

Goalless draw for Iran, Uzbekistan in 2026 World Cup qualifier

The face-off between Group A pacesetters Uzbekistan and Islamic Republic of Iran ended in a goalless draw, with both teams moving to seven points. Uzbekistan and Iran settled for the draw in their AFC Asian Qualifiers - Road to 26 Group A tie on Thursday.

The Central Asian derby saw Iran going down to 10 men in the second half following Saleh Hardani's sending off but there was to be no winner in the evenly-matched contest as the two sides moved up to seven points, the-afc.com reported. Forward Mehdi Taremi and Eldor Shomurodov, who both play their club football in Italy, had a subdued first half with neither seeing much of the ball.

The match took a turn in the 57th minute after Australian referee Shaun Evans referred to the pitchside monitor, which led to a straight red card for Hardani for a studs up challenge on Shomurodov.

Uzbekistan seized the opportunity to increase their tempo with two chances just after the hour mark, Abbosbek Fayzulaev dragging his shot just wide before Masharipov ballooned his attempt over the bar after being teed up by Shomurodov. There was drama in stoppage time when Evans awarded a penalty to Iran after the ball seemed to have struck Rustam-



jon Ashurmatov's hand but upon a VAR review, the decision was reversed as the sides shared the spoils.

Ghalenoei, Radmanovic content with stalemate
Uzbekistan's Vlado Radmanovic and Amir Ghalenoei of the Is-

lamic Republic of Iran were both satisfied after seeing their sides played to the draw. Radmanovic, who took charge as head coach as Srecko Katanec was indisposed, was pleased to see Uzbekistan navigate what he considered the toughest match in the group, with their

sights now set on the upcoming games. "It was a difficult match as Iran are one of the strongest in Asia," said Radmanovic. "There are not many chances in such matches. We have passed another game with seven more matches ahead of us.

"One of our main players, Oston Orunov, was injured. He was able to play at first, but as kickoff approached, he wasn't ready as his leg was hurting. "We don't have many attacking players like that. We could have made changes in the centre of

the field and in the centre of defence, but the plan we prepared for today's match did not work well."

"We attacked even after being a man down and won a few corners," said Ghalenoei. "The goalkeeper of Uzbekistan also saved his team in many situations. "We witnessed a good game today. I think it was the best game in the group. We have to think about the next meeting. We proved that we can defend well in today's match. I congratulate Ali Nemati on his national team debut. I hope that he will play a lot more for Iran in the future."

Uzbekistan will host the United Arab Emirates next on Tuesday while Iran will meet Qatar.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has confirmed that the AFC Asian Qualifier - Road to 26 Group A match on October 15, 2024, between Iran and Qatar will be played at a neutral venue, in the United Arab Emirates.

The decision to host the match in a neutral venue was taken after careful consideration of the prevailing security situation and in consultation with FIFA and the relevant stakeholders. The match will kick off at 20:00 hour local time and details regarding the specific venue in the UAE will be updated on the fixtures section.

'King of Clay' Rafael Nadal to retire from Tennis in November

Rafa Nadal will call time on his illustrious but injury-plagued career after next month's Davis Cup Finals, the 22-times Grand Slam champion announced on Thursday, as one of the greatest players in the sport prepares for an emotional farewell.

Nadal, who won a record 14 French Open titles during his 23-year career, had previously said he expected to retire this year after a hip injury that required surgery and limited his appearances in 2023, Reuters reported.

The 38-year-old was a surprise selection for the Nov. 19-24 Davis Cup Final 8 in Malaga, after last competing at the Paris Olympics in July and subsequently missing the U.S. Open and Laver Cup over fitness concerns.

"It's been some difficult years, these last two especially," Nadal

said in a video posted on social media.

"I'm very excited that my last tournament will be the Davis Cup representing my country. It's closing the circle because one of my first joys was the final in Sevilla in 2004."

Nadal has been no stranger to injuries and he sustained the hip problem at the Australian Open in early 2023 and missed the French Open later that year before having surgery.

He has played only 23 matches in the last two seasons.

Nadal returned to his favourite hunting ground this season but was beaten in the opening round by German Alexander Zverev and politely refused a celebratory farewell in the hope of a final hurrah next year.

Dubbed the 'King of Clay' for his jaw-dropping 112-4 win-loss record at the

Paris major, Nadal's last Roland Garros triumph came in 2022.

Nadal will hang up his racket two years after great rival and Swiss maestro Roger Federer, leaving record 24-times major winner Novak Djokovic of Serbia as the only member of the 'Big Three' still active.

Federer led the tributes to Nadal on social media, saying that he hoped the day his friend announces his retirement would never come.

"What a career, Rafa ... Thank you for the unforgettable memories and all your incredible achievements in the game we love. It's been an absolute honour!" the Swiss great said.

Nadal thanked his family and his team for his stellar career, with a special word for his uncle Toni, who was his coach for most of his time on court.

"I believe that thanks to him, I have also been able to overcome many situations that have been difficult in my sporting career," he said.

To his fans, Nadal said: "I can't thank you enough for what you have made me feel. Everything I have experienced has been a dream come true."

"I leave with the absolute peace of mind having given my best," he added.

Nadal is now expected to receive what promises to be an emotional tribute at Roland Garros next year, with a similar celebration of his career expected at the Davis Cup on home soil.

Bam Khatoon eyes first win in AFC Women's Champions League

Bam Khatoon football team is going to earn its first win in the AFC Women's Champions League.

The Iranian side has collected just one point from its two previous matches against Melbourne and Kaya, reported Tasnim News Agency.

Khatoon is scheduled to meet College of Asian Scholars of Thailand on Saturday at the Pathum Thani Stadium.

The AFC Women's Champions League 2024/25 Group Stage comes to a close on Saturday but still with a lot at stake as teams chase down the remaining quarter-final berths.

Following Wednesday's matches, five spots have already been filled with four matches still to be played in Groups B and C that will decide progression or elimination for the teams, with the two best third-placed teams to join the three group winners and runners-up in the knock-out stage.

In Group B, Melbourne of Australia will be looking to end their campaign in style, having already achieved wins over Iran's Bam Khatoon (2-1) and Thailand's College of Asian Scholars (3-0).

Top spot is assured for the Australian side with head coach Michael Matricciani possibly looking to give playing minutes to those



● INSTAGRAM

who didn't feature much in the opening two matches.

The Philippines' Kaya fought back in the dying embers of their match against Bam Khatoon on Wednesday to secure a valuable point, thanks to Joyce Onrubia's stoppage time equaliser.

That means that with two points, a win for Kaya will assure them their spot in the quarter-finals but they will certainly need to raise their performance to stand a chance.

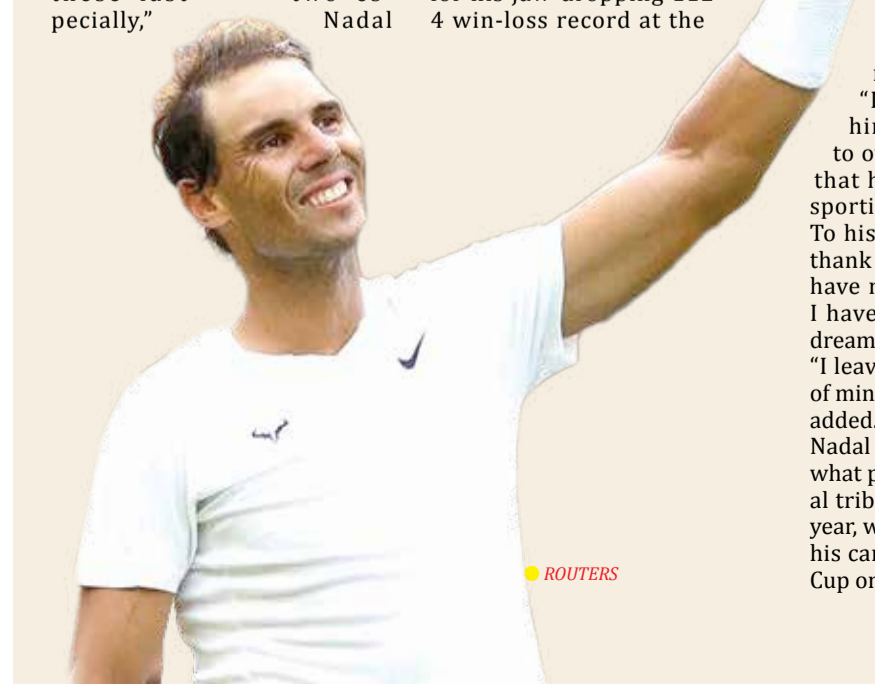
College of Asian Scholars will fancy their chances against Bam Khatoon as they go in search of a first win that

could potentially earn them a quarter-final spot.

Head coach Nuengrutai Srathongvian will have to ensure that her players put the defeat to Melbourne behind them as they also look to prolong their stay in the competition.

Similarly, Bam Khatoon head coach Marziyeh Jafari will be eyeing a first win after collecting just a point from their opening matches.

The Iranian side will rely on the fact that they have managed to score in each of those two games, something which the Thai side has not achieved thus far.



● REUTERS