

AFC U20 Asian Cup:

# Iran off to flyer with Indonesia rout

Sports Desk

Iran's bid for a fifth title at the AFC U20 Asian Cup got off to an emphatic start as Hossein Abdi's young guns routed Indonesia 3-0 in their Group C opener in Shenzhen, China. Goals from Hesam Nafari, Esmaeil Qolizadeh and Mobin Dehqan put Iran on top of the group table, thanks to a superior goal difference over defending champion Uzbekistan, which defeated Yemen 1-0 earlier on Thursday. Abdi's boys started on the front foot and took the lead with five minutes into the game when the ball bounced off defender Nafari in a packed penalty box and into the net. Iran had to wait until the 63rd minute for a second goal, with Qolizadeh unleashing a spectacular volley on Nima Andarz's cross that flew past Indonesian keeper Achmad Zidan. Dehqan secured maximum points for Iran seven minutes later, heading home Qolizadeh corner kick. Iran will be chasing a second victory in the tournament against Yemen on Sunday, with Wednesday's game against Uzbekistan likely to decide the group winner.



Iranian players celebrate a goal during a 3-0 victory over Indonesia at the AFC U20 Asian Cup in Shenzhen, China, on February 13, 2025. ● AFC

The top two in each group will progress to the last eight, with the four semi-finalists qualifying for Sep-

tember's under-20 World Cup in Chile. Abdi, who led Iran to the U-17 World Cup last 16 in

2023, was pleased with the first-day result but acknowledged there is room for improvement in the fu-

ture games. "We should have scored more goals in the first half, but the second half was an

improvement," said Abdi, adding that their opponents were strong, aggressive and good at keeping the ball.

"In any tournament we have to take the points first. We have to see what we can do in the next match, focus on our opponents' weaknesses and use that." "All the teams here are the best in Asia, they're trying hard and ready to win the tournament. We have to think carefully, which is why I'm taking it from match to match." Indonesia, which was unbeaten in the qualifiers, picked up the pace in the second half, but either failed to convert its chances or found custodian Arsha Shakouri a stumbling block. "We did not play badly, but failed to anticipate Iran's set-pieces and corner kicks," said head coach Indra Syafri. "They are a good team, played a good game and had an advantage over us in their crossing and high balls. "But on our part, we were weak in one-on-ones and failed to take advantage of our speed."

## WTT Youth Contender Cappadocia 2025: Iran's Faraji, Yavari settle for runner-up trophies

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Iranian table tennis players won three trophies, including two runner-up titles, at the WTT Youth Contender event in Cappadocia, Turkey. Representing the country in the U17 boys' singles event, Benjamin Faraji, who won a historic under-15 bronze in last year's World Youth Cham-

pionships, overcame opponents from Venezuela and Azerbaijan to reach the final showpiece but fell to a 3-2 setback (9-11, 11-9, 11-5, 4-11, 12-10) against home-favorite Gorkem Ocal. Iranian girl Vania Yavari also finished her under-17 campaign with a runner-up trophy. Yavari defeated three players from Hong Kong

for a place in the final, before suffering defeat in straight games (11-8, 11-6, 11-6) against Loy Ming Ying of Singapore. Yavari's fellow-Iranian girl Setayesh Iloukhani had settled for a joint third-place finish - alongside Yuen Sum Lok of Hong Kong - in the same age group after a last-four loss to the Singaporean player.



Iranian table tennis players Benjamin Faraji (2nd L) and Vania Yavari (2nd R) pose with their runner-up trophies at the WTT Youth Contender event in Cappadocia, Turkey, on Feb. 13, 2025. ● ITTF

Sports Desk

Iranian prodigy Seyyed Mohammad Mirbaqeri won a second medal at the Asian Road Cycling Championships, grabbing the silver medal in the men's junior road race event in Phitsanulok, Thailand. Mirbaqeri, 18, clocked 2:40:20 to finish runner-up to Hong Kong's Hon Man Yip, who crossed the finish line in 2:40:17 hours, with the host's Thanapat Sakuntae in third place. This was a second medal for the Iranian cyclist in the competition, after he had won the individual time trial gold medal, thanks to a fastest time of 26:30.690 minutes in the final. Koshi Narita of Japan took the silver with 26:34.216, with Indian Dendra Aditama Purniawan clocking 26:40.788 for the bronze medal.

## Asian Road Cycling Championships: Iranian teenager Mirbaqeri wins road race silver



## Iranian Hazfi Cup: Esteghlal beats Shams Azar in extra time, Foolad stunned by Paykan

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Ramin Rezaeian found the net in the fifth minute of extra time to lead Esteghlal to a 2-1 victory at Shams Azar in the Iranian Hazfi Cup - Memorial of Khorramshahr Liberation on Thursday. Winter-signing striker Mohammadreza Azadi gave the Tehran Blues a 27th-minute lead, before the host's Ahmadreza Zenderouh forced the

tie into extra time with a 94th-minute equalizer. Alireza Koushki and Saleh Hardani received their marching orders as the visitors went down to nine men in the closing stages of extra time but held on to progress to the quarter-finals. Elsewhere, second-tier club Paykan rallied from a two-goal deficit to beat Foolad Khuzestan 3-2, courtesy of Afshin Sadeqi's 106th-minute winner.

