

AFC U20 Asian Cup:

Iran eager to end the title drought,
Zamani says after Yemen hammering

Sports Desk

Iran's Abolfazl Zamani hopes his team can build on a flying start to the AFC U20 Asian Cup in China to walk away with the elusive crown on the final day.

The Esteghlal midfielder found the net twice in the first half, with Esmail Qolizadeh, Reza Ghandipour, and Abolfazl Zoleikhaei also on the scoresheet, coupled with a Mohammed Moqbel's own goal, as Iran routed 10-man Yemen 6-0 in its second game in China.

The victory left Hossein Abdi's boys, who had beaten Indonesia 3-0 in their opener, on top of the Group C table with six points – thanks to a superior goal difference over defending champion Uzbekistan.

"The team's effort was amazing. I'm happy I could contribute to this victory. I hope we can score more goals in the next game and advance to the next stage with a strong goal difference," Zamani said after the game.

"Our main focus is to maintain a solid defense, avoid conceding goals, and defeat our opponents with as many goals as possible. Yemen is a good team, but we performed better. Hopefully, with the team's continued effort, we can

continue the perfect run to finish atop the group," added the Iranian.

The top spot in the group will be on the line when Iran and Uzbekistan square off in Shenzhen on Wednesday.

The top two in each group will progress to the last-eight round, with the four semifinalists qualifying for September's U20 World Cup in Chile.

"Our goal is to qualify for the under-20 World Cup and become Asian champions once again," Zamani added.

Iran dominated the Asian competition in the 70s by winning four titles, but have only managed to reach the last four on three occasions since lifting a last trophy in 1976.

Meanwhile, head coach Hossein Abdi, who led Iran to the U17 World Cup last 16 in 2023, was pleased with his team's defensive solidity against Yemen.

"We were prepared for a tough match, as we knew Yemen would put up a strong resistance. But after they were reduced to 10 men, it became easier for us to secure the three points," said Abdi. "It would have been a good contest to face a full-strength Yemen team, as they were a very confident team.

"We scored some good



goals, but football at this stage is also about development, and we would have preferred to face Yemen with all their players on the pitch.

"I told my players to take their feet off the gas and

control the game after the sixth goal [in the 72nd minute] as we wanted to avoid bookings and injuries ahead of our future games in the tournament," added the Iranian coach.

Yemen head coach Mo-

ammed Hasan Ali cut a despondent figure after seeing his side eliminated from the tournament.

"I'm proud of my players even though we lost today," said Ali. "We played really well and controlled the

game at the start, but after the red card, my players found it tough to cope.

"After trailing by five goals, the players were really demotivated, and it was hard for them to stay focused in the second half."



Iranian midfielder Abolfazl Zamani (16) celebrates after scoring a goal during a 6-0 victory over Yemen at the AFC U20 Asian Cup in Shenzhen, China, on February 16, 2025.

● AFC



2025 World Rowing Indoor Championships:

Iranians grab double golds on first weekend

Sports Desk

Iranians collected four medals, including double golds, on the first weekend of action at the 2025 World Rowing Indoor Championships, which is held virtually using ergometer machines. Amirreza Ebdali clocked 01:23.1 minutes to take the bronze medal in the men's lightweight 500m final, finishing behind Finland's Joonas Makipelto (01:21.9) and Egyptian Adham Mahgoub

(01:22.5).

Ebdali's record saw the Iranian beat Egypt's Youssef Moursy to the gold medal in the 19-20 age group of the category.

A second gold medal for Iran came in the women's 19-20 age class, where Saqi Maleki walked away with the ultimate prize in the lightweight 500m event, thanks to a fastest time of 01:38.3 minutes, while finishing fourth in the overall standings.

Meanwhile, Mohammad-Ebrahim Doulabi, representing Iran in the para athletes' competitions, settled for a third-place finish in the men's PR2 500m final with 01:48.2 minutes, trailing Yigit Dogukan Bozkurt of Turkey (01:39.7) and Latvia's Kristis Mickēvičs (01:43.5).

The eighth edition of the annual event will continue with the second and final weekend on February 22-23.

CAFA Women's Futsal Championship:

Iran routs Tajikistan
to lift fourth successive title

Sports Desk

Iranian women cruised to a fourth title in as many CAFA Futsal Championship editions thanks to a 10-1 hammering of host Tajikistan at the Dushanbe Indoor Hall on Saturday.

Fereshteh Karimi and Maral Torkaman scored twice apiece, with Zahra Kianimanesh, Mahtab Banaei, Roqayyeh Some'eh, Fati-meh Hosseini Nasimeh Gholami, and Mahsa Ali-Madadi also finding the net as Iran made a clean sweep of four victories in Tajiki-

stan.

Iran was in a league of its own in the competition – featuring five Central Asian teams in a round-robin format – as Forouzan Soleimani's girls scored 34 goals, while conceding only twice, across the four games.

Iran began the event with a 9-0 rout of eventual runner-up Uzbekistan, and then eased to comfortable victories over the Kyrgyz Republic (10-0), Turkmenistan (5-1). Torkaman picked up the Best Player prize, while finishing atop the top scorers' chart with 10 goals.

The event was part of the Iranian girls' preparation for May's AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup, which will resume after a seven-year hiatus in China.

Soleimani's side will begin its bid for a third successive title with a game against the Philippines on May 7, before squaring off against Vietnam and Hong Kong in Group B.

The top three of the 12-team tournament will punch their tickets for the inaugural FIFA Futsal Women's World Cup – starting November 21 in the Philippines.



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