

Iran, Shamsaei out to prove doubters wrong in Futsal World Cup



By Amirhadi Arsalanpour
Staff writer

As Iran kicks off its Group F campaign against Venezuela at the Futsal World Cup on Monday, the familiar home-grown vs. foreign coach debate is likely to reignite among fans and pundits in the country. While many insist the knowledge and acumen of a high-profile international coach is essential to success in major tournaments, others argue that a local coach, with a better understanding of the Iranian culture and emotional needs, is better suited to lead a compatriot. For all his glorious years as a scoring machine for the

national team, Iranian head coach Vahid Shamsaei has had his own critics to deal with since taking charge of the bench two years ago and a record-extending 13th Asian Cup crown, coupled with some shaky performances against minnow oppositions in Bahrain and Uzbekistan, back in April did little to consolidate him as the right man for the job. That is why Shamsaei will be eager for a statement victory against the South American opponent, which is making only a second World Cup appearance but managed to reach the last 16 in the 2021 edition. With the group also featuring Guatemala and France,

Iran could fancy a comfortable progress to the last 16. Beaten by Iran in all six previous meetings between the two sides, Guatemala has failed to go beyond the group stage in five attempts, with France, 56th in the FIFA ranking, securing a maiden place in the finals courtesy of an elite-round group win in the European qualifiers. The story of the knockout stage, however, will be in stark contrast with the group phase as a top-spot finish in the group could place Shamsaei's men in the same half of the draw with five-time champion Brazil, world No. 2 Spain, or the 2021 semifinalist Kazakhstan. A best World Cup result for

Iran came in 2016, when the Asian powerhouse, steered by a domestic coach in Mohammad Nazemasharieh, defeated Portugal in the shootout to finish third, and Shamsaei knows any outcome other than emulating the heroics of eight years ago could well be deemed as a failure. The Iranian will definitely need to have prolific Hossein Tayyebi, Saeid Ahmadabbasi – top scorer in April's Asian Cup – as well as reigning Asian player of the year Moslem Oladqobad in their best form if the country is to go for yet another successful run in the World Cup.



● SAJJAD IMANIAN/MIZAN



↑ Foolad Sirjan's outside-hitter Amirhossein Esfandiari (C) celebrates with teammates during a last-four victory over Jakarta Bhayangkara Presisi in the Asian Men's Club Volleyball Championship in Yazd, Iran, on September 13, 2024.

● AMIRHOSSEIN KHEIRKHAH/volleyball.ir

Asian Men's Club Volleyball Championship:

Foolad, Shahdab set all-Iranian date in the final

Sports Desk

Foolad Sirjan and Shahdab Yazd will square off in an all-Iranian final showpiece at the Asian Men's Club Volleyball Championship in Yazd's Shahediyeh Indoor Hall today.

On Friday, Foolad, steered by former Iran head coach Behrouz Ataei, came from behind to beat a star-studded Jakarta Bhayangkara

Presisi in a five-set thriller (25-22, 23-25, 22-25, 25-21, 16-14) to reach the final. Opposite spiker Ali Hajipour was Foolad's top scorer for the day with 25 points, followed by Iranian international outside-hitter Amirhossein Esfandiari, who contributed with 24. World-class opposite Jean Patry, who won the Olympic gold on home soil in August, chipped in a game-high 31

points for the Indonesian side, with his fellow-French star Earvin N'Gapeth finishing on 16 points.

"I was glad to see my team somehow pull off the victory despite not having its best day. The final game against Shahdab will be a much different contest as there will be no more mental pressure on the players, though the match is still going to be a grueling one," Ataei said af-

ter the game.

Earlier in the day, Shahdab came out on top against Pavlodar VC of Kazakhstan in straight sets (25-21, 25-20, 25-19) to improve on the semifinal defeat in last year's edition in Manama.

Shahdab's Iranian opposite Amir Ghafour and Pakistani outside-hitter were the joint-top scorers of the game with 14 points, with Mikhail Ustinov scoring 13 for Pavlodar.

Premier League rivals want to see us punished: City boss Guardiola

BBC – Manager Pep Guardiola says Manchester City's Premier League rivals want to see the club punished for alleged breaches of the top flight's financial rules. Guardiola says he is glad the hear-

ing into City's 115 charges will begin on Monday.

City were charged and referred to an independent commission in February 2023 following a four-year investigation.

It is alleged City breached the Premier League's financial rules between 2009 and 2018.

City strongly deny all charges and have said their case is supported by a "comprehensive body of irrefutable evidence".

Javier Tebas, president of Spain's La Liga, is a long-time critic of City, owned by the Abu Dhabi-backed City Football Group and has repeatedly accused the them – together with Qatar-backed PSG – of being a state club and of "financial doping". Tebas says he has spoken to many Premier League clubs and believes they want to see the current champions punished.

"I have spoken with many Premier League clubs and most of them understand that City should be sanctioned," he was quoted as saying by Spanish newspaper Mundo Deportivo.

Responding to these comments on Friday, former Barcelona boss Guardiola said: "For the first time

I agree with Tebas.

"All the Premier League teams want us to be sanctioned, that is for sure. But that's why I say to Mr Tebas and the Premier League teams, wait for the independent panel.

"Justice is there in a modern democracy. It's not more complicated than that.

"I don't know if he is a lawyer or the rest of the Premier League teams are lawyers, so I ask for that. It happened with UEFA.

"We believe we have not done anything wrong."

Billed as sport's 'trial of the century', it is expected to run for 10 weeks – with a verdict likely in early 2025.

The Premier League has also accused the reigning champions of not co-operating with its investigation.

If found guilty of the most serious charges, City could be hit with a points deduction serious enough to condemn them to relegation – or even expulsion – from the Premier League.

City have won eight league titles, multiple cups and the Champions League since their 2008 Abu Dhabi takeover.

Iranian girls grab three Asian rowing golds



Sports Desk

Iranian girls bagged four medals, including triple golds, at the Asian Rowing U19 & U23 Championships in Shenyang, China. Fatemeh Mojallal rounded off a successful campaign for the country on Saturday by clocking 7:52.20 min-

utes in the final to win the women's under-23 single sculls gold.

Mojallal then teamed up with Kimia Zarei for a silver medal in the double sculls contest of the age group, thanks to a 7:38.07-minute record behind China.

Mahna Haji Hosseini was the Iranian gold medalist in

the under-19 competitions, crossing the finish line with a fastest time of 8:13.37 minutes in the single sculls final. Haji Hosseini was also part of the Iranian four-girl team, alongside Zarei, Mojallal, and Saghi Maleki that had won the under-23 quadruple sculls gold on Friday.



● REUTERS