

FIBA Women's Asia Cup Division B:

Iranian girls beat Thailand to book final spot

Sports Desk

Iran progressed to the final showpiece of the FIBA Women's Asia Cup Division B thanks to a comfortable 78-52 victory over Thailand in Shenzhen, China, on Saturday. This was a second win against Thailand in the competition for the Iranian girls, following last Wednesday's 80-62 triumph at the Shenzhen Bay Sports Center.

Standing between Iran and promotion to Division A in today's final showdown is the Chinese Taipei, which came out victorious over Mongolia (92-82) in the other semifinal on Saturday.

Iran displayed strong defensive resolve and timely scoring on Saturday. While Thailand put up a resilient fight, propelled by its sharp-shooting, Iran's cohesive team play, led by players Negin Rasoulipour and Roxanna Barahman, proved too much to overcome.

Barahman had 21 points – including nine from behind the arc – to lead Iran, with Rasoulipour adding 13.

Iranian point guard Nahideh Asadi also finished in double figures, chipping in 11 points during 13:45 minutes on the court.

Thailand was paced by Rattiyakorn Udomsuk's 24 points, while Warinthon Summat dropped 12.

Chasing a historic top division promotion, Iranian girls, who were beaten by Indonesia in the 2023 Div. B final, began their campaign in Shenzhen with an 82-32 hammering of the Cook Islands, before Rasoulipour's 20-point performance, coupled with Mahla Abedi's efficiency of 19, led Greek coach Eleni Kapogianni's side to an 88-59 triumph over Mongolia.

Wednesday's win against Thailand secured a top-spot finish for Iran in Group B of the eight-team tournament.

Meanwhile, The Chinese Taipei – relegated from Div. A in 2023 – revealed in dominant run in Group A, routing Tahiti (122-38), India (83-39), and Kazakhstan (91-47) to advance to the semifinals.



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UWW Ranking Series:

Iran settles for triple freestyle bronzes



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Sports Desk

The final UWW Ranking Series event of the season – the Polyák Imre & Varga János Memorial – was one to forget for Iranian wrestling after the country's freestyle team finished with three bronze medals in Budapest, Hungary.

Ali Savadkouhi brought the curtain down on a mediocre campaign for the four-man squad on Friday, finishing joint-third in the 86kg contests.

The former Asian champion recovered from a last-four fall defeat against ex-Olympic silver medalist Mahamedkhabib Kadzimahamedau of Belarus to beat Kazakhstan's Nurzhan Isagaliyev 3-0.

Abbas Ebrahimzad, Sina Khalili, and Fariborz Babaei were dealt a massive blow in their bid to secure a place in the national team for September's World Championships in Zagreb after failing to grab the gold medal in their respective weight classes.

Ebrahimzad suffered a comprehensive 11-0 loss to Japanese world silver medalist Yoshinosuke Aoyagi in the 70kg semifinals and then was beaten 11-4 by Georgian Akaki Kemertelidze to miss out on the podium.

The other half of the 70kg bracket saw Khalili fall to a 4-1 defeat against Yegor Anchugin of Kazakhstan before he was handed a bronze medal following Mexican Austin Klee Gomez's withdrawal with injury.

The two Iranians' under-par results convinced national team head coach Pejman Dorostkar to give two-time world silver medalist Amir-Mohammad Yazdani a shot at the 70kg slot for September's showpiece.

Meanwhile, Babaei is out of equation for the 79kg contests, leaving Mohammad Nokhodi – a four-time world medal winner – and reigning Asian champion Mahdi Yousefi in the mix for the visit to the Croatian capital.

A gold medalist in last month's Ranking Series in Ulaanbaatar, Babaei failed to repeat the success, suffering a last-eight setback (4-1) against Georgia's Vladimeri Gamkrelidze, who ultimately won the gold, before a 2-0 win against Kazakhstan's Bolat Sakayev sealed a consolation bronze for the Iranian.

Elsewhere in Budapest, reigning world and Olympic champion Akhmed Tazhudinov was in his own league in the 97kg contests, cruising to the gold with four superiority victories, while world under-23 silver medalist Kota Takhshi of Japan marked his return from a nine-month injury with the ultimate prize in the 74kg event.

Ex-Iran captain Hajsafi set for Sepahan return

Sports Desk

Former Iran international fullback Ehsan Hajsafi is on the verge of return to Persian Gulf Pro League club Sepahan, according to Iranian media reports on Saturday.

Hajsafi, 35, parted ways with AEK Athens on Friday after making 118 appearances in four seasons for the Greek top-flight side, registering four goals and 10 assists in all competitions.

"After four unforgettable years, the time has come for me to say goodbye. Wearing this jersey has been an absolute honor, and playing in front of our incredible fans is something I will never forget," Hajsafi, who won a domestic league and cup double with AEK in

2023, wrote on Instagram.

Should his return to Sepahan be sealed in the coming days, it will be a fourth spell for the ex-Iran skipper at his boyhood club.

An academy product at Sepahan, Hajsafi made his senior debut for the club in 2007 and went on to bag 38 strikes and 25 assists in 309 games across different spells, lifting the Iranian league and cup trophies three times apiece, while reaching the AFC Champions League final in 2007.

Having last played for Iran at the AFC Asian Cup last year, the left-footed fullback has won 142 international caps – third all-time national record – and was an integral part of Team Melli at the 2014, 2018, and 2022 World Cup finals.

Sepahan has made six signings during the summer transfer window, including goalkeeper Alireza Akhbari, who joined from Golgozar Sirjan, and former Esteghlal midfielder Arash Rezavand.

Sepahan finished runner-up to Tractor in the Iranian Pro League last season to secure a place at the upcoming AFC Champions League Elite playoffs, where the Isfahan-based outfit plays away to Al Duhail of Qatar on Aug. 12, with the winner qualifying for the West region's 12-team league phase.

French head coach Patrice Carteron left Sepahan earlier in the month in the aftermath of the 12-war between Iran and Israel, with the club announcing former captain Moharram Navidkia as his successor.



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