

AFC Futsal Asian Cup: Iran rallies past Iraq to advance to final

Sports Desk

Iran came from behind twice to defeat Iraq 4-2 on Friday and progress to the AFC Futsal Asian Cup final in Jakarta, Indonesia. Standing between the defending champion and a record-extending 14th title in 18 editions in today's showdown will be Indonesia. The host nation, inspired by a roaring home crowd at the Indonesia Arena, stunned Japan 5-3 after extra time later on Friday to reach a maiden final at the flagship continental event. Iraq, which pulled off a 4-2 upset against Thailand in the quarterfinals, took the lead in the 10th minute, opening the scoring through Salim Kadhim, who dispossessed Saeid Ahmadabbasi on the halfway line before surging forward to find the bottom corner. The lead, however, lasted only a minute, with Ahmadabbasi redeeming himself by delivering a perfect reverse pass to Mohammadhossein Derakhshani, who swept home from close range with Iraq custodian Ibrahim Ahmed rooted.

Iraq restored the advantage in the 13th minute after Ghaith Riyad's free-kick found Salim Kadhim, whose initial effort

was blocked by Iranian keeper Baeer Mohammadi before he stretched out a leg while still on the ground to flick home the rebound.

Iran, yet to trail at halftime in the tournament, ensured it maintained that record as it equalized through a stunning long-range strike from Behrouz Azimi three minutes before the break.

There were chances at both ends after the interval, with Kadhim slicing an effort wide before attempts from Azimi, Salar Aqapour and Amirhossein Gholami failed to beat Ahmed.

Ahmed then did well to tip away Mahdi Mahdikhani's shot in the 26th minute but conceded from the ensuing corner as Hossein Tayyebi arrived first to the ball to flick past the Iraqi keeper for his fifth goal of the competition. Iraq was denied an equalizer in the 30th minute when Dera-khshani came to Iran's rescue, clearing Kadhim's strike off the goal line after Mohammadi had been caught out of position.

Iran spurned an opportunity to widen the gap four minutes later after being awarded a penalty for Tareq Zeyad's foul on Mahdi Karimi, but Tayyebi's effort was saved by Ahmed.

Aqapour, however, struck in



 Salar Aqapour (l) and Behrouz Azimi celebrate Iran's fourth goal during a 4-2 victory over Iraq at the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Jakarta, Indonesia, on February 5, 2026.

AFC

the 40th minute to send Iran through to a sixth successive final.

Despite the victory, Iran head coach Vahid Shamsaei blamed his players' lack of conviction in

front of goal.

"We are in the final, but my expectations of my team's performance were much higher than what they showed today," said the Iranian futsal great, who

lifted the Asian Cup trophy as a player on eight occasions.

"Iranian players are capable of making a much bigger impact, and we can't afford to waste so many chances as we did today."

My team hit the post five times, missed a penalty, and squandered numerous scoring opportunities. That allowed Iraq to score against us from just two chances. I take full responsibility for these technical shortcomings, but we have no right to repeat these mistakes," Shamsaei added.

Shamsaei's opposite number on the Iraqi bench, Joao Carlos, meanwhile, expressed a sense of achievement after his side gave the Asian powerhouse a scare before bowing out of the competition.

"We gave a good fight against a strong team," said Carlos. "We know Iran's quality, but at times we had control. We don't like to lose, but we finish this match with our heads held high."

"We have young players and our league is growing. We have 16 teams, but our players need to continue playing in tournaments of this level."

"Twice we were in the lead, and at those moments we needed to play with more intelligence and tactical awareness. But that comes with experience. We played against an amazing team who know exactly how to control the match – that was the difference."

Zagreb Open Ranking Series: Yazdani stumbles in new weight class as Iran secures 10 medals

Sports Desk

Iranian freestyle wrestler Hassan Yazdani was given a harsh reality check in his pursuit of an elusive second Olympic gold after being outclassed by low-profile American Stephen Buchanan in the 97kg final at the Zagreb Open on Friday.

ries in the morning session to reach the final in a new weight class.

His experience seemed to tell, with his trademark underhooks still evident, and his movement, despite the visible weight gain, appearing largely unaffected. Yazdani scored through stumps, takedowns and go-behinds in typical fashion, con-

ceding just four points across his three bouts. The Iranian great still appeared in control when he took a 2-1 lead against Buchanan at the break, but the American dominated the second period, opening with a four-point suplex. Falling behind 5-2, Yazdani

was forced to attack more aggressively, and that is where opportunities opened up for Buchanan, who scored three takedowns and two stumps to seal a shock 13-3 victory. It was only the 10th senior-level defeat of Yazdani's career and his first loss to an American wrestler other than David

alist last year, 19-year-old Khalili outscored his opponents 42-3 across four bouts, capping an emphatic 70kg campaign with a 10-0 win over Georgia's Akaki Kemertelidze in the final. Reigning world U23 champion Azimi, meanwhile, claimed gold in the 92kg category after senior world champion Trent Hidley – who had beaten the Iranian on criteria (5-5) in their round-robin bout – forfeited the final.

Azimi rebounded from the loss to Hidley by edging Abolfazl Rahmani 11-9 in an all-Iranian encounter, making amends for his final defeat at last December's National Championships, before cruising past American Dustin Plott 11-0 in the semifinals.

Elsewhere across the two-day freestyle competition, Peyman Nemati settled for silver at 65kg after a 3-0 loss to Indian world U23 champion Sujeeet Kalkal in the final. Milad Valizadeh (57kg), Reza Momeni (61kg), Aliakbar Fazli (74kg), Adel Panahian (79kg), Ali Savadkouhi (86kg) and Morteza Janmohammazadeh (130kg) added six bronze medals to Iran's tally as the country finished runner-up in the team standings with 180 points – 45 behind the United States, which topped the table with five golds, three silvers and five bronzes.



 Iranian freestyle wrestler Hassan Yazdani (r) is seen in action against American Stephen Buchanan in the 97kg final at the Zagreb Open in Zagreb, Croatia, on February 5, 2026.

Making his first international appearance since his 86kg final setback at the Paris Olympics 18 months ago, Yazdani – winner of a national-record 10 world and Olympic medals – appeared to be back to his familiar best as he cruised to three superiority victo-

ries in the morning session to reach the final in a new weight class. The Iranian great still appeared in control when he took a 2-1 lead against Buchanan at the break, but the American dominated the second period, opening with a four-point suplex. Falling behind 5-2, Yazdani

Taylor. It also marked the first technical-superiority defeat of his storied career. Iran still enjoyed a taste of glory through young prodigies Sina Khalili and Mobin Azimi at the opening Ranking Series event of the season. A world U23 silver med-

Shahrdari falls to Al Wahda in West Asia Super League

Sports Desk

Iranian champions Shahrdari Gorgan surrendered a first-quarter lead to suffer a 101-92 loss to Al Wahda SC in the FIBA West Asia Super League in Ghazir, Lebanon, on Friday.

The Croatian forward

shots in the closing minutes to ensure they left Ghazir with the victory secured.

Jones finished with 23 points, while Justice added 23 of his own, as the new trio carried much of the scoring load, supported by



 Al Wahda guard Yousef Abdullah (2) makes an attempt during a victory over Shahrdari Gorgan at the FIBA West Asia Super League in Ghazir, Lebanon, on February 5, 2026.

FIBA

The Syrian Basketball League outfit turned things around in the second quarter before finishing strongly to move into the win column after losing its first five outings of the season, keeping its semifinal hopes alive ahead of next month's playoffs.

They did so at the expense of a side they were scheduled to face last November in Tehran, a meeting that was ultimately cancelled by league officials due to circumstances beyond basketball.

Al Wahda received a major

scored 11 of his points in the second period, nearly matching Shahrdari's output by himself as he spearheaded a 28-15 run to give Al Wahda a 54-48 lead heading into halftime. Shahrdari briefly regained the lead early in the third quarter, but the momentum quickly swung back in Al Wahda's favor, with Proleta combining with Falando Jones to push the margin to 76-67 just before the end of the period.

From there, Al Wahda remained in control, with James Justice Jr. and company knocking down key

solid contributions from Bilal Atli, Yousef Abdullah and CJ Maran.

Piter Girgoorian led Shahrdari with 25 points as the Iranian side failed to bounce back from last week's defeat to BC Astana in Kazakhstan, slipping to a second consecutive loss. Gorgan fell to 3-3 but remained third in the standings.

Amirhossein Yazarloo chipped in with 20 points, while Jordan Hamilton recorded a double-double with 14 points and 10 rebounds for the two-time WASL runners-up.