

FIVB Men's U21 World Championship: Iran hammers host to set last-four date with USA

Sports Desk

Iran marched to a straight-set victory (25-21, 25-16, 25-15) over China on Friday to progress to the FIVB Men's U21 World Championship semifinals in the Chinese city of Jiangmen. Awaiting Iran in today's last-four clash is USA, which came from behind twice to edge out France in a five-set thriller (21-25, 25-17, 22-25, 25-23, 15-12) earlier on Friday. Middle-blocker Taha Behboudnia and outside-hitter Matin Hosseini contributed with 14 points apiece for Iran, with middle-blocker Armin Qelichniazi – the top scorer in the last-16 win against Argentina – chipping in 10 points. Chinese opposite also finished on 14 points, while outside-hitter Zhiqiang Zhang scored nine for the host, which stepped onto the court fresh off a sensational fifth-set comeback victory

over Japan in the quarterfinals. Friday's victory extended Iranian head coach Gholamreza Mo'menimoqaddam's unbeaten run at the helm to a remarkable 26 games in competitive action, during which his team has claimed back-to-back Asian under-20 titles either side of the world U21 crown in 2023 in Manama.

"We had two analysis sessions before today's game, and I am extremely pleased that the players did all I had asked them to in those meetings," Mo'menimoqaddam said after the game. "We scored 17 direct points on defense, which was exceptional. I think that was a record for this tournament." On today's opponent, the Iranian coach said, "USA is a different team which knocked out one of the tournament favorites in France. The United States play with a strong system; they

are a top-notch team with players of exceptional physique.

"However, we are Iran, and will face them with passion and pride, determined to reap the rewards of five months of hard work and training. "Our ultimate goal is definitely beyond reaching the last four, but we're taking it one game at a time," added the Iranian. Iran began its title defense in Jiangmen with a 3-1 win against Kazakhstan and then defeated Puerto Rico (3-0), South Korea (3-2) Canada (3-0), and Poland (3-1) to finish atop the Pool B table, before coming out on top in four sets against Argentina on Wednesday.



Iranian middle-blocker Armin Qelichniazi (20) goes up for a spike during a last-eight 3-0 win against China at the FIVB Men's U21 World Championship in Jiangmen, China, on August 29, 2025.

● FIVB



Taremi at crossroads as Inter exit looms



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Mahdi Taremi is on the verge of a new chapter in his career, as the Iran international striker is believed to have no future at Internazionale. With the closing date of the summer transfer window fast approaching across Europe, several clubs have reportedly inquired about the out-of-favor Inter forward, who is with the national team in Tajikistan for the CAFA Nations Cup. French top-flight side Lyon is the latest club to enter the race for the Iranian's services, according to high-profile Italian journalist Fabrizio Romano. While Leeds United and Fulham have shown interest in bringing Taremi to the Premier League, Brazilian clubs Botafogo and Flamengo also approached the Iranian in

recent months, though the 33-year-old However, the 33-year-old has made clear that he prefers to stay in Europe. Greek heavyweights Panathinaikos and Olympiacos, as well as Dutch champion PSV, Serie A outfit Sassuolo, and Turkish Süper Lig club Besiktas have also emerged as potential suitors for the Iranian in media reports throughout the summer. When Taremi left Porto as a free agent to join Inter on a two-year contract – with the option of a one-year extension – last summer, his signing was widely regarded as a bargain for the Serie A giant. Taremi had spent four glorious seasons with the Portuguese heavyweight, helping the Dragons lift seven domestic trophies – including a league and cup double in the 2021/22 campaign – while

he bagged 91 strikes in 182 appearances to become the club's third all-time top scorer. With Marcus Thuram granted an extended vacation ahead of the new season – due to his involvement in Euro 2024 – the Iranian capitalized on the Frenchman's absence by delivering impressive performances during preseason friendlies, making a strong case for a No. 9 role alongside Lautaro Martinez in the starting XI. However, his debut campaign in the Nerazzurri colors was hardly one to remember, as Taremi managed only three goals – including double spot-kicks – and nine assists in 43 appearances across all competitions, with his sole strike from open play coming in a 3-2 loss to archrival Milan at the Supercoppa Italiana final in January.

Despite receiving criticism for his lack of goals throughout the season, Taremi still had the full backing of former Inter boss Simone Inzaghi, who even selected him over his first-choice duo for some of the big occasions in the Champions League. The introduction of new head coach Cristian Chivu in June, however, marked the beginning of the end for Taremi, who missed the FIFA Club World Cup after being stranded in his home country due to all flights from Iranian airports being grounded amid the 12-day conflict with Israel. Taremi was left out of the Inter squad for the 5-0 victory over Torino in the opening weekend of the new Serie A season this week, meaning Iranian fans have already seen the last of their compatriot in a Nerazzurri shirt.

Iran futsal remains fifth in Men's World Ranking

Sports Desk

Iranian national team retained the fifth spot in the latest FIFA Futsal Men's World Ranking – released by the international governing body of the sport on Friday. Iran, which lifted a record-extending 13th Asian Cup trophy last year, collected 1485.1 points to remain the top team

in the continental ranking, followed by Thailand and Japan, which stood 11th and 13th respectively, while Uzbekistan moved up by four spots to sit 19th – fourth in Asia. The top four of the World Ranking remained unchanged, with top-ranked Brazil followed by Portugal, Spain, and Argentina.

Meanwhile, Iran remained ninth in Women's Ranking with 1183.68 points – following Thailand (fourth), and reigning Asian champion Japan, which moved up by five places to sit fifth, in the AFC member states ranking. Brazil, Spain, and Portugal are the top three, respectively, in the Women's World Ranking.



● AFC

Ex-Persepolis defender reunites with Sepahan

Sports Desk

Georgian center-back Giorgi Gvelesiani signed for Sepahan for a second spell as a free agent from Persepolis, the Persian Gulf Pro League club announced on Friday. Having joined Persepolis from Sepahan for the start of the 2022/23 season, the 34-year-old Georgian scored 20 goals in 100 appearances for the Tehran Reds, lifting two league trophies as well as the Hazfi Cup two seasons ago, while becoming the club's all-time foreign top scorer. Gvelesiani, who played for the national team at the Euro 2024, scored some crucial goals throughout the three seasons with Persepolis, including a double in a 2-2 draw against archrival Esteghlal in



● SEPAHAN S.C.

December 2022, and a last-gasp winner against Mes Rafsanjan on the final day of the 2023/24 season, which helped Persepolis win a seventh top-flight title in eight years. He contributed with four goals in 36 games for Persepolis last term. The Georgian, who was introduced to the Iranian top flight with Zob

Ahan in January 2017, made 79 appearances in his previous spell with Sepahan, finding the net on 10 occasions. Sepahan has endured a shaky start to the new campaign under new head coach Moharram Navidkia, who replaced Frenchman Patrice Carteron in June. A 3-2 loss to Qatar Stars League club Al Duhail

in the AFC Champions League Elite playoffs was followed by a 1-1 stalemate against Malavan on the opening day of the domestic league season, before Sepahan suffered a first league defeat against Persepolis in 1,335 days in the 'Iranian Clasico' last Monday, losing 1-0 at the Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium.