

FIBA Asia Cup:

Resolute Iran to continue
Jeddah journey against Australia

Sports Desk

A place in the final showpiece of the FIBA Asia Cup will be up for grabs when Iran and two-time defending champion Australia go head-to-head at Jeddah's King Abdullah Sports City today.

Chasing a fourth Asian title, and first since 2013, Iran pulled off an epic fightback in the quarterfinals, overcoming a 21-point deficit to edge Chinese Taipei 78-75 on Wednesday – the biggest comeback by any team in this year's competition.

Mohammad Amini stole the show with 30 points and 11 rebounds while Sina Vahedi added 21 points – including 19 in the second half – and two triples in a display of grit and poise as Greek head coach Sotirios Manolopoulos's men celebrated a fourth successive win in Jeddah, having beaten Guam, Japan, and Syria for a top-spot finish in Group B.

Lin Ting-Chien paced Chinese Taipei with 22 points, with the Hinton brothers and Chen Ying-Chun chipping in timely bursts that had them in full control for most of the night. Chinese Taipei came out firing, opening with a 10-0 burst behind Hinton's triple and Lin's fearless drives. By the end of the first quarter, Lin had nailed back-to-back corner threes to put his team up 24-11, and Mohammad Al Bachir Gadiaga's hot shooting in the second frame helped preserve a commanding 42-26 halftime advantage.

"I believe when we were not mak-



Iranian guard Sina Vahedi (3) goes for a layup during a last-eight victory over the Chinese Taipei in the FIBA Asia Cup in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on August 13, 2025.

● FIBA

to concede a defeat since making its Asia Cup debut in 2017.

Spearheaded by star forward Jaylin Galloway and Owen Foxwell, who had 15 points apiece, Australia dismantled the Philippines 84-60 earlier on Wednesday to book a last-four date with Iran.

The defending champions wasted no time asserting control, hitting seven triples in the opening quarter alone to build a commanding 29-12 lead. Galloway set the early tone with three makes from deep, while Jack McVeigh and Will Magnay chipped in with key plays at both ends.

Australia has been in its own league in Jeddah, making a clean sweep of wins in arguably the toughest group in the preliminary round, which also featured 2022 finalist Lebanon, two-time champion South Korea, and Qatar.

Today's game will mark a second Asia Cup encounter between Iran and Australia after the Boomers defeated Team Melli (79-56) in the 2017 final in Lebanon.

The other last-four clash will see China – the most decorated team in the competition with 16 titles – face New Zealand, which is desperate for a maiden final berth, after back-to-back semifinal defeats against Australia.

ing shots, that bothered our mind and mentality," Manolopoulos said after the game. "At halftime, we had a long talk, and we changed the approach. We had to start from defense, to play aggressively possession by possession. We

knew we will get our shots, and this time, we will make out shots. For the second half, we played to our maximum."

Vahedi, meanwhile, said he was "proud of everybody – coaches, players" after Iran claimed a third

comeback victory in a row in Jeddah.

"Man, I don't know what to say about that because I'm so mad about it. I was on the bench for the whole first half," said the 24-year-old, adding: "I was pa-

tient on the bench, thinking about defense, offense, everything. And in the second half, we won the game. I'm so happy about that."

The scale of today's task, however, is incomparable to what Iran has faced in Jeddah, as Australia is yet

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Persian Gulf Pro League champion will host Al Sadd on the first matchday of the upcoming AFC Champions League Elite season – starting with the league stage across the West and East regions on September 15.

The draw for the league phase of the Asian elite clubs' competition took place at the AFC headquarters in Kuala Lumpur on Friday, where Tractor avoided the Saudi Prwo League heavyweights in the West's 12-team table.

A second successive home game will see Tractor welcome Iraqi champion Al Shorta on Matchday Two (Sept. 29-Oct.1), before Dragan Skocic's men visit Dubai to play Shabab Al Ahli, which has three Iranians in Sardar Azmoun, Saeid Ezzatollahi, and Reza Ghandipour in its ranks, in the third round of fixtures on October 20-22.

Tractor will then play PFC Nasaf in Qarshi, Uzbekistan, before returning home to take on Qatar Stars League's Al Duhail, which defeated Iran's Sepahan 3-2 at home in the

playoffs on Tuesday, for Matchday Five in late November.

A final home game for the north-west Iranian club will come against Emirati outfit Al Wahda, followed by back-to-back trips to the UAE's Sharjah FC and Al Gharafa of Qatar.

The league stage will conclude in mid-February next year, with the top eight in each of the 12-team tables in the west and east zones progressing to the round of 16 – scheduled for March 2-11, 2026. This will be followed by a centralized Finals that sees all matches from the quarterfinals onwards being staged in Saudi Arabia between April 17 and 25, 2026.

ACL Two draw

Earlier on Friday, 32 teams were divided into eight groups across the West and East regions in the AFC Champions League Two draw, as Iranian clubs Esteghlal and Sepahan learned their fate at the continent's second-tier club competition.

Esteghlal, which finished ninth in the Iranian top-flight table last

term but still managed to secure Asian club football thanks to a domestic cup title in May, was drawn in Group A alongside Al Wasl – fourth in the Emirati league last season – Jordanian Pro League runner-up Al Wehdad and Bahraini champion Al Muharraq SC. Meanwhile, Sepahan – runner-up to Tractor in the Iranian league – was pitted against Mohun Bagan Super Giant of India, and Turkmenistan's Ahal FC, as well as Al Hussein of Jordan – in a repeat of last year's group encounters – in Group C.

Cristiano Ronaldo's star-studded Al Nassr headlines Group D – also featuring Al Zawraa of Iraq, Istiklol of Tajikistan, and India's FC Goa.

The top two in each group will advance to the last 16.

The group stage is scheduled to conclude on December 24 before moving into the round of 16 between February 10-19, 2026. The quarterfinals and semifinals are set for March 3-12 and April 7-15 respectively, with the final showpiece to be staged on May 16, 2026.

AFC Champions League Elite:

Tractor avoids Saudi giants,
to host Al Sadd in league stage opener

● RASOUL SHOJAEI/IRNA

Coman close to Al Nassr move, says Bayern

REUTERS – Bayern Munich winger Kingsley Coman is close to joining Saudi Arabian club Al Nassr, with talks in the final stages, the German champions said on Friday ahead of today's German SuperCup at VfB Stuttgart. They said, however, there was no development in the ongoing transfer saga of Stuttgart forward Nick Woltemade.

The 29-year-old Coman, a 2022 World Cup finalist with France, has been at

Bayern for a decade, having won a slew of domestic and international titles, including the Champions League and the Club World Cup.

"There are still final talks pending, so it is not a done deal just yet," Bayern sports director Christoph Freund told a press conference. "But should it go ahead, then he was here 10 years, he won many titles, and was a super person."

For coach Vincent Kompany, Coman's

imminent departure may be emotional, coming shortly after club talisman Thomas Mueller's move to the Major League Soccer (MLS) side Vancouver Whitecaps after 25 years at Bayern, but his team was focused on the season start.

"I think that King showed over the years at Bayern what player he was. When such a successful player leaves the club, it is always emotional," Kompany said.



● REUTERS