

Iran to build on youth talent for AFC Asia Cup mission

Sports Desk

The young talents of the Iranian national football team played a pivotal role in securing qualification for the 2026 AFC Women's Asian Cup, capturing attention with their exceptional performances. Team Melli endured a thrilling and hard-fought campaign against Singapore, Bhutan, Lebanon, and Jordan in Group A of the qualifiers in Amman earlier in July. On the final matchday, Iranian women faced a must-win task against Jordan – and they delivered, beating their formidable opponents 2-1 on their own turf to book their place in the Asian Cup. This marks only the second time in history (and the second consecutive edition) that Iranian women have reached the continental tournament. Despite entering the qualifiers with an incomplete and subpar preparation, the national team defied expectations. A closer look at head coach Marzieh Jafari's 23-player squad reveals that nine players were born in 2001 or later, with these young stars stealing the spotlight. Remarkably, they accounted for 10 of Iran's 14 goals in the qualifiers, proving their technical prowess on the big stage. Negin Zandi, 21, was undoubtedly the standout player of the tournament. With her blistering speed and dazzling technique, the Izeh-born winger constantly threatened defenses. Though the woodwork and some heroic goalkeeping denied her a more prolific tally, she still finished with two goals and three assists, earning recognition as Iran's most influential player in the Jordanian capital. Her brilliance will be crucial in the Asian Cup, where she could be Iran's secret



weapon against stronger opponents. At 24, Zahra Alizadeh is the oldest among Iran's Gen-Z stars. Initially used as a substitute, she made an immediate impact by assisting against Singapore, earning a starting role afterward. She scored against Bhutan and delivered a crucial assist in the decisive match against Jordan, proving her worth as a clutch performer. Few expected Fatemeh Shaban, 22, to break into the starting lineup, but the technically gifted winger silenced doubters by scoring in three consecutive games (Singapore, Bhutan, Lebanon). Though luck denied her more

goals, she still finished as Iran's top scorer in the qualifiers, announcing herself as a rising force. Sara Didar, 20, played multiple roles – from attacking midfielder to target forward – and excelled in each. She scored and assisted against Singapore before netting the crucial opener against Jordan, cementing her status as a key figure in Iran's qualification. Despite carrying an injury, 21-year-old Fatemeh Pasandideh was the heartbeat of Iran's midfield. Her incisive passing created numerous chances, and she even contributed an assist. Her leadership and vision signal

the rise of a new midfield generation for Iran. While they saw limited minutes, 19-year-old Rojin Tamerian and 20-year-old Mohaddeseh Zolfi made their mark. Zolfi scored against Bhutan and impressed against Jordan, while Tamerian netted her first international goal in the same match, showcasing her predatory instincts.

A golden generation in the making

As Iranian women's football approaches its 20th anniversary, the emergence of this technically gifted generation hints at a bright future. With stars like Zandi, Zahra,

Shaban, Didar, Zolfi, Tamerian, and Pasandideh leading the charge – alongside 18-year-old Maryam Dini, who is yet to get her chance – this could be the dawn of a golden era for Iran's women's football. With greater investment and attention, this talented crop of players could take the nation to new heights. The 2026 Asian Cup will be their stage – and the world should take notice – though a mammoth task lies ahead of Jafari and her team in the group phase when the showpiece gets underway in Australia next March. Iranian girls will begin their campaign against South Korea



L-R: Mohaddeseh Zolfi, Zahra Alizadeh, Sara Didar, Fatemeh Shaban, Negin Zandi, and Fatemeh Pasandideh

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– beaten by China in the 2022 final – on March 2, before taking on their formidable hosts – World Cup semifinalists on home soil two years ago – in Gold Coast three days later. The final round of the group fixtures will see Iran face the Philippines, which made it to the last four in the previous edition, on March 8. The top two in each group will be joined by the two best third-place teams in the quarterfinals.

U17 World Wrestling Championships: Delrouz wins heavyweight silver as Iran bags three Greco-Roman medals

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Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Yazdan Delrouz settled for a silver medal in the 110kg weight class at the U17 World Championships in Athens, Greece, on Tuesday. The Iranian enjoyed an emphatic run prior to the final showpiece, not conceding a single point in three bouts, but was unfortunate to give away a three-point lead at the break and lose on criteria (3-3) to Indian Yardeep Yardeep. The final setback summed up a disappointing campaign for the Iranian



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Greco-Roman squad, which headed into the event as the three-time defending world champion, across six weight categories. Amirmohammad Hajivand recovered from a first-round 4-3 defeat against Uzbekistan's Bunyod Hasanov, who went on to win the gold, to finish his campaign with a consolation bronze in the 48kg contests. Hajivand beat Kyrgyzstan's Zhanarbek Seitov 7-4 in a thrilling repechage battle before defeating Turkish wrestler Baris Soylu by technical superiority (12-3) for a joint-bronze

alongside American Michael Rundell. Iranian Amirreza Tahmasbpour also bounced back from a setback in his first outing – against Kyrgyzstan's Alkham Abdirasulov (5-3) – to finish his 55kg run with something to cheer about. Tahmasbpour was given a second chance for a medal following comfortable victories over China's Zongyao Wu (8-0) and Hungarian Balint Kazinczy (11-1) before he came out on top against Aditya Gupta by superiority (10-1) to add a second bronze to Iran's medal haul. Abdirasulov, meanwhile, went on to claim the gold, thanks to a 4-1 win against Nurali Askar of Kazakhstan in the final, with Tajikistan's Makhdi Barotov taking the other bronze of the class. Elsewhere in the Greco-Roman competitions, Abolfazl Shiri suffered a first-round loss to Bulgarian Kristiyan Petkov to finish empty-handed in the 65kg category. Representing Iran in the 80kg division, Taha Nouri also missed out on the podium following a 3-1 loss to Nurislam Oskonbaev of Kyrgyzstan in the third-place bout. There was further disappointment for Iran in the 51kg class, as Amir-mahdi Hajivand crashed out in the round of 16, courtesy of a 10-1 loss to Islam Kurbanov of Kyrgyzstan.

Asian Roller Skating Championships: Iranians impress with six speed medals

Sports Desk

Iranians delivered an impressive performance in the speed event of Asian Roller Skating Championships in, securing a total of six medals, including double golds, across different genders and age classes.

In the 100m category, Iran claimed one gold and two bronze medals. Milad Salehi came out on top in the men's final to notch up the ultimate prize, while Mohammad Soroush Mehr earned bronze. On the women's side, Mahya Dastpak also clinched a bronze medal.

The junior division saw further success, with Amir Mahdi Yahaqqi claiming gold and Mohammad Amin Samimifar settling for a bronze in the men's showdown. Yosna Haqnazari added another bronze to Iran's medal haul in the women's junior competition.



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