

# Iran beats Saudi Arabia to reach Futsal Asian Cup knockouts

## Sports Desk

The Iranian national futsal team secured a 2-0 victory over Saudi Arabia on Friday, ensuring their progression to the knockout stage of the 2026 AFC Futsal Asian Cup. According to Mehr News Agency, the Group D clash took place at Jakarta's International Velodrome, with Iran's squad under head coach Vahid Shamsaei claiming both goals. Amirhossein Gholami opened the scoring with a

header from a corner delivered by Moslem Oladghobad, and was named the best player of the match. Later, Iran goalkeeper Bahram Mohammadi doubled the lead in the 35th minute with a precise long-range strike. Wearing their red away kit against the green-clad Saudis, Iran struggled to create clear-cut chances in the first half. Despite advancing toward the Saudi goal, Iranian players' short passes failed to produce mean-

ingful opportunities. Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, threatened Iran's goal twice with dangerous crosses but were unable to score. The second half, however, was dominated entirely by Iran. Shamsaei's team applied relentless pressure, eventually breaking through with the first goal midway through the half. In response, the Saudis, needing points to stay in contention, adopted a five-player "power play," leaving their goal unat-

tended at times. Although Iran faced five dangerous opportunities on their own goal during this period, Mohammadi's outstanding performance kept the score intact. Capitalizing on one such scenario, Mohammadi scored the second goal himself into the empty Saudi net. With two wins in the group stage, Iran advances to the knockout rounds. The team will face Afghanistan on Sunday for a chance to secure top spot in Group D.



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## Iran claims U17 bronze at Turkey Youth Table Tennis Contender



IRNA

## Sports Desk

Iran's national table tennis team continued its campaign at the Youth Table Tennis Contender in Turkey, with the country claiming a bronze medal in the under-17 category. According to IRNA, Iranian players faced off against their international rivals throughout the competition. In the U17 boys' division, Arshia Lorestan secured a bronze medal, add-

ing to Iran's growing achievements in youth table tennis. In the same age group, Erfan Yazdanbakhsh and Avetsa Askarzadeh advanced from the group stage and won their Round of 16 matches, but were eliminated in the quarterfinals by host nation representatives, ending their progression in the tournament. In the girls' events, Vania Yavari advanced from the group stage to the knockout round, where

she faced the top seed and was ultimately defeated by her Indian opponent. Meanwhile, Sarina Jahanshahi and Zeinab Dura were unable to progress beyond the group stage. The Turkey Youth Table Tennis Contender is being held from January 28 to 31 in Cappadocia, Turkey. The Iranian delegation is coached by Hadi Sobhi, who oversees the country's representatives in this international youth competition.

## Cramping Alcaraz beats Zverev in epic to reach final

A cramping Carlos Alcaraz had to draw on every physical and mental reserve to come back from the brink and beat Alexander Zverev to reach a first Australian Open final. Spain's Alcaraz came through 6-4 7-6 (7-5) 6-7 (3-7) 6-7 (4-7) 7-5 after an enthralling five hours and 27 minutes - but the scoreline barely hints at the drama that occurred in Melbourne, bbc.com wrote. Alcaraz had clinched the first two sets and was cruising

when, serving at 4-4 in the third, he suddenly pulled up and was left barely able to serve or move. The world number one took a medical timeout — leaving third seed Zverev irate — and looked a shadow of his former self as his German opponent forced a decider. Zverev went an early break up in the fifth set and served for the match at 5-4, before Alcaraz produced a scarcely believable comeback.

Buoyed by the crowd, Alcaraz broke to get the match back on serve and then capitalized on Zverev's nerves as the German served at 6-5 down to try to force a 10-point tie-break. Alcaraz fell to the floor in complete disbelief as Zverev missed a backhand and sent him into Sunday's showpiece. "I always say that you have to believe in yourself no matter what," Alcaraz said. "I couldn't be here right now without these guys [the crowd]. The way you pushed me back into the match on every point is crazy." Victory keeps alive the 22-year-old's bid to write more tennis history — should he win on Sunday, he will become the youngest man to complete the career Grand Slam. Only Novak Djokovic — and Alcaraz's own physical condition — now stand in the way of a fourth successive Grand Slam final between the Spaniard and Jannik Sinner.



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## Olympiacos' playoff qualification bears Taremi's signature

### Sports Desk

Iranian striker Mehdi Taremi played a pivotal role in guiding Olympiacos to the knockout stage of the UEFA Champions League, earning widespread media praise while emphasizing his team's philosophy and focus on the present. According to varzesh3, in a historic night for Greek football, Taremi once again demonstrated why he is one of Olympiacos' key players this season. The Greek side's 2-1 victory over Ajax in Amsterdam not only secured the win but also marked Olympiacos' historic qualification to the Champions League playoffs under the new format — a success in which Taremi's impact was unmistakable.

Regarding Olympiacos' next

Taremi played a decisive role in this match, as he had in several other crucial group-stage games. His precise and intelligent assist in the 52nd minute set up Olympiacos' opening goal, giving the Greek team a crucial edge in their most important match of the season. This assist was Taremi's third direct contribution in the final three group-stage games, during which Olympiacos needed victories more than ever to reach the playoffs.

Overall, out of the 11 points Olympiacos earned in the group stage, 9 came directly from Taremi's goals and assists, a statistic that highlights his technical value and influence. He provided the decisive assist against Kairat of Kazakhstan, scored the key second goal against Bayer Leverkusen, and against Ajax, once again contributed a critical assist, underlining his European brilliance.

After the Amsterdam match, Taremi spoke confidently about Olympiacos' team character: "From the very begin-

ning, I said we are a big team and we can succeed in the Champions League. The most important thing was to qualify," he said. Thanking the fans for their support, he stressed that the victory is not the end of the journey, and the team's focus must remain on the next match.

Speaking to MEGA TV, Taremi added, "Congratulations to our fans who were with us and supported us. Thanks to everyone, even those watching on TV. The most important thing was qualifying. From the start, I said we are a big team and we can succeed in the Champions League. Tonight, we feel good, but we have to focus on the next match against AEK Athens, which is very important." Regarding Olympiacos' next



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