

AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup:

Japan defeat sums up below-par campaign for Iran

Sports Desk

Two-time defending champion Iran suffered a first defeat in the history of the AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup on Thursday, falling to a last-four 3-2 loss to Japan in Hohhot, China.

The result meant there will be a first-time champion in today's final between Japan and Thailand, which came from behind to beat China 3-2 in the other semifinal.

Meanwhile, there will be much more than a consolation third place on the line when Iran and the host square off earlier today, as the winner will secure the third and final spot at the inaugural Women's World Cup in the Philippines in November.

Runner-up to the Iran in back-to-back editions, Japan started right on the front foot at the Hohhot Sports Centre and took a two-goal lead through Risa Ikada and Kyoka Takahashi inside four minutes.

A wasteful Iran managed to pull one back four minutes after the break, with Fereshteh Khosravi teeing up Maral Torkaman, who finished with a powerful strike. Yukari Miyahara restored the two-goal cushion for the Japanese on the counter in the 30th minute, before Torkaman reduced the deficit to one again two minutes later with her fourth goal of the competition. Iranian girls poured forward after that but despite utilizing the



power play, the equalizer eluded them as Japan held on to progress to a third straight final. "I'm proud of my players' performance and I'm happy to win the match and qualify for the World

Cup. Japan's strength is unity and all the players worked hard for this win. It was a really tough game. Reaching the World Cup is an honor," Japanese head coach said after the game.

"Iran is our biggest opponent in Asia. One of our goals was beating them but most importantly, we focused on ourselves and had self-belief after the hard work we put in. Discipline and

unity were key to our success." Iran coach Forouzan Soleimani admitted that her side couldn't recover after conceding the first goal. "I knew once we conceded that



Iranian players are dejected after a 3-2 loss to Japan at the Women's Futsal Asian Cup in Hohhot, China, on May 15, 2025.

● AFC

it was going to be very tough for us. Our goal was to be champions for the third time but we couldn't achieve it," said the Iranian.

"We played much better in the second half and for sure, we were the better team. However, there is still the World Cup spot and we will be motivated to win against China," added the Iranian.

The writing was always on the wall for Soleimani's team after a poor preparation for the tournament was followed by a shaky start in China.

Iran edged out the Philippines 1-0 in their opener, and then beat Hong Kong 3-1 to secure a knockout spot, before its 12-game winning run in the Asian Cup came to an end against Vietnam in controversial, embarrassing fashion.

Soleimani's girls deliberately played for a goalless draw in their final group game, tanking the match to avoid Japan until the final. The cynical approach, however, backfired as Japan's shock defeat to Thailand later on the final day of the group fixtures forced the two powerhouses into the same half of the knockout bracket.

Asian Weightlifting Championships:

Sharifi excels in superheavyweight as Iran collects eight medals

Sports Desk

Ayat Sharifi brought the curtain down on a decent run for the Iranian three-man squad at the Asian Weightlifting Championships by bagging three medals – including double golds – in the +109kg contests in Jiangshan, China, on Thursday. The final-day results took Iran's medal haul to five golds, double silvers, and one bronze as Behdad Salimi's trio finished runner-up in the men's team standings. China won the men's team

title, thanks to a remarkable nine gold and silver medals apiece, plus five bronzes. Sharifi had to settle for the snatch silver medal after registering a 195kg lift with his third attempt, with South Korean Hwang Wooman claiming the gold with 196kg, while Uzbekistan's Amir Abdullaev finished on 182kg for the bronze. The Iranian, however, went on to raise 227kg above his head to beat Hwang to the clean & jerk gold by two kilograms, before a total tally of 422kg secured a second gold of the afternoon for Sharifi.

Hwang also took the total silver, with his fellow-South Korean grabbing the C&J (220kg) and total (396kg) bronze medals. Iranian duo Alireza Moeini and Ali A'alipour – winner of three world medals between them last year – had claimed five of the nine medals up for grabs in the 96kg class earlier in the competition. It was an Iranian one-two in the snatch event with Moeini achieving the gold with 180kg – six kilograms clear of A'alipour – while the host's Qian Feixiang finished third with 173kg. An Asian 89kg champion last

year, A'alipour raised the bar in the clean & jerk category by making a 216kg effort for the gold, followed by South Korea's Won Jong-beom (215kg) and Feixiang (207kg). A'alipour took his tally to double golds, thanks to 390kg in total, while Won (385kg) and Moeini (383kg) stood next to him on the podium.



Iran's Ayat Sharifi is seen in action in the men's +109kg contests at the Asian Weightlifting Championships in Jiangshan, China, on May 15, 2025.

● XINHUA



Foolad Sirjan's Earvin Ngapeth (9) hits a spike during a 3-1 victory over Shanghai Bright at the AVC Men's Champions League in Kyoto, Japan, on May 16, 2025.

● FIVB

AVC Men's Champions League:

Foolad rallies past Shanghai Bright to progress to last four

Sports Desk

Iranian champion Foolad Sirjan came from behind to beat Shanghai Bright of China 3-1 (24-26, 25-21, 28-26, 25-23) and advance to the semifinals at the rebranded AVC Men's Volleyball Champions League in Kyoto, Japan.

Iran international outside-hitter Amirhossein Efsandiar contributed with a game-high

25 points for Behrouz Ataei's side, with opposite-spiker Ali Hajipour chipping in 20. Cuban middle-blocker Javier Concepcion and Alireza Abdollahmadi also finished in double figures for Foolad, registering 10 points apiece, while French superstar Earvin Ngapeth had a quiet day with four points. Chinese Pengzhi Wu was the top scorer for Shanghai Bright with 20 points, followed by Cong Tian

(15) and Bohan Wang (12). A bronze medalist in last December's Club World Championship in Brazil, Foolad was caught off-guard in the first set, but Hajipour and Efsandiar scored a combined 13 points in the second set to tie the game at 1-1. The pivotal point of the contest came in the closing stages of the third set, when Ataei's men overcame a 24-20 deficit

to win 28-26, before sealing the hard-fought victory in the fourth set.

Chasing a third Asian title four years, Foolad got off to a shaky start in the competition, laboring to a 3-2 win against Thailand's Nakhon Ratchasima QminC in their Pool C opener, and then went on to beat Taichung Bank of the Chinese Taipei to progress to the quarterfinals as the group winner.