

World Cup Asian qualifiers:

Iran coach Qalenoee blames 'frustrating' refereeing in Qatar defeat

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee said his team was left "frustrated and annoyed" by several decisions made by Saudi referee Mohammed Al Hoish in a 1-0 away defeat against Qatar at the 2026 World Cup Asian qualifiers on Thursday.

Qatari defender Pedro Correia found the net in the 41st minute, five minutes after the visitors had gone down to 10 men due a second booking inside three minutes for left-back Milad Mohammadi.

Despite a first defeat in their qualification campaign, Qalenoee's men, who had already secured a spot in next year's finals in North America, remained top of Group A with 20 points, while the Qataris confirmed their progress to the fourth round of the qualifiers.

Questioning the Asian Football Confederation's decision not to pick a referee from Fareast Asia for the game, Qalenoee said: "We had a decent start to the game but there were some refereeing decisions, especially the second yellow card for our player, which caused us to lose confidence at the end of the first half, though we improved in the second half."

The Iranian coach believed the Saudi official had double standards in his approach to the game.

"He officiated in a way that annoyed and frustrated our team. He kept calling fouls against us and issuing cards, while ignoring similar challenges from Qatari players, letting them



Iranian winger Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi is tackled by a Qatari player during a World Cup Asian qualification game in Doha, Qatar, on June 5, 2024.

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get away with it without any punishment," said the Iranian, whose team had been last beaten in February 2024 – a 3-2 loss to the same opponent in the AFC Asian Cup semifinals. With some of the key players, namely prolific striker Sardar Azmoun and skipper Alireza Jahanbakhsh, missing the game with injury, Qalenoee fielded a new-look starting XI on Thursday, including Amirhossein

Hosseinzadeh and Ali Alipour – the top two leading marksmen in the newly-finished Iranian top-flight season – as well as Sepahan winger Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi, who made his senior international debut, and Tractor center-back Aref Aqassi.

"The Iranian league ended early, and some players were out of action for 20 days. Seven of our main players were injured but the young

players still impressed today and I am very optimistic about the future," added Qalenoee.

Iran will finish the qualifiers against bottom-side North Korea at Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Tuesday.

Double debutants

Uzbekistan and Jordan celebrated a maiden World Cup qualification, while regular qualifier South Korea also booked a place in the finals

with a 2-0 win over Iraq in Basra.

Uzbekistan claimed the spot at the expanded 48-team showcase following a goalless stalemate against the United Arab Emirates in Abu Dhabi, which guaranteed Timur Kapadze's side a top two finish in Group A of the preliminaries alongside Iran. Foolad Khuzestan goalkeeper Utkir Yusupov made a string of second-half saves to earn his nation a first World

Cup qualification since Uzbekistan gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Elsewhere, Kim Jin-gyu and Oh Hyeon-gyu were on target in the second half for the South Koreans against 10-man Iraq and that win not only secured qualification for Hong Myung-bo's side from Group B but confirmed Jordan would also progress.

The Asian Cup finalists had

beaten Oman 3-0 earlier in the evening through a hat-trick from Ali Olwan, but the Jordanians had to wait for the outcome of Iraq's game before being able to celebrate their World Cup berth. Australia also stands on the cusp of a place at the finals after Aziz Behich scored the only goal in a 1-0 win over Japan in Perth in Group C. Victory keeps Australia three points clear of Saudi Arabia, which won 2-0 against Bahrain in Riffa, with one game to play.

Goals from Musab Al-Juwayr and Abdulrahman Al-Obud earned Saudi Arabia a win that put Australia's celebrations on hold until the two nations meet in Jeddah on Tuesday. The Socceroos' vastly superior goal difference means they can lose that meeting with the Saudis by up to four goals and still advance to a sixth consecutive World Cup finals as second-placed finishers behind the Japanese. Indonesia continued its impressive campaign with a 1-0 win over China to guarantee progress to the fourth round, while ending the qualification hopes of Branko Ivankovic's side.

Goals from Tamer Seyam and Wessam Abou Ali kept Palestine's chances of going through to the next round intact, with a 2-0 win over hosts Kuwait moving Ihab Abujazar's side to within one point of Oman in fourth place in Group B.

Iranian rowers win double golds in Grand Moscow Regatta Cup

Sports Desk

Iranian rowers walked away with a couple of gold medals at the 64th Grand Moscow Regatta Cup on Thursday.

Mahna Hajhosseini and Saqi Maleki teamed up to win the gold medal in the women's double sculls event on the first day of action on the Moscow Rowing Canal, thanks to a fastest time of 7:51.94 minutes in the final. Meanwhile, Amirreza Abdali and Amirhossein Mahmoudpour claimed the men's gold medal in the same category, crossing the finish line in 7:02.09 minutes.



Iran's Azarpira to make long-awaited return in Sassari

Sports Desk

Iranian freestyle wrestler Amirali Azarpira will make his long-awaited return to action at the Memorial Matteo Pellicone event – starting today in the Italian city of Sassari.

A two-time world under-23 gold medalist, Azarpira had been sidelined with a torn ligament injury following an impressive 97kg bronze-winning campaign in at the Paris Olympics last summer, only recovering from a knee surgery to resume training in mid-May.

Azarpira was joined by Ehsan Amini – a member of the Iranian freestyle coaching staff – in the visit to the Mediterranean Island of Sardinia.

The 23-year-old wrestler is eager to secure a spot in the Iranian 10-man squad for September's World Championships in Zagreb.

Standing between Azarpira and a Zagreb ticket is fellow-Iranian Ahmad Bazri, who

won the International Takhti Cup gold in Isfahan May, before walking away with the ultimate prize at the Ulaanbaatar Open – the third UWW Ranking Series event of the international season – last week, thanks to an emphatic 8-0 victory over the host's Gankhuyag Ganbaatar in the final showpiece.

The 97kg slot is one of the three weight classes – along

with the 70kg and 79kg categories – yet to be decided in the Iranian freestyle team for the world event.

Ali Mo'meni (57kg), Ahmad Mohammadnejad-Javan (61kg), Rahman Amouzad (65kg), Younes Emami (74kg), Kamran Qassempour (86kg), Amirhossein Firouzpour (92kg), and Amirhossein Zare' (125kg) have punched their Zagreb tickets.



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