

2025 Beach Soccer World Cup:

Iran given Portuguese test in group stage



Sports Desk

Iran and two-time champion Portugal were drawn in the same group at the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup – starting May 1 in Victoria, Seychelles.

The draw for the flagship international event of the sport took place in the host city on Friday, where Iran and Portugal were joined by world No. 12 Paraguay and Mauritania in Group B.

Iran will get its campaign underway against Mauritania on the opening day of the competition at Victoria's Paradise Arena, before taking on Paraguay two days later. The final round of the group fixtures will see Iran and Portugal go head-to-head on May 5.

Iran and Portugal – champion in 2015 and 2019 – will be the favorites to progress to the quarterfinals as the top two in the group, though Paraguay and talisman Carlos Carballo are a force to be reckoned with.

The Albirroja beat Brazil 5-3 in the group stage of last month's Copa America, before falling 5-4 to the same opponent in a thrilling final. Debutant Mauritania will have it all to do, though the African side recently proved to be capable of springing surprises, finishing runner-up in last October's Africa

Cup of Nations in Egypt. Iran, which finished third in its last two World Cup appearances in 2017 and 2024, booked its place at this year's finals after cruising to a record fourth Asian Cup trophy last week in Pattaya, Thailand.

Ali Naderi's men claimed five successive victories before routing Oman 8-1 in the final showpiece to defend their title – scoring 56 goals, while conceding only six in the process.

Elsewhere in the World Cup draw, the host nation landed in a wide-open Group A alongside fellow first-timer Guatemala, with Belarus, the revelation of the 2024 edition in Dubai, and Japan, runner-up in 2021, the favorites to go through. Group C will see Tahiti, Spain, Senegal, and Chile battle it out for the last-eight spots.

Tahiti and Spain have finished second at the World Cup twice and once respectively, while Senegal reached the semifinals in 2021.

Brazil – the most decorated side in the tournament with six titles – Italy, El Salvador, and Oman complete the lineup in Group D.

The clash between Brazil and Italy will be the game to watch in the group phase as it will be a repeat of the 2008 and 2024 final showdowns, where Selecao came out on top on both occasions.

Iran names karate quadruple for 2025 World Games

Sports Desk

Iran will be represented by four karatekas at the 2025 World Games – starting August 7 in the Chinese city of Chengdu – the national governing body of the sport confirmed.

Four-time Asian bronze medalist Fatemeh Sadeqi will be among the favorites in the women's individual kata event, having walked away with ultimate prize in January's Karate 1-Series A event in Tbilisi, Georgia. Former world bronze medalist Sara Bahmanyar will be the sole Iranian girl in the kumite con-

tests, vying success in the -50kg weight class – also featuring world champion Moldir Zhangbyrbay of Kazakhstan and silver medalist Erminia Perfetto of Italy. Bahmanyar was also a gold medalist in the Georgian capital. In the men's draw, reigning world silver medalist Mahdi Khodabakhshi will be the Irania participant in the kumite -84kg contests, leading the pack alongside Egyptian Youssef Badawy, who beat the Iranian to the 2023 world title in Budapest. Four-time Asian gold medalist Saleh Abazari will part of the

+84kg draw, which will be headlined by the world gold medalist Mehdi Filali of France and Egyptian Taha Tarek Mahmoud, beaten by the Frenchman in the 2023 final. A total of 96 athletes have earned their spots in the karate event of the World Games – scheduled for August 8-9 – with eight competitors in each category.



L-R: Fatemeh Sadeqi, Sara Bahmanyar, Mahdi Khodabakhshi, and Saleh Abazari will be the four Iranian karate participants at the 2025 World Games in Chengdu, China.

● IKF



● MOHSEN DAVOUDI/FFIRI

Iran up to fifth in Futsal World Ranking

Sports Desk

Iran climbed into the top five of the FIFA Futsal Men's World Ranking in the latest list released by the international governing body of the sport on Friday.

Iran climbed one spot to sit behind world champion Brazil, Portugal, Spain and Argentina.

Thailand is the second-best Asian side at 11th, followed by Japan (13). Indonesia climbed seven rungs to sit in 21st spot while Uzbekistan dropped two to 23rd.

In the Women's World Ranking,

Thailand stood fifth to lead the way among the Asian countries, with Brazil, Spain, Portugal and Argentina ahead of the Southeast Asian side.

Iran (9), Japan (10) and Vietnam (11) are the next best ranked Asian nations with Indonesia and Chinese Taipei both moving seven rungs up to 17 and 18 respectively.

In a repeat of the previous two Asian Cup finals, Iran and Japan played to a goalless draw during a four-team tournament in Thailand – also featuring the host country and Uzbekistan.

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

Doncic, James star as Lakers beat Pelicans

BBC. Luka Doncic and LeBron James helped the Los Angeles Lakers to a comfortable victory against the New Orleans Pelicans.

Doncic put on a game-high 35 points with team-mate Austin

Reaves adding 30, while James scored 27 points with eight assists in a 124-108 win.

The Lakers bounced back from defeat against the Golden State Warriors to further boost their hopes of a top-four finish in

the Western Conference. It is the sixth successive win for the Lakers over the Pelicans, including three victories this season.

Elsewhere, Western Conference leaders the Oklahoma

City Thunder, who host the Lakers in back-to-back games on Sunday and Tuesday, saw an 11-game winning streak ended against the Houston Rockets.

Jalen Green and Alperen Sen-

gun combined for 65 points to triumph 125-111 in Houston.

The Boston Celtics set a new record for the number of three-pointers scored in a single season during their 123-103 win over the Phoenix Suns.

Boston, the defending NBA champions, scored 14 at TD Garden to take their overall tally to 1,370, eclipsing the previous record of 1,363 set by the Golden State Warriors in 2022-23.