

## Sports Desk

Iran's bid for a historic place in the World Cup knockout stage ended in vain despite an unbeaten run in Group G after Austria and Algeria played to a dramatic 3-3 draw on the final day of the group phase.

Austria, which had led twice, appeared to be heading out when Riyad Mahrez scored his second goal of the game to put Algeria 3-2 ahead in the 93rd minute.

At that point, Iran was on course to qualify as one of the eight best third-placed teams.

But Sasa Kalajdzic headed home a 96th-minute equalizer – literally the last touch of the ball in the group stage – to secure a point in the Group J meeting in Kansas City as both sides advanced to the round of 32.

Iran, meanwhile, which had a late winner ruled out by VAR for a marginal offside in Friday's 1-1 draw with Egypt, was left to rue stoppage-time heartbreak once again, joining South Korea, Scotland and Uruguay in crashing out of the expanded 48-team tournament.

Three draws in as many games had seen Team Melli finish behind Belgium and Egypt in the group table, leaving head coach Amir Qalenoee and his players reliant on favorable results elsewhere to secure a historic knockout-stage berth.

The anxious seven-hour wait at Iran's World Cup camp in Tijuana began with the Group L clash between Croatia and Ghana, whose head coach, Carlos Queiroz, previously managed Iran, in Philadelphia.

A victory for the African side would have sent Iran through, but the Portuguese coach, who failed to lead Team Melli to the knockout stage at the previous three World Cups, did little to help his former employers' cause as Ni-

## FIFA World Cup: Late heartbreak sends unbeaten Iran packing



Iran's Mahdi Taremi is dejected after the World Cup Group G game against Egypt in Seattle, Washington, U.S., on June 26, 2026.  
● LINDSEY WASSON/AP

kola Vlastic's 83rd-minute header secured a 2-1 win for the Europeans, who had trailed Iran on goal difference in the third-placed teams table before kickoff.

Next came the Group K clash between DR Congo and Uzbekistan, with DR Congo needing all three points to overtake Iran.

Uzbekistan, which had nothing to play for after back-to-back defeats, appeared to have done its fellow Central Asian side a huge favor after Eldor Shomurodov opened the scoring in the 10th minute. But DR Congo staged a late comeback to win 3-1 and finish third in the group with four points.

Although Austria and Algeria entered their match knowing a draw would send both teams through, there was little sign of a repeat of the 'Disgrace of Gijón.'

In that infamous match at the 1982 World Cup in Spain, West Germany beat Austria 1-0 in a group-stage game in which both teams simply went through the motions, knowing that result would send them both through at Algeria's expense.

This time, however, the match was played in the right spirit throughout, with the intensity only easing in the closing minutes before a chaotic period of stoppage time.

The final whistle at Arrowhead Stadium marked one last painful moment for Iran, which missed out on the round of 32 by a single place, in a World Cup campaign overshadowed by a politically charged buildup amid the country's conflict with co-host United States.

Throughout the tournament, Qalenoee and his players complained of numerous logistical problems, including travel restrictions, visa denials for support staff and hurried departures from the United States after matches.

Speaking to reporters after Iran's final group game, captain Mahdi Taremi described the tournament

as a logistical "disaster" and called on world governing body FIFA to resolve the situation.

"FIFA, they have to solve every problem here but unfortunately they couldn't stop, since the beginning," said the Iranian talisman, adding that FIFA President Gianni Infantino had visited the Iran dressing room after their opening game and told the team: "It's just the beginning." Yet, "the group stage finishes tomorrow and we don't have our logistics people here."

Taremi also argued that Iran's presence at the tournament was no longer welcome, asking: "Who wants to help us? Who? If they

want us to be out – OK, let's (be) out, let's get out. But that's not fair."

Qalenoee, meanwhile, who previously described Iran as the "most oppressed" team at the World Cup, urged FIFA "not to let the hosts treat teams and players the same way in the future. I hope Mr. Infantino will actually stand up to such behavior."

After its elimination was confirmed, the team released a statement expressing its "heartfelt appreciation to the wonderful people of Mexico, especially the beautiful city of Tijuana."

"Leaving Tijuana is truly difficult for all of us," the statement said.



Iran's Diana Rahimi (3rd) poses with her women's 60kg gold medal at the SCO Member States Wushu Sanda Championships in Anlu, China, on June 28, 2026.  
● iranwushufed.ir

## Iranians win four golds at SCO sanda tournament

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Iran's national sanda squad enjoyed a successful campaign at the SCO Member States Wushu Sanda Championships in Anlu, China, winning four gold and four silver medals across the men's and women's events.

Diana Rahimi claimed Iran's only women's gold, defeating her Indian opponent 2-0 in the 60kg final. She had reached the title bout by overcoming a Kazakh rival who had previously finished

third at the World Junior Championships.

The Iranian men's team added three more titles. Mahdi Kermani captured the 60kg gold with a straight-round victory over his Uzbek opponent after earlier defeating rivals from Cambodia and Kyrgyzstan. Sohail Mousavi secured the 75kg title after his Indian opponent, the Asian silver medalist, was disqualified in the opening round of the final. Reza Karami completed Iran's gold-medal haul by beat-

ing his Macau rival in two rounds to win the 80kg division.

Sogand Sinkaei, meanwhile, finished runner-up in the women's 52kg division after losing to a Chinese opponent in the final, having previously defeated rivals from Macau and India. Sogand Salimi also settled for silver in the women's 56kg category despite winning the opening round of her final against a Chinese opponent. She had advanced after her Kazakh

rival was disqualified in the semifinals.

In the men's events, Shoja Panahi claimed silver in the 65kg division after falling to a Chinese opponent in the final, while Erfan Moharrami also took silver in the 70kg class following a loss to another Chinese rival.

The two-day tournament featured athletes from China, Iran, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Hong Kong, Macau, Cambodia and India.

## Iran eyes another win against Syria in FIBA World Cup qualifier

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Iran's national basketball team will face Syria today in a rescheduled 2027 FIBA World Cup Asian Qualifier, aiming to strengthen its path toward the next round and extend its dominant record against its regional rival. The Group C encounter, originally scheduled for March 1 in Beirut, was postponed by four months after FIBA suspended several fixtures due to regional security concerns. The game will now be played just days before the start of the third qualification win-

dow, which begins on Thursday and features 16 Asian teams divided into four groups.

Iran enters the delayed fixture with two wins and one defeat from its opening three qualifying matches. The national team opened its campaign with back-to-back victories over Iraq, winning 94-68 and 86-71 in the first window, before suffering a 73-60 loss to Jordan in its opening game of the second window in February.

Those results leave Iran second in Group C with five points, one behind unbeaten Jordan, which

is on a perfect three-win run. Jordan will also play its postponed second-window game against Iraq today.

Although a victory over Syria may not immediately lift Iran to the top of the table, it would significantly strengthen the team's position in the race for qualification to next year's global showpiece in Qatar and provide valuable momentum ahead of the third window.

History also favors the Iranian side. Ranked 28th in the latest FIBA world rankings, Iran sits well ahead of Syria, which is ranked 74th. Iran has

won eight of the previous nine meetings between the two teams, including a commanding 82-43 victory in their most recent encounter during the group stage of the 2025 FIBA Asia Cup.

Syria, meanwhile, has struggled for consistency in recent international competition. The team has managed just one victory in its last five matches, which came against Iraq during the second qualifying window. Its other four games ended in defeats to Guam, Jordan twice, and Iran.

The Syrians will look to challenge Iran with the

help of naturalized American guard Donte McGill, who chipped in 34 points in his team's victory over Iraq. Nevertheless, Iran will enter the contest as the clear favorite, seeking another convincing result against a familiar opponent and an important step toward World Cup qualification.

Iran will take on Jordan in a crunch fixture on July 2, before concluding the first-round group phase against Syria in Amman three days later.

The top three in each of the four groups will progress to the second round of the qualifiers.

