

FIBA Asia Cup:

Iran routs Syria to secure direct last-eight berth

Sports Desk

Iran hammered Syria 82-43 to complete a clean sweep of Group B victories at the FIBA Asian Cup and secure a direct berth in Wednesday's quarterfinals in Jeddah.

It was a neck-and-neck battle in the first half at the King Abdullah Sports City, with only two points separating the two teams, before Iran pulled away in the third quarter and never looked back to maintain its perfect run in the competition.

Matin Aqajpour was the star of the show for Iran with a game-high 24 points, chipping in six three-pointers – including a decisive four in the third quarter.

Sina Vahedi also made a significant contribution, producing 19 points, three rebounds, three assists and two steals.

"Every game is tough," Aqajpour said post-game. "Syria is a very good team. In the first half we could not play well, but in the second half we heard our coaches, and we did do our job." Syria's defense disrupted Iran's rhythm from the opening tip, holding them to just 13 points in a scrappy first quarter. Vahedi and Aqajpour provided Iran's only perimeter spark, but the scoreboard read just 13-11 after 10 minutes.

The struggle continued in the second frame as Syria's energy



and hustle kept the three-time champions at bay. Mohamad Bilal Atl'i's putback gave Syria the lead briefly, and Keron Deshields, who finished with 16 points, kept applying pressure. A

late triple from Arsalan Kazemi nudged Iran ahead 25-23 at the break, with star wingman Mohammad Amini yet to score. However, the game turned on its head after halftime as Iran's

defense clamped down, forcing a series of turnovers that led to transition opportunities. Aqajpour drilled a triple to extend the lead, then struck again moments later after Kazemi's

work on the boards. The gap hit double-digits midway through the quarter, and Syria's offence began to unravel. Aqajpour's shooting display reached its peak with back-to-



Iranian players celebrate after an 82-43 victory over Syria at the FIBA Asia Cup in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on August 10, 2025.

● FIBA

back threes in the final minutes of the third, part of a 32-11 blitz that turned a tense two-point game into a commanding 57-34 advantage heading into the fourth.

From there, Iran was in cruise control. Vahedi continued orchestrating the offence, Amini found his way onto the scoresheet, and the defense allowed just nine points in the final period.

Chasing a first Asian trophy since 2013, Iran left fans with another reminder of why it is among the region's elite, capable of weathering adversity, flipping a game in minutes, and riding multiple offensive weapons to decisive wins. With Vahedi in control and Aqajpour firing from deep, Team Melli now turns its attention to the quarterfinals with momentum firmly on its side.

Having beaten Guam (77-52) and Japan (78-70) earlier in the group phase, Greek head coach Sotirios Manolopoulos's men will face the winner of the Chinese Taipei-Jordan playoff in the last eight, with two-time defending champion Australia, which will play the Philippines or the host next, likely awaiting in the semi-finals.

AFC Champions League Elite:

Sepahan to begin new era at Al Duhail

Sports Desk

A place in the West region's league phase will be at stake as Sepahan plays away to Qatari club Al Duhail in the preliminary stage of the AFC Champions League Elite today at the Khalifa International Stadium.

The game will also mark the beginning of a new era for the Persian Gulf Pro League outfit under head coach Moharram Navidkia, who returned to Sepahan bench in June to replace Patrice Carteron after the Frenchman walked out of his job amid the 12-day war between Iran and Israel.

Having settled for a runner-up finish in their respective domestic leagues last season, both sides will aim to feature in the West's 12-team league stage of the revamped ACL Elite for the first time.

Victory in today's game will

mean a 15th appearance in the Asian elite clubs' competition for Sepahan, which was a losing finalist in 2007.

Meanwhile, Al Duhail – a semifinalist in 2022 – will be looking to build on a superior head-to-head record against the Iranian club to secure a 13th participation in the continental showpiece.

The two sides met four times in the group stage in the 2012 and 2022 editions, with Al Duhail coming out victorious on three occasions.

Sepahan fans will get to watch their new-look team in action for the first time this season following a busy transfer window of high-profile incomings and departures.

While Iranian international goalkeeper Payam Niazmand and midfielder Reza Shekari left for Persepolis, French midfielder

Steven Nzonzi parted ways with club for "safety reasons" and prolific winger Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi joined Ittihad Kalba in the UAE Pro League.

Ex-AEK Athens fullback Ehsan Hajsafi, meanwhile, has returned to his boyhood club for a fourth spell, with goalkeeper Seyyed Hossein Hosseini and his Esteghlal teammate Arash Rezavand, as well as Portuguese midfielder Ricardo Alves, who won the Iranian league with Tractor last season, among the new signings.

There will be two marquee signings to watch in Al Duhail shirt. Former PSG midfielder Marco Verratti has joined as a free agent from fellow-Qatari club Al Arabi SC, while Polish striker Krzysztof Piatek is set to make his debut in Asian football following his €10m move from Turkish club Basaksehir.



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Iranian boxer Estaki wins Asian U22 silver

Sports Desk

Young Iranian boxer Sam Estaki settled for a silver medal in the men's under-22 age class at the U22 & U19 Asian Boxing Championships in Bangkok, Thailand. Representing the country the country in the 85kg division, Estaki, who had his father Alireza Estaki as the head coach in his corner, defeated opponents from Sri Lanka and India to reach the final, but fell short against Abdulaziz Abdulrahmanov of Uzbekistan in Monday's showdown.

This was a sole medal for the Iranian six-man squad at the under-22 event, while the country enjoyed a much more prolific campaign in the under-19 competitions, winning a



Iran's Sam Estaki (R), pictured with his father and head coach Alireza Estaki, settled for a silver medal at the U22 & U19 Asian Boxing Championships.

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gold and four bronze medals. Ali Chehreqani beat Kazakhstan's Adil Tortbik to walk away with the ultimate prize in the 60kg category, with Mahdi Rouzbehani (50kg), Ash-

kan Hashemi (65kg), Mohammad-Saleh Mesbahi (70kg), and Abbas Garshasbi (+90kg) suffering last-four setbacks to finish with a consolation bronze in their respective events.

Iranian weightlifter Javadi back in training ahead of ISG 2025

Sports Desk

Iranian weightlifter Mir-Mostafa Javadi is back in training after recovering from a back injury and will be in contention for a place in the national team squad at the 2025 Islamic Solidarity Games – starting November 7 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. A winner of five world medals – including double golds in 2023 – the Iranian weightlifter has been sidelined with a pain in the waist area after missing out on the men's 89kg podium at the 2024 World Championships in Manama, Bahrain.

However, Iran head coach Behdad Salimi has named the 25-year-old weightlifter in the provisional squad for the visit Riyadh, as he will be



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eager for further ISG glory in his career, having grabbed double golds and a snatch silver at the multi-sport event three years ago in Konya, Turkey.