

FIBA Asia Cup:

Iran holds off late scare to beat New Zealand for third place

Sports Desk

Iran survived a furious late charge from New Zealand to secure a 79-73 win in the FIBA Asia Cup 2025 third-place game on Sunday at Jeddah's King Abdullah Sports City, reclaiming a spot on the podium after missing out in 2022.

Veteran forward Arsalan Kazemi spearheaded the Iranian team with 16 points, 15 rebounds and two timely triples, while Seyyed Mahdi Jafari contributed with a game-high 22 points, five assists and five three-pointers. Guard Sina Vahedi added 19 points, five rebounds and four assists as Team Melli finished with a 5-1 record in Jeddah.

For New Zealand, Flynn Cameron fought to the end with 18 points and relentless rim attacks, while Mojave King contributed 13 points and four rebounds.

Iran came out sharp, using Kazemi's veteran poise and Vahedi's attacking flair to build a 28-20 lead after the first quarter. Even with Mohammad Amini unable to see action, Team Melli looked energized as Mobin Sheikh capped the frame with a banked triple at the buzzer.

"We are like a family. We built chemistry and refused to lose," Sheikh said. "I'm proud of my teammates and brothers. Before the tournament began, our team captain said we were the underdogs, so I'm proud we finished third. This win is for our team and for our country."

The lead swelled to 47-33 at half-time behind Jafari's hot shooting, as Iran answered every New Zealand push with composed scor-



Iranian players celebrate a 79-73 victory over New Zealand in the third-place game at the FIBA Asia Cup in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on August 17, 2025.

ing bursts. By the third quarter, back-to-back triples from Matin Aqajanzpour and Kazemi gave Iran a 59-42 cushion, though the Tall Blacks clawed back with Cameron and Jordan Ngatai connecting from deep to trim the gap to 66-54 entering the final period. The fourth quarter nearly unraveled for Iran as empty possessions left them stuck on 76 points for several minutes. Cameron slashed the lead to just 76-73 with under 40 seconds remaining, igniting hopes of a Tall Blacks comeback. But a costly unsportsmanlike foul

on Ngatai gave Jafari a crucial trip to the line, and Kazemi calmly iced the game with two free-throws in the final six seconds. The result marked a proud return to the FIBA Asia Cup podium for Iran, cementing the three-time champion's status among the Asian elite powers. Iran's sole defeat came in the last four, where Sotirios Manolopoulos' men were outclassed 92-48 by Australia, which went on to edge China 90-89 in Sunday's final for a third successive crown at the flagship continen-

tal tournament. Meanwhile, there was further joy for Vahedi in the awarding ceremony, as the Iranian guard was named in the tournament's All-Star Five – alongside MVP Jaylin Galloway and his Australian teammate Jack McVeigh, as well as Chinese duo Hu Jinqu and Wang Junjie. Vahedi served as the stabilizing presence for Team Melli, registering 17.8 points, 2.7 rebounds, 2.2 assists, and 1.0 steal to make his first-ever Asia Cup experience all the more memorable.

'Greater than gold'

For Iranian captain Kazemi, the narrow win against New Zealand is a statement per se, as nobody – even their own people – believed that they could accomplish as much.

"We walked into the tournament as underdogs," the veteran forward said, adding: "Nobody was expecting us to accomplish anything, especially in Iran. We have a whole controversy around our basketball team, around this young group of guys, that they're not ready yet."

It was a relatively young team which Greek coach Manolopoulos went with for this year's tournament as half of the 12-man roster are aged below 25, with Mohammad Heydari the youngest of the bunch at only 19.

"We have some young guys; they're unknown, but every game one of them is gonna step up," he said.

"They all can go for 30 points. Tonight, Matin played great, Sina played great, but I think Jafari was the guy that really surprised New Zealand and came out with some huge shots for us," he continued.

Mohammad Amini would've added more to that but the rising star wing was unfortunately out due to a knee issue he sustained against Australia. Yet he served as a reason for them to compete harder.

"Obviously tonight we were missing Amini so I told them, 'He helped us to get here, let's win one for him.' That's kinda like what the atmosphere in the locker room was," the 12-year pro out of Oregon said.

"I played a horrible game against Australia yesterday and being able to regroup in less than 14 hours with these young guys, that shows a lot of character and a lot of toughness. I'm really glad, I'm proud of them," he said.

Kazemi now has two Asia Cup medals, the first being a silver which he and Iran took home in 2017 – the last time that the program stood on the podium. But this bronze, for him, weighs more than the ultimate prize.

"It feels kinda greater than a gold medal for me, because it was very unexpected," the former Olympian said.

Also because he and Team Melli were able to prove the doubters wrong.

"Even after beating Chinese Taipei, and yesterday we lost to Australia – Australia is a great team ... they're just going at us like crazy. I mean, this will definitely shut them up," Kazemi said with a smile.

Iran U21 defeats France ahead of FIVB World Championship



Iranian under-21 players (R) are seen in action during a friendly victory over France in Jiangmen, China, on August 17, 2025.

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Iran came out on top against France in four sets on Sunday in a friendly game in Jiangmen ahead of the upcoming FIVB Men's U21 World Championship – starting Thursday in the Chinese city.

Mohammad Mo'menimogaddam's boys won the first two sets 25-22 and 25-21, respectively, before France bounced

back in the third to win 25-22. The third set was held in a 15-point format due to time restriction, with Iran claiming a 15-11 victory.

A two-time champion over the past three editions, Iran will begin its title defense in Jiangmen against Kazakhstan in Pool B on the opening day of the competition.

A second outing for Iran will come against Puerto Rico on

Aug. 22, followed by games against South Korea – in a repeat of last year's Asian under-20 final, which Iran won in straight sets – Canada, and Poland.

The top four in each of the four six-team groups will progress to the round of 16.

Iranian head coach Mo'menimogaddam will be looking to build on a 20-game unbeaten run at the helm, during which

the country claimed back-to-back Asian under-20 titles either side of the world U21 crown in 2023 – thanks to a 3-2 victory over Italy in the final showdown in Manama. Pouria Ariakhah will be the player to watch in the Iranian squad after the prolific opposite delivered an MVP display during the title-winning run at the Asian U20 meet in Indonesia last summer and was part of the national team in the Volleyball Nations League preliminaries in June and July.

Young setter Emran Kookjili, along with middle-blockers Taha Behboudinia and Armin Qelichniazi, were also among the individual award winners at the Asian event and are expected to play integral roles for the Iranian team in Jiangmen again.

Elsewhere in the competition, the host nation will be joined by Egypt, the United States, Thailand, Morocco, and Turkey in Pool A, with four-time champion Brazil, Bulgaria, Czechia, Colombia, Japan, and Cuba completing the lineup in Pool C.

Italy, Argentina, Tunisia, France, Ukraine, and Indonesia will lock horns for a last-16 spot in Pool D.

Asian Shooting Championships: Iran bags double bronzes in air pistol events

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The third day of the Asian Shooting Championships saw Iran collect a couple of bronze medals in Shymkent, Kazakhstan, on Monday.

Amir Joharikhou, Vahid Golkhandan, and former Olympic champion Javad Forouqi teamed up to score 1733 points for a third-place finish in the men's 10m air pistol team event.

China claimed the gold medal with 1744 points, while India edged Iran to the silver by two points.

Joharikhou added a second medal to Iran's haul later in the day by finishing behind Chinese gold winner Hu Kai and South Korean Hong Su-hyeon in the 10m air pistol individual contest.

The 16th edition of the Asian Champions will continue at the Shymkent Shooting Plaza until August 30.

