

## AFC Futsal Asian Cup:

## Iran sees off Afghanistan to set quarterfinal date with Uzbekistan



Iranian players react after a goal during a 5-2 victory over Afghanistan at the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Jakarta, Indonesia, on February 1, 2026.  
● AFC

## Sports Desk

Iran survived a late scare from Afghanistan to secure a 5-2 victory and clinch top spot in Group D of the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Jakarta, Indonesia.

A clean sweep of three group wins means the defending champions will continue their bid for a record-extending 14th title at the flagship continental event against Group C runners-up Uzbekistan in today's quarterfinal clash at the Jakarta International Velodrome.

The game will mark the third encounter between the two sides in two years. Vahid Shamsaei's men came out on top in a shootout after a 3-3 draw in the semifinals of the previous Asian Cup in Thailand, before winning 4-2 – again in the semifinals – at last November's Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh.

In a rematch of the 2-2 draw in

the Saudi capital, Iran took the lead in the 13th minute when Afghanistan goalkeeper Javad Safari parried Amirhossein Gholami's shot into the path of the onrushing Behrouz Azimi, who made no mistake from close range as Iran went into halftime leading 1-0.

Afghanistan pushed desperately for an equalizer after the break, leaving gaps at the back which Iran exploited in the 29th minute, breaking away from an Afghanistan corner as Gholami picked out prolific pivot Hossein Tayyebi to knock the ball home.

Iran extended its advantage a minute later when a Video Support review adjudged Safari to have fouled Tayyebi inside the semi-circle, with the Iranian captain converting from the spot for his third goal of the competition.

Afghanistan was also awarded a penalty in the 32nd minute, with Reza Hosseinpour reducing the deficit on the re-

bound after his spot kick was saved by Iranian goalkeeper Baqer Mohammadi.

Safari's deflected strike from distance a minute later set up a tense finale as Afghanistan threw bodies forward in search of an equalizer, only to be caught out once again on the counter, with Masoud Yousef (36th minute) and Mahdi Karimi (40th) settling the contest.

"We had some problems with timing and with the court," Shamsaei said after the game, adding, "Both teams have technical players so it was difficult to move the ball given the conditions." "Uzbekistan are one of the best teams in Asia and in the history of the tournament, they have always been part of the last four. It is unfortunate that two of the bigger names have to face each other and one of them will have to leave, but this is part of life and part of the game,"

added the Iranian head coach, whose team began the tournament with a 4-1 win against Malaysia, before defeating Saudi Arabia 2-0 in their second group outing. Earlier on the final day of the group phase, Japan pulled off a second-half fightback to edge four-time runner-up Uzbekistan 2-1 and finish top of Group C, setting up a highly anticipated quarterfinal clash with Afghanistan today.

The other last-eight match will see Group A winner Indonesia take on Group B runner-up Vietnam.

A victory against Uzbekistan would send Shamsaei's men into Thursday's semifinals against either Thailand or Iraq.

Thailand – beaten by Iran in the 2024 final – also enjoyed a perfect run in Group B, while Iraq finished second in Group A after ending level on seven points with the host team.

## Zagreb Open Ranking Series:

## Yazdani aiming for statement return to international action

## Sports Desk

All eyes will be on Hassan Yazdani when the Iranian freestyle wrestling superstar makes his first international appearance since the 2024 Paris Olympics at the opening Ranking Series event of the season, which begins Wednesday in Zagreb, Croatia. Sidelined by a shoulder injury following his setback in the 86kg final in Paris, Yazdani – winner of a national-record 10 world and Olympic medals – marked his return to wrestling mat with two emphatic victories in the Olympic 97kg category on the final day of the Iranian Wrestling

Premier League last December.

With his sights set on an elusive second Olympic gold at Los Angeles 2028, Yazdani will be looking to lay down a marker against the top 97kg contenders, including compatriot Amirali Azarpira, Russian great Abdurashid Sadulaev, American world champion Kyle Snyder, and Bahraini Olympic gold medalist Akhmed Tazhudinov, with a strong showing in the Croatian capital.

With the Zagreb Open serving as a key stage in the national team selection process ahead of this year's major events – including September's World

Championships in Manama – participation in the tournament comes as a relief for Iranian freestyle head coach Pejman Dorostkar and his Greco-Roman counterpart Hassan Rangraz, after their squads were granted late Croatian visas on Sunday amid recent internet restrictions in Iran. Joining Yazdani in the Iranian freestyle squad are Milad Valizadeh, Ali Yahyapour (57kg), Reza Mo'meni (61kg), Peyman Ne'mati (65kg), Sina Khalili, Ebrahim Elahi (70kg), Ali-Akbar Fazli (74kg), Adel Panahian, Sobhan Esmi (79kg), Ali Savadkouhi, Abolfazl Shamsipour (86kg), Abolfazl Rahmani, Mohammad-Mobin Azimi (92kg), and

Morteza Janmohammadzadeh (130kg).

The Greco-Roman competition will get underway on Friday at Arena Zagreb. Pouya Dadmarz, Mohammad Hosseinvand Panahi (55kg), Sajjad Abbaspour, Pouya Nasserpour (60kg), Erfan Jarkani, Meysam Dalkhani (63kg), Ahmadreza Mohsennejad, Mohammad Kamali (67kg), Mohammad-Javad Rezaei (72kg), Ahoura Boveiri, Amirmahdi Saeidinava, Ali Oskou (77kg), Abolfazl Mohammadi, Mohammadreza Mokhtari (82kg), Nasser Alizadeh, and Mohammad-Hadi Seydi (97kg) will represent Iran across eight weight divisions.



● FARSHAD BANDANI/IAWFIR

## Fujairah Open International Taekwondo Championships: Ne'matzadeh strikes gold as Iranian girls bag seven medals

## Sports Desk

Mobina Ne'matzadeh captured the -53kg gold



Iran's Mobina Ne'matzadeh (R) won the women's -53kg gold medal at the 13th Fujairah Open International Taekwondo Championships.  
● WORLD TAEKWONDO

to spearhead Iran's seven-medal haul in the women's competition at the Fujairah Open In-

ternational Taekwondo Championships in the United Arab Emirates. With the tournament serving as a World Taekwondo G2 event and contributing valuable Olympic qualification ranking points, Sunday's triumph at Sheikh Zayed Sport City boosted Ne'matzadeh's chances in her bid for a berth at the Los Angeles 2028 Games, following her bronze-medal finish at Paris 2024.

Elsewhere in the women's competition, teenage sensation Saina Karimi (-46kg) – who claimed an impressive gold at last November's Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh

– along with Kowsar Asaseh (-62kg) and Fati-meh Ahmadi (+73kg), settled for silver medals in their respective weight classes.

Saina Alipour (-46kg), Maryam Malakoutikhah (-49kg), and Islamic Solidarity Games bronze medalist Melika Mirhosseini (-73kg), meanwhile, finished their campaigns with three consolation bronze medals.

A total of 1,709 athletes – including 206 senior female competitors – from 66 countries took part across senior, junior, cadet, and children's divisions at the 13th edition of the prestigious tournament.

## Taremi converts last-gasp spot-kick as Olympiacos rescues point at AEK

## Sports Desk

In a dramatic finish to one of Greek football's biggest rivalries on Sunday night, Iranian striker Mahdi Taremi scored from the spot deep into stoppage time to help Olympiacos salvage a 1-1 draw away at AEK Athens, keeping pace with the home side and PAOK in the Super League title race. The derby at the Allwyn Arena in Nea Filadelfia seemed destined to be won by AEK after Barnabás Varga headed the hosts into the lead in the 59th minute. The Hungarian striker rose well from a Razvan Marin corner to direct the ball past Olympiacos goalkeeper Konstantinos Tzolakis, giving AEK what looked like a crucial advantage.

AEK continued to push for a second goal and even struck the crossbar, before

Olympiacos was awarded a controversial penalty by the VAR in the 16th minute of added time.

Taremi stepped up to take the spot kick and calmly converted, securing a share of the points for the visitors.

The last-gasp equalizer took Taremi's tally to 15 goals and four assists in 25 appearanc-

es across all competitions since the Iranian striker joined the club from Internazionale last summer.

The draw left AEK top of the Greek Super League standings with 45 points, one clear of PAOK and two above third-placed Olympiacos, with both chasers holding a game in hand.



Olympiacos striker Mahdi Taremi (2nd L) celebrates his equalizer with teammates during a 1-1 draw against AEK Athens in Nea Filadelfia, Greece, on February 1, 2026.  
● GEORGIA PANAGOPOULOU/APE-MPA