

## AFC Asian Qualifiers

## Iran eyeing victory over Qatar to lead Group A

Islamic Republic of Iran and Qatar are set for a blockbuster clash when they meet today in Group A of the AFC Asian Qualifiers - Road to 2026.

Iran lead the standings together with Uzbekistan while a win for Qatar will see the two-time AFC Asian Cup™ champions drawing level with Tuesday's opponents, the AFC wrote.

Iran had to be satisfied with a draw against Uzbekistan on Thursday and will know that they can't afford to drop points against Qatar.

Particularly concerning for head coach Amir Ghalenoei will be the fact that goals have been hard to come by, with Iran only having found the back of the net twice in three matches.

Thursday's 3-1 win against Kyrgyz Republic was Qatar's first triumph of their campaign and head coach Marquez Lopez will be hoping the victory was the booster his side needed in their bid to qualify for the FIFA World Cup Finals on merit for the first time.

The West Asian side will go into the tie with the psychological ad-



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vantage of having defeated Iran 3-2 in thrilling AFC Asian Cup semi-final in February. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan will have a great opportunity to boost their hopes of an inaugural appearance at the FIFA World Cup when they host the United Arab Emirates in

Group A of the AFC Asian Qualifiers on Tuesday. The Central Asian side lead the standings ahead of Islamic Republic of Iran on goal difference and victory against UAE will see them opening a six-point gap against Tuesday's opponents.

Having dropped two points at home against Iran on Thursday means Uzbekistan have to win against UAE if they are to stay ahead in the race for the two automatic spots to the FIFA World Cup. Vlado Radmanovic, standing in for indisposed head coach Srecko

Katanec, felt his players had done well against Iran but will emphasise on the need for Uzbekistan to get back on the winning trail against the UAE.

Head coach Paulo Bento did not hold back after his side's 1-1 draw with DPR Korea on Thurs-

day, with the Portuguese admitting UAE did not deserve to win against the East Asians.

Bento, who previously guided Portugal and Korea Republic to the global showpiece, will expect a reaction from his players despite Uzbekistan having the advantage of playing at home.

Also on Tuesday, it will be a meeting between two teams desperately in need of a win when Kyrgyz Republic welcome DPR Korea to the Dolen Omurzakov Stadium for their AFC Asian Qualifiers.

Debutants Kyrgyz Republic have yet to register points on the board while DPR Korea only have two from their previous three matches. Thursday's 3-1 defeat to Qatar was the biggest margin of defeat Kyrgyz Republic have suffered in their campaign so far as the Central Asian side have generally been competitive against their higher ranked opponents.

However, victory is needed if they are to keep their hopes alive - with the top two teams to earn automatic spots in the global showpiece while the third and fourth-placed sides to advance to a playoff.

DPR Korea are in a slightly better position as their two points mean they are just two adrift of United Arab Emirates and Qatar, while pacesetters Uzbekistan and Islamic Republic of Iran are on seven.

Sin Young Nam felt his team can do better after their 1-1 with UAE on Matchday Three and the DPR Korea head coach will be expecting his side to take all three points in Bishkek.

## Sinner wins Shanghai Masters to deny Djokovic 100th career title

World number one Jannik Sinner defeated 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 on Sunday to win the Shanghai Masters.

Sinner took a crucial break in the fourth game of the second set to defeat the Serb in 1hr 37min and deny him a 100th career singles title, AFP reported.

Facing off before an impassioned crowd, neither player blinked in the first set, unable to break the other's serve.

In the tiebreak Sinner quickly took control, breaking Djokovic's serve on the first point and going 5-1 up.

The Serb steadied himself but then netted a volley to bring up set point at 6-3.

Sinner failed to convert initially but didn't miss the second time behind serve.

The next key moment came in the fourth game of the second set, when Sinner was up 40-15 on Djokovic's serve.

Djokovic saved one break point with a fiery ace, but couldn't stop a superb forehand down the line from Sinner that saw him pull ahead.

All that remained was for the Italian to hold his nerve, hitting an ace to finish the match and claim the title.

Sinner's victory is the latest triumph in a formidable season, in which he has won two Grand Slams and retained the top spot in the rankings since June.

But it is also a year that has seen him embroiled in controversy after he twice tested positive for a banned steroid in March.

In August, the International



● AFP

Tennis Integrity Agency accepted Sinner's explanation that the drug entered his system unintentionally when his physiotherapist used a spray containing it to treat a cut, then provided massage and sports therapy to the player.

However, the World Anti-Doping Agency said last month it would appeal against the decision to clear him of wrongdoing and was seeking a ban of up to two years.

That news came as Sinner was contesting the China Open, where he lost in the final to Spain's Carlos Alcaraz, who was also watching from the stands on Sunday.

"This year has been very, very tough for me... At points I lost a little bit of smile," Sinner said on Sunday.

"It's never easy to play in these kinds of circumstances," he added.

"I feel like I'm strong when I go on the court trying to

not think about it... When I wake up, I try to focus on every single (match or practice) I do, but then of course I have moments when I think about it which is not comfortable." Djokovic said Sinner played "the big points better" and "deserved to win".

The 37-year-old said that getting a 100th title was "not a live-or-die type of goal", but he would keep trying.

Djokovic became the last man standing from tennis' golden era after Rafael Nadal announced his retirement this week and said that, despite the loss, he was pleased with his performance in Shanghai.

"I played pretty good, which gives me, I guess, a reason to believe that I can still play with these guys that are the best in the world at this level," he said.

"As long as that's the case, I guess I'll still feel the need to keep on competing and the motivation to be out there."

## Iranian rowers dazzle in Asian championships

Iranian rowing athletes have grabbed six colorful medals in the 2024 Asian Rowing Championships held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

Iranian athletes won six medals in total at the 2024 Asian Rowing Championships, which took place in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, from October 10 to 14, reported Mehr News Agency.

The medals included two gold, three silver, and one bronze.

Iranian female rower Zeinab Norouzi won a gold medal in the lightweight women's single-scull rowing event.

Zeinab Norouzi and Kimia Zarei also claimed a gold medal in the women's lightweight double-sculls event.

Additionally, Iran's Kimia Zarei, Fatemeh Mojallal, Mahsa Javar, and Zeinab Norouzi secured a silver medal in the women's quadruple-sculls.



Fatemeh Mojallal won a silver medal in the heavyweight women's single-scull rowing event. Amir-Hossein Mahmoudpour claimed a silver medal in the lightweight men's

single-scull rowing event. Finally, in the women's heavyweight double-sculls event, Kimia Zarei and Fatemeh Mojallal grabbed a bronze medal.

## Alipour bags bronze at 2024 IFSC Asian competitions



● MEHR

Iranian climber Reza Alipour bagged a bronze medal for his country at the IFSC Asian Championships Tai'an 2024.

Wu Peng of China won a maiden individual men's speed title due to Kazakhstan's Amir Maimuratov's false start in their duel, according to Mehr News Agency.

In his last competition, Alipour defeated Rishat Khaibullin with a time of 4.95s. The Kazakh climber Rishat Khaibullin registered 5.12s.

The 2024 Asian Championships started on Oct. 9 in Tai'an, China and ended yesterday.