

# FIBA World Cup Asian qualifiers: Iran drains 19 threes to beat Iraq in group opener



## Sports Desk

Iran got off to an emphatic start in the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027 Asian Qualifiers, draining a remarkable 19 three-pointers to defeat Iraq 94-68 in the first-round Group C clash in Zouk Mikael, Lebanon, on Thursday. Sina Vahedi led the way with a game-high 21 points, while point guard Behnam Yakhchali chipped in 19 on his long-awaited return to the national team. Martin Aqajanpour (15 points), Arman Zanganeh (13), and Navid Rezaeifar (11) also finished in double figures for Iran. For Iraq, point guard Ramon Galloway and Abdullah Hayder Alibraheemi topped the scoring with 20 and 12 points, respectively. Iran's three-point tally was the third-highest ever recorded by a team in a single game in the histo-

ry of the Asian Qualifiers – behind Australia (21) and New Zealand (20). Iran was just one make shy of becoming only the seventh team in World Cup Qualifiers history to hit 20 threes in a game. It was not a one-man show either, as both Aqajanpour and Yakhchali knocked down five three-pointers apiece, while Vahedi and Zanganeh each connected three times from beyond the arc. The victory lifted Iran to the top of Group C – which also includes Jordan and Syria – ahead of Sunday's rematch against Iraq. In other Group C action, American-born Jalen Cole Harris scored 22 points and Ahmad Al-Dwairi added 18 as Jordan beat Syria 74-59 in Amman. Elsewhere in the qualifiers, Saudi Arabia defeated India 75-51 in Riyadh in Group D, thanks to a game-high 23 points from Mu-

hammad-Ali Abdurrahkman. Lebanon survived a late scare against Qatar to begin its World Cup bid with a narrow 75-74 win in Doha. The top three teams from each of the four groups will advance to the second round of the qualifiers. The twelve qualified teams will be split into two groups and will face the three teams advancing from the corresponding group twice – Group A will be paired with Group C, and Group B with Group D. The top three teams from each second-round group, along with the best fourth-placed team, will qualify for the 2027 World Cup in Qatar.



Iranian center Salar Monji (51) goes up for a basket during a victory over Iraq at the FIBA World Cup Asian qualifiers in Zouk Mikael, Lebanon, on November 27, 2025.

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## Iran to boycott World Cup draw ceremony over US visa denial

### Sports Desk

No Iranian representative will take part in Friday's 2026 World Cup draw ceremony in Washington, D.C., Amirmahdi Alavi, spokesman for the Iranian Football Federation, announced on Friday. The decision comes after the United States refused to issue entry visas for several members of the Iranian delegation – most notably Mehdi Taj, chairman of the national governing body. Iran topped Group A in the third round of the Asian qualifiers in June to secure its seventh World Cup appearance – and fourth in a row. The expanded 48-team finals will be co-hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico from June 11 to July 19 next year. "No Iranian representatives will attend the ceremony," Mehr News Agency quoted Alavi as saying. "After consultations with the federation's board, the

Ministry of Sports, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the decision was communicated to the FIFA," added Alavi, who blamed the measures taken by the United States as "non-sporting and deviated from standard athletic procedures." Alavi said FIFA has assured Iranian officials that the matter will be seriously addressed. According to Varzesh3, Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee and Mohammad-Mahdi Nabi, the federation's vice-president, are among five Iranians who were granted US visas. However, Alavi stressed that there are no guarantees the delegation would not face additional issues if they were to attend the ceremony. Ranked 20th in the latest FIFA Men's Ranking, Iran will be placed in Pot 2 for the World Cup draw, alongside fellow AFC teams Japan, South Korea, and Australia, as well as Croatia, Morocco, Colombia, Uruguay, Switzerland, Senegal, Ecuador, and Austria.



● FABRICE COFFRINI/AFP

## IHF Women's Handball World Championship: Iran off to losing start against Switzerland

### Sports Desk

Iran got off to a losing start at the IHF Women's Handball World Championship in Germany and the Netherlands, suffering a 34-9 defeat to debutant Switzerland in the Dutch city of 's-Hertogenbosch on Thursday. Entering the tournament on the back of a historic bronze medal at the Islamic Solidarity Games earlier this month, Iran was determined to begin strongly, and goalkeeper Fatemeh Khalili delivered early with a series of solid saves. However, mistakes in Iran's attack quickly opened the door for Switzerland, which – carried by Era Baumann's early impact – took control and moved into a 7-3 lead by the 10th minute. As the match progressed, Switzerland grew increasingly confident. Coming in as the clear favorite, the European side steadily showed why. Mia Emmenegger, Tabea Schmid, and Baumann led the offense, combining for 13 of Switzerland's 19 first-half goals. Most of Switzerland's scoring came through quick transitions, as the team pushed to finish its attacks as fast as possible. Iran, meanwhile, struggled with the pace; their average attacking sequence lasted around 39 seconds and often ended unsuccessfully, allowing Switzerland to dictate the flow until the end of the half. Little changed after the break, as Iran's problems continued at both ends of the



Iran's Nastaran Goodarzi (76) makes an effort during a defeat against Switzerland at the IHF Women's Handball World Championship in 's-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands, on November 27, 2025.

● IHF

court. The team went 11 minutes without a goal, while Switzerland maintained its pressure even with heavy rotations across the squad. Seraina Kuratli was exceptional in goal, picking up where Lea Schüpbach had left off, saving six of Iran's first seven attempts of the half. Eleven of Switzerland's 14 outfield players found the net at least once, with Melanie Felber stepping up after halftime to finish with seven goals. Kuratli concluded her impressive performance with 12 saves from 14 shots, underlining Switzerland's control from start to finish and earning the hummel Player of the Match award.

For Iran, Fatemeh Merikh was the standout performer with three goals in what proved a difficult start to the World Championship. This marks the second time Iran has scored only nine goals at the flagship event and their second-lowest tally overall, after recording eight goals against Angola in 2021. Iran will be back in action in Group against Hungary today before facing Senegal on Monday. The top three teams in the group will advance to the main-round phase, while the bottom side will compete for 25th-32nd places in the President's Cup.

## 6th International Fajr Cup: Qashqaei, Salehipour claim double golds on Day 1

### Sports Desk

The opening day of the 6th International Fajr Cup in Tehran saw two Iranian weightlifters claim gold in their respective categories on Thursday. Competing in the men's 65kg division, Hafez Qashqaei – the 2019 world clean & jerk silver medalist – lifted 122kg in the snatch and secured a best clean & jerk of 160kg to take the total gold with 282kg. He finished 11 kilograms clear of Uzbekistan's Diyorbek Odilov, while Tajikistan's Faizali Sangov claimed bronze with 201kg. Meanwhile, Iliya Salehipour, entering the platform after a triple-medal run at the Islamic Solidarity Games earlier this month, posted 155kg in

the snatch and 192kg in the clean & jerk for a 344kg total to win a closely contested 88kg event. Uzbekistan's Bekzod Gofirjonov topped the snatch standings with 156kg but settled for silver with a 341kg total. Turkmenistan's Ramazan Torayev earned bronze on 316kg. Former world champion Mirmostafa Javadi marked his long-awaited return from injury – which had kept him out of the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh – with a runner-up finish in the 79kg class. He opened strongly with a 166kg snatch to edge Turkmenistan's Gaygysyz Torayev by one kilogram. Torayev, however, responded with a 187kg clean & jerk to secure the total gold at 332kg, one kilogram ahead of Javadi. Uzbekistan's Khayitboy Abdushukurov finished third with lifts of

147-174-321. Elsewhere, Seyitjan Mirzayev (124-150-274) stood atop the podium in the 60kg division, followed by Sri Lanka's Liyanagedara Lagas and Tajikistan's Mustafa Zabiroy. Turkmenistan's Bunyad Rashidov captured the 71kg title with a 150-165-315 total, while Khusinboy Matrasulov of Uzbekistan took silver with 305kg and Iraq's Saif Al-Lami earned bronze on 292kg. Weightlifters from Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia are competing at the four-day tournament in Tehran. The gold medalist in each weight category receives \$1,000 in prize money, with \$600 awarded for silver and \$400 for bronze.



Iranian weightlifter Hafez Qashqaei is seen in action in the 65kg class at the Fajr International Cup in Tehran, Iran, on November 27, 2025.

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