

AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup:

Consolation as Iran beat host to book World Cup ticket

AFC — Iran overcame China in the third-place playoff of the AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup on Saturday to seal their place at the FIFA Futsal Women's World Cup in the Philippines.

The two-time champions ended their campaign on a high in front of a raucous partisan crowd at the Hohhot Sports Centre, as the 3-1 victory ensured that they will join Thailand— and Japan at the inaugural World Cup come November. Given the high stakes, it was perhaps no surprise that both teams started tentatively as they probed for openings without overcommitting.

But Iran then took the initiative as Fereshteh Khosravi, Maral Torkaman and Fereshteh Karimi went close, before Liu Danping saved efforts from Elham Anafteh and Karimi.

There was a scare when Fatemeh Rahmati nearly put the ball in her own net, with only the outstretched left leg of Farzaneh Tavasoli preventing disaster. The Iran goalkeeper then fielded Yu Ting's rasping strike as her side broke the deadlock shortly after on 11 minutes.

Liu did superbly to repel attempts from Rahmati and then Nasimeh Gholami on the rebound, but was helpless to prevent the latter from



setting up Torkaman to score her fifth goal in six games from unmissable range.

Tavasoli, the veteran, then demonstrated that she can still cut it at

this level with a brilliant stop off Zhang Rui's volley. Seconds later, the 38-year-old made a sprawling save from Ke Yaoxiang's grounder, before getting up immediately to

push the rebound away from the lurking Zhang. Silenced at the break, the home fans were on their feet within a minute of the restart.

Receiving the ball on the right, Su Jiahong pulled off a stunning piece of skill by leaving the onrushing Tavasoli for dead with a perfect Marseille turn before calmly



Iranian girls celebrate a goal during a 3-1 victory over China at the AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup in Hohhot, China, on May 17, 2025.

● AFC

picking out Cao Jiayi to tap in the equaliser.

The upper hand was with China PR now and Nastaran Moghimi made a vital intervention to prevent Ke from getting to a loose ball, while Tavasoli pulled off another top reflex save from the ensuing corner to deny Zhang.

Despite being under the cosh, it was Iran who scored next as they caught the reds shirts out at a corner. Gholami rolled the set-piece to Moghimi, who had ghosted into the area, to sidefoot a shot that came off the left post and back into goal off the unfortunate Liu on 30 minutes.

Lady Luck deserted China PR at the other end three minutes later as Zou Yinglan's attempt beat Tavasoli but not the right post.

The home side brought out the power play and threw everything in a bid to take the game to extra time, but to no avail and it was Torkaman who finished them off in the dying seconds with a long-range strike into an unguarded net.

AVC Men's Champions League:

Foolad undone by Osaka Bluteon in semis

Sports Desk

Foolad Sirjan's bid for a third Asian crown in four years finished in vain as the Iranian champion suffered a 3-1 (25-19, 25-18, 25-18, 25-19) last-four defeat against Osaka Bluteon at the revamped AVC Men's Champions League in Kyoto, Japan, on Saturday. Cuban outside-hitter Miguel Angel Lopez stole the show for the home-favorites with a game-high 24 points, while Japanese sensation Yuji Nishida chipped in 18, including three aces. French superstar Earvin Ngapeth delivered his best performance yet for Foolad in Japan with 20 points, followed by middle-blocker Javier Octavio Concepcion and Iranian outside-hitter Amirhossein Esfandiar,

who finished on 11 points apiece. Awaiting the Japanese side in today's final showpiece is Qatari side Al Rayyan. Dutch opposite-spiker Nimir Abdel-Aziz contributed with a remarkable 40 points, including five serve points, to help Al Rayyan come from behind twice to beat Suntory Sunbirds Osaka 3-2 (22-25, 25-22, 23-25, 25-23, 17-15) in the other semifinal on Saturday. Slovenian Tine Urnaut played his part in the thrilling victory with 12 points. Russian opposite Dmitriy Muserskiy was Suntory's top scorer with 30 points, with Japanese duo Ran Takahashi and Taishi Onodera adding 20 and 13 points, respectively. A bronze medalist in last December's Club World Championship in Bra-

zil, Foolad will be looking to finish its campaign with some consolation when taking on Suntory in the third-place contest earlier. 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. Behrouz Ataei's side rallied past Shanghai Bright of China 3-1 (24-26, 25-21, 28-26, 25-23) in the quarterfinals.

Shoma Tomita (5) of Osaka Bluteon hits a spike against Foolad Sirjan's Ali Ramezani at the AVC Men's Champions League in Kyoto, Japan, on May 17, 2025.

● FIVB



Qassem Haddadifar (R) poses for a photo after being unveiled as the new Zob Ahan head coach in Isfahan, Iran, on May 17, 2025.

● ZOBAHANCLUB.COM

Haddadifar named new Zob Ahan coach

Sports Desk

Qassem Haddadifar was appointed as the new head coach of Zob Ahan, the Persian Gulf Pro League club announced on Saturday. The club legend takes over from Mohammad Rabiei, who parted ways with the club following a 3-0 away victory over Nassaji Mazandaran in the final round of the Iranian league fixtures on Thursday. Rabiei spent a decent two-year spell on Zob Ahan bench, leading the club to a fifth-place finish in the league in his first season in charge, before the Isfahan-based outfit stood sixth in the newly-finished campaign, with the club tallying 42 points

in 30 games on both occasions. Haddadifar, 41, spent 18 years of his career with Zob Ahan over different spells, before hanging up his boots in July 2022.

Also a former midfielder for Tractor and San'at Naft Abadan, Haddadifar bagged 22 goals and 30 assists in 450 appearances across all competitions for Zob Ahan, leading the club to four Hazfi Cup titles and three runner-up finishes in the domestic league.

He was also part of the Zob Ahan team that reached the final showpiece of the AFC Champions League in 2010, before suffering a 3-1 defeat against Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma of South Korea.

Son eyeing history by leading Spurs to Europa League glory

REUTERS — Tottenham Hotspur skipper Son Heung-min said Wednesday's Europa League final against Manchester United will be the biggest day of his life as the north London club prepare to cap a difficult season with a trophy. Spurs slumped to a 2-0 defeat at Aston Villa on Friday, their 21st loss of the season, leaving them 17th in the Premier League on 38 points, just above the three sides already relegated. Far from contending for a European berth through the league, Spurs' only path to next season's Champions League is by winning the second-tier European competition against fellow Premier League strugglers

United, who are 16th in the standings.

"It's a very disappointing result and a very poor season," the South Korean, who has recently returned to fitness after a brief spell on the sidelines, told the BBC after Spurs' defeat at Villa. "But at the end of the day, we can win a trophy, that's what we're all looking for."

A win against United in the Spanish city of Bilbao would end Spurs' 17-year trophy drought and hand the 32-year-old Son his first piece of silverware after a decade at the club. "Wednesday will be the biggest day of my life. It will be great. We will be excited, and I hope we can make history," Son said.