mohammad-Amin Hazbavi as well as Sepahan duo Arya Yousefi and Mohammad Qorbani, while Esteghlal Khuzestan striker Javad Aqaepour was rewarded with a first international cap as a late substitute after a stellar campaign in the newly-finished Persian Gulf Pro League season.

"We scored four goals and had other chances to score more but in general, given the presence of a number of young players who have recently joined the na-



Iranian players celebrate a goal during a 4-2 victory over Hong Kong in Hong Kong, China, on June 6, 2024. AFC

tional team, I am pretty satisfied with the performance and quality of the game, not to mention the result," added the Iranian coach.

This was a second meeting between the two sides in six months following Iran's 1-0 victory in Asian Cup group stage.

"Football in Asia has become closer and the

results recorded in the Asian Cup prove this. It showed that every game can be difficult for all teams in the continent," said Qalenoey, while he was full of praise for his talisman Taremi, who is now the joint-third all-time top scorer – alongside legendary midfielder Karim Baqeri – for the national team with 50 goals, following Ali Daei and Azmoun.

The milestone night also saw Taremi register his fourth international hat-trick, second highest after Daei, who has eight under his belt.

"The strategy of the national team is to attack and create chances. With all due respect to Hong Kong, which caused us problems in some spells, Iran controlled

the game today and had many opportunities in front of the goal. I believe Hong Kong's football philosophy has changed a lot and, as the manager said, they be a tough opponent for other Asian teams in the future," said Taremi, who is to be unveiled as a new signing for Serie A champion Inter on July 1.

Celtics dominate Mavericks in NBA Finals opener



Celtics' Jaylen Brown (7) dunks the ball during a victory over the Mavericks in Game 1 of the NBA Finals in Boston, MA, US, on June 6, 2024. MADDIE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES

BBC – Jaylen Brown starred as the Boston Celtics put on a dominant display to beat the Dallas Mavericks 107-89 in game one of the NBA Finals.

The 27-year-old top scored with 22 points, while five of his team-mates also recorded double figures for the Celtics who are aiming to win a record 18th title.

But the Celtics' defensive display was just as good, helping them to a 29-point lead in the first half at the TD Garden in Massachusetts.

Mavericks star Luka Doncic, who scored 30 points and 10 rebounds, helped his side to close the deficit to eight points in the third quarter but the

home side pulled away again in the fourth quarter.

"When they cut it to eight, that's when the game started," said Brown.

"I liked how our team responded. We stayed composed. Offensively, we got to our spacing and was able to push that lead back out and make some plays."

Kristaps Porzingis made his return from injury for the Celtics after missing 10 games with a calf injury during the play-offs.

The Latvian, playing against his former side, scored 20 points including 11 from rebounds.

On a disappointing night for the Mavericks, the Texan side

will be looking to take hope from their performance in the third quarter.

"I think in those moments we were playing our basketball," said Doncic.

"We were getting stops. We didn't allow them to offensive rebound. We were having fun out there in those moments, and that's what we've got to do more."

Boston host game two of the best-of-seven series on Sunday. They are aiming to move clear of the Los Angeles Lakers, who also have 17 NBA Championship titles, and will know that 70% of NBA Finals have been won by the team that was victorious in game one.

Polyák Imre & Varga János Memorial: Iranians grab double silvers on Day 1

Sports Desk

The first day of the Polyák Imre & Varga János Memorial tournament in Budapest – the final UWW Ranking Series event before the Paris Olympics – saw Iranian wrestlers collect three medals, including a couple of silvers, in the freestyle contests.

Representing the country in the 65kg contests, Abbas Ebrahimzadeh came out 6-0 winner against Azerbaijan's Haji Aliiev – a three-time world champion and silver medalist in Tokyo Olympics – for a place in the final showpiece, but settled for the silver after a 12-8 loss to Japanese Kotaro Kiyooka.

Adel Panahian grabbed a second silver for the country when he fell to a 6-5 defeat against Georgian wrestler Otari Bagauri in the 79kg final.

Shahdad Khosravi, meanwhile, added a bronze to Iran's medal count in the Hungarian capital as he bounced back from a last-four 7-3 defeat against Armenian Arsen Harutyunyan – a winner of three successive world bronzes – to outmuscle Giorgi Goniashvili of Georgia 8-0 and share the

61kg third podium with American Nahshon Garrett.

Ali Mo'meni (57kg), Mohammadali Amouzad (70kg), and Abolfazl Babalou (97kg) were also in action on the first day of the competitions but finished their campaigns empty-handed.

Iranian Abbas Ebrahimzadeh won a freestyle 65kg silver medal at the Polyák Imre & Varga János Memorial tournament in Budapest, Hungary. MOJTABA SHOURMEYI

