

World Snooker Championship:

Vafaei lets 'animal come out' to roar past Hawkins and progress

Sports Desk

Iran's Hossein Vafaei progressed to the last-16 round at the World Snooker Championship thanks to a hard-fought 10-9 victory over Englishman Barry Hawkins in Sheffield's Crucible Theatre. The Iranian will face three-time world champion Mark Williams in the next round on Friday after the Welshman orchestrated a 10-8 victory over Wu Yize of China. Vafaei had never been ahead in the entire first-round contest at the Crucible Theatre until the final frame. The former world amateur champion trailed throughout his match against Hawkins but grew stronger as the contest went on and enjoyed runs of 104, 107 and 110 as he repeatedly drew level. The Iranian world No. 24 had to come from behind on six occasions, including four

times by a couple of frames to stun the 11th seed.

Already known as a feisty character on and off the baize, Vafaei shocked the Crucible crowd with a large outburst during the deciding frame. He potted a red ball to reach a break of 50, and with the frame yet to be secured, the 30-year-old produced an unexpected "come on" roar. The former Shoot Out champion still held his nerve together to make a 73 break and qualify for the last 16 of the competition for only the second time in his career. "In the moment during the deciding frame, my mind went negative," Vafaei, who compiled four century breaks, told the World Snooker Tour. "I had to change something around. I needed to give something a go and let the animal come out again. It was a trick to my mind. "I was under lots of pressure.



Iran's Hossein Vafaei celebrates his victory over Englishman Barry Hawkins at the World Snooker Championships in Sheffield, Britain, on April 20, 2025.

● WORLD SNOOKER

All the way, I was down. What can I do? I'm always under pressure. I couldn't handle it at the end.

"I had to show some emotion or I'm not human. I had to show to the fans that we feel the pressure. People want to see this.

"Beating the world number 11 in the Crucible with four centuries is the best performance I have had. The numbers don't lie.

"I could easily have given up and not continued. I kept believing in myself that the game was there."

Vafaei is a character who divides opinion, but he surely adds a different element to the action in Sheffield.



Central Asian Youth Table Tennis Championships:

Boys crowned as Iran completes title double



Sports Desk

The Iranian boys' under-19 team defeated Kyrgyzstan 3-0 to walk away with the winner's trophy at the Central Asian Youth Table Tennis Championships in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The triumph meant Iran made a clean sweep of double team titles in



Iran's under-19 team and coaching staff pose with their medals and the winner's trophy at the Central Asian Youth Table Tennis Championships in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on April 20, 2025.

● IRTTF

Almaty, after the country's female team also beat Kyrgyzstan in emphatic fashion to lift the silverware. Benyamin Faraji put the Iranian quadruple in front with a 3-0 (11-3, 11-6, 13-11) win against Islam Ibragimov, before Amir-Abbas Hodaei and Mohammad Habibi also came out victorious against Abai Kasymov and Nuradil Tologonov, respectively, in straight games to secure a second victory in three outings for Iran at the four-team event. The Iranian boys began their campaign with a 3-2 loss to Uzbekistan but went out to beat the host with the same scoreline.

Kazakhstan defeated Uzbekistan 3-2 on the final day as three teams finished on five points, though Iran stood on top of the table to qualify for June's Asian Youth Table Tennis Championships in Tashkent. Earlier on Sunday, Setayesh Iloukhani, Vania Yavari, and Efat Ranjbar all came out on top in straight games against their Kyrgyz opponents to steer Iran to a third victory in as many matches in the girls contests. Iranian girls came from behind twice to beat the host 3-2 in their opener and then eased to a 3-0 win against Uzbekistan.

Mahdavi agrees one-year extension to Shahdab contract

Sports Desk

Mahdi Mahdavi will stay on as Shahdab Yazd head coach for next season, the Iranian top-flight volleyball club announced on Sunday. Former Iranian international setter Mahdavi took over from Rahman Mohammadi-Rad, to whom he worked as a number two, on Shahdab bench in February following a disappointing run of results in the Iranian Premier League regular season. The 41-year-old went on to turn Shahdab's fortune around, steering his side to the domestic league playoffs. Having stood third in the regular season table, Shahdab overcame Paykan and Chadormalou in the knockout phase to reach the Finals but eventually settled for a runner-up finish after a 2-1 defeat against familiar foe Foolad Sirjan in a thrilling best-of-three series earlier in April. Mahdavi's men came from be-

hind to win the first game 3-1 (24-26, 26-24, 25-21, 25-17) but Foolad bounced back to come out victorious 3-2 and 3-1 in the next two outings and defend its title. This was Shahdab's third defeat against Foolad in a major final over the past 12 months, following setbacks in the league last year and the AVC Asian Club Championship showdown in September.



● RASOUL SHIRDEL/volleyball.ir

Curry leads Warriors to play-off win at Rockets

BBC – Stephen Curry scored a game-high 31 points as the Golden State Warriors began their NBA play-off campaign with a 95-85 win at the Houston Rockets.

The seventh-seeded Warriors made it successive wins in Houston, with Curry also adding six rebounds and three assists.

Jimmy Butler chipped in with a further 25 points, seven rebounds and six assists to hand Golden State a 1-0 series lead – with Game 2 scheduled for Thursday.

"Steph was incredible. He was incredible," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "With that type of pressure on him from [Amen] Thompson and others, he just made some amazing plays and, obviously, carried us offensively along with Jimmy."

The Rockets, seeded second in the play-offs, endured a disappointing end to the regular season with three successive defeats and have lost back-to-back games at home.

Ime Udoka's side are featuring in the play-offs for the first time since 2019-20, when they lost against the Los Angeles Lakers in the semi-finals.



● AP

"I wouldn't say the moment, I would say the physicality at times, going after guys, and just play-off basketball," Udoka said when asked if a lack of experience cost his side. "It's not really about the moment. Going into the lane, trying to shoot over too many and not finding your outlets is a

big thing and a big key for us all year." Elsewhere, the Cleveland Cavaliers sealed a 121-100 win against the Miami Heat in the Eastern Conference play-offs. Donovan Mitchell scored 30 points with Ty Jerome adding 28 points and Darius Garland scoring 27.