

AFC U17 Asian Cup: Coach Chamanian wants more from Iran after North Korea draw

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Abbas Chamanian was satisfied with his team's 1-1 stalemate against North Korea in their opening game at the AFC U17 Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia but expects his players to improve for their remaining Group D fixtures.

Mahdi Sahneh found the net for Iran midway through the first half to cancel out Choe Chung-hyok's eighth-minute opener.

North Korea, which beat Iran 4-1 in the qualifiers, was unlucky not to restore the lead before the break after Iranian goalkeeper and defenders put their bodies on the line to produce heroic blocks in a frenetic scramble at the end of the first half.

Iran came close to a second goal on the hour mark when Ri Kang-song's header back to his keeper was intercepted by Ehsan Kheradpisheh but Jong Hyon-ju pulled off a great save to deny the striker.

Another quick counter in the 77th minute saw Mohammadreza Yousefi send a superb curled pass beyond the North Korean backline but Kherad-

pisheh could not get a touch as the teams shared the spoils in Jeddah.

With Tajikistan leading the group table thanks to a 2-1 victory over Oman earlier in the day, Iran and North Korea will be desperate to walk away with maximum points in their second outing on Tuesday to remain on course for a last-eight spot and qualification for November's U-17 World Cup in Qatar.

"North Korea is a very strong team and it was a difficult match, but our players performed well considering this was our opening game," said Chamanian.

The vastly experienced tactician said his players would still have to put in more effort to further improve, especially in the final third, if they want to overcome two-time champion Oman next. "Our defense is solid but we need to sharpen our attacks. We have intelligent players who can help us get good results and win our next two matches if we work on this component."

Iran will take on 2018 runner-up Tajikistan on Friday. The top two of the group will progress to the quarterfinals.



Iran's Mahan Alipour (1) is challenged by North Korean Kim Tae-guk during a Group D game at the AFC U17 Asian Cup in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on April 5, 2025. AFC



Tractor's Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh (3rd R) scores his second goal during a 2-1 win against Esteghlal at the Persian Gulf Pro League in Tabriz, Iran, on April 4, 2025. MASOUD SEPEHRINIA/IMNA

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A defining round of fixtures at the Persian Gulf Pro League saw Tractor open a four-point lead on top of the table with a game in hand to edge ever closer to a maiden Iranian top-flight crown. Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh's first-half double steered Tractor

to a 2-1 victory over Esteghlal at home on Friday.

A Ramin Rezaeian's corner-kick was deflected off Tractor skipper Shoja Khalilzadeh's knee in the eighth minute to silence the capacity crowd at the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium, before Hosseinzadeh found the net twice inside 14 minutes against his former club to

Persian Gulf Pro League:

Tractor extends lead to close in on maiden title

take his tally to 16 goals across all competitions for the season.

Tractor's massive win was followed by frustrating draws for nearest rivals Sepahan and Persepolis on Saturday.

A late drama in Arak saw Sepahan take a 92nd-minute lead against Iralco through Mohammad Karimi's spot-kick after the visitors were awarded a controversial penalty following a lengthy VAR review.

Just when Sepahan - down to 10 men after French midfielder Steven Nzonzi was sent off in the 89th minute - thought it had done enough to walk away with maximum points, Mohammad-Amin Kazemian salvaged a draw for the home side from the spot in the 12th minute of stoppage time - a ninth goal of the season for the Iralco striker.

Meanwhile, Persepolis's bid for an eighth league title in nine seasons was dealt a massive blow after a goalless stalemate at home against Esteghlal Khuzestan.

Hit by a flu virus in the buildup to the game, Ismail Kartal's men were insipid and out of sorts throughout the game, with the courageous visitors registering more attempts and shots on target than the defending champions at the Azadi Stadium, which welcomed only female supporters due to ban for the Tehran Reds.

Tractor is on top of table with 54 points, with Sepahan (50) and Persepolis (48) lagging behind and likely to battle it out for a runner-up finish and an Asian Champions League Elite spot in the remaining five rounds of fixtures. Elsewhere, Iranian international center-back Ali Nemati gave

Foolad Khuzestan a 53rd-minute lead against Golgozar Sirjan at home, only to see his goal canceled out by Mahdi Tikdari 11 minutes later as it finished 1-1 between the fourth and fifth teams of the table on Friday.

Ali Yahyazadeh's early strike helped Chadormalou end a four-game losing streak with a 1-0 win at Zob Ahan.

In Tehran, Dariush Shojaeian and Karim Eslami scored in each half as Havadar defeated 10-man Malavan 2-0 to keep slim survival hopes alive.

Having a game in hand, Havadar remains at the bottom of table with 18 points but managed to close the gap on Mes Rafsanjan and Nassaji Mazandaran to six and three points, respectively, after the fellow-relegation candidates played to a goalless result in Rafsanjan.

Verstappen wins Japanese GP for fourth straight year

REUTERS - World champion Max Verstappen banished his early season misery with a fourth successive pole-to-flag victory at the Japanese Grand Prix on Sunday, holding off the previously dominant McLarens with some ease for his first win of the year.

Verstappen crossed the line in his Red Bull for his 64th grand prix victory to a huge ovation from the 115,000 crowd some 1.4 seconds ahead of McLaren's championship leader Lando Norris

in second place.

"I am incredibly happy. This weekend started off quite tough but we didn't give up, kept improving the car. Today it was on its best form," said Verstappen, the first driver to win four times in a row at Suzuka.

Norris's lead over Verstappen in the drivers' standings was slashed to one point after an all but incident-free race effectively decided in Saturday's qualifying.

"Max drove a good race today, no mistakes," said

Norris, who won the season-opening race in Melbourne.

"It was a flat-out race from start to finish, so tough, but just not enough today, nothing special that we had that we could get Max on."

Oscar Piastri in the second McLaren, who won last time out in China, rounded out the podium in third place on his 24th birthday as the top six finished as they had started on the grid.

All 20 cars crossed the line after 53 laps with no rain,

none of the trackside grass fires that disrupted practice, and not a single yellow flag.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was fourth, the Mercedes of George Russell and Andrea Kimi Antonelli finished fifth and sixth with Lewis Hamilton seventh in the other Ferrari after moving up one place in the race.

Racing Bulls rookie Isack Hadjar was eighth, Alex Albon of Williams ninth, while teenager Ollie Bearman took the last point in 10th for Haas.



Red Bull's Max Verstappen celebrates winning the Japanese Grand Prix in Suzuka, Japan, on April 6, 2025. ISSEI KATO/REUTERS