

Iran to go all out for World Cup success, women's futsal skipper Tavassoli vows



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INTERVIEW

Iran concluded its campaign at the recently-finished AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup in China by clinching third place. The defending champions fell short of retaining their title and were unable to replicate the dominant performances displayed by the Iranian girls in the previous two events.

However, securing the Asian bronze medal was enough for Team Melli to secure a spot at the 2025 FIFA Women's Futsal World Cup, where they will come up against the world's best teams at the inaugural flagship international event in the Philippines.

Iranian girls entered the tournament in China (held from May 6 to 17) with hopes of securing a historic third consecutive title. However, their quest for a three-peat fell short this time. Iran had dominated the previous two editions of the tournament in 2015 and 2018, winning back-to-back titles.

In China, the landscape had changed entirely from six years prior. Drawn into a group with Vietnam, the Philippines, and Hong Kong, Iran was regarded as the strong favorites to advance and replicate their past glories. However, fate had other plans.

The defending champions opened their campaign with group stage victories over Hong Kong and the Philippines, followed by a draw against Vietnam – enough to secure their progression. They then overcame Chinese Taipei in a hard-fought quarterfinal to reach the semifinals. But their title defense came to an abrupt halt when they faced an immovable obstacle: Japan. The Iranians couldn't break through the Japanese defense, suffering a semifinal defeat that dashed their hopes of a third continental crown.

Iran still managed to finish on a high note, defeating China 3-1 in the third-place playoff. The Iranian girls will now aim to prove their technical prowess on the sport's biggest stage as they seek to make their mark in international futsal.

Following the national team's return to Iran, we sat down with veteran goalkeeper and team captain Farzaneh Tavassoli to discuss the tournament's competitive level, Iran's failure to defend the past titles, and the team's hopes for the upcoming World Cup in.

Though still visibly pained by the missed opportunity to retain their continental crown – an emotion that colors every word she speaks – Tavassoli's voice brightens when discussing Iran's historic World Cup qualification. The captain admits she and her teammates harbor ambitious dreams, even daring to imagine lifting the trophy at the global event.

The following is what the Iranian skipper had to say in an interview with Iran Daily.



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IRAN DAILY: What are your thoughts on the recent Asian Cup? Many expected Iran to defend its title. What went wrong?

TAVASSOLI: One standout observation from this tournament was the remarkable progress made by all Asian teams. While Japan and Thailand remained our primary competitors from previous editions, this time we saw teams like Vietnam, China, Chinese Taipei, and the Philippines deliver truly impressive performances.

It's clear that Asian futsal is no longer dominated by just two or three nations like Iran, Japan, or Thailand. The Eastern Asian teams in particular have made significant strides in their development. This rising standard across the board certainly made our task as two-time defending champions much more challenging.

Another critical factor was our lack of adequate preparation through friendlies. Our team simply didn't play enough high-caliber warm-up matches before this tournament – we hadn't been truly tested.

Over these past four years, our only competitive fixtures were in CAFA competitions, which frankly didn't match our national team's level. We comfortably won every time without being pushed to our limits.

Had we scheduled more challenging friendlies and allocated proper preparation time, I'm convinced we would've performed better in this championship. With proper tests before the tournament, that third consecutive title could have been ours.

Would you say Iranian women's futsal has stagnated while other Asian nations have progressed?

You're absolutely right. Our team has undergone changes with promising young players joining the squad, but the newcomers haven't been tested against top-tier opponents in friendlies.

Before our 2015 and 2018 Asian

title-winning campaigns, we played preparatory matches against powerhouses like Italy, and Russia. That exposure was key to standing on the top podium twice.

If we're serious about making an impact at the upcoming World Cup, we must schedule friendlies against elite European teams now.

I spoke with some other national team players, who were also a bit disappointed by the failure to reclaim the Asian title. Do you think it was reasonable to expect a title defense from a team that, by your own admission, didn't have proper preparations?

Every team dreams of standing on the championship podium. From the moment our training camp began and the Asian Cup was scheduled on the AFC calendar, we all wanted to defend our title and stand atop Asia once again. But the truth is, I believe the lack of friendly matches hampered our preparation. Just look at Japan, the eventual champions – they played two friendlies against Spain before the tournament. They competed in multiple competitions to prepare. In my opinion, our team truly had championship potential. If you carefully rewatch our match against Japan, yes, we conceded two early goals, but once we found our rhythm and cohesion, we fought hard. Honestly, with a little more luck, we could have won that game. That said, I'll emphasize again: Had we played more friendlies, I'm confident we would've easily stood on that championship podium.

One thing that stood out in our match against Vietnam was that our players seemed reluctant to score, apparently to avoid facing Japan in the next round. In the end, the match finished in a draw. What's your take on this?

Let me be honest – I'd rather not answer that question because it's not my responsibility to address

such matters. You'd be better off asking the national team's technical staff about this; they're the ones who should answer these questions. As national team players, we served the team like soldiers, and our duty was to execute the technical staff's instructions to the letter.

So are you saying you gave 100% of your energy to win the match?
Absolutely. We did our best to execute everything that was asked of us on the pitch.

In every single match, we played with the clear intention of implementing all the technical staff's strategies.



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