

AVC Men's Volleyball Continental Championship:

Iran holds off Taipei fightback, sets up last-four date with Australia



Iranian middle blocker Mohammad Valizadeh (27) hits a spike during a 3-1 quarterfinal victory over Chinese Taipei at the AVC Men's Volleyball Continental Championship in Fukuoka, Japan, on Sept. 11, 2026.

QA AVC

Sports Desk

Iran overcame a third-set wobble to beat Chinese Taipei 3-1 (25-19, 25-19, 21-25, 25-18) on Friday and advance to the AVC Men's Volleyball Continental Championship semifinals in Fukuoka, Japan. Pouria Hosseinkhanzadeh finished with a game-high 24 points, with fellow outside hitter Morteza Sharifi, as well as prolific opposites Amin Esmaeilnejad and Ali Hajipour, adding 12 apiece, as Iran tallied 68 points from attacks, seven blocks and four service points, while benefiting from 17 opposition errors. Outside hitter Chang Yu-Chen led Chinese Taipei with 18 points, while Wen Yi-Kai and Chang Yu-Sheng also reached double figures, chipping in 14 and 11, respectively. Standing between Iran and a fourth successive final ap-

pearance in today's semifinal will be Australia, which managed a tough 3-0 (25-22, 26-24, 25-19) straight-sets win over Thailand on Thursday, outplaying Thailand mostly at the net with a 10-4 advantage in kill blocks. Outside hitter Lorenzo Pope was the top scorer of the match, contributing 17 points, spiking at a 56 percent success rate and adding two kill blocks and an ace. Opposite Lincoln Alexander Williams chipped in with another 15 points, including two aces and a block. As if Iran needed extra motivation to chase a fifth continental crown in eight editions, direct Olympic qualification is up for grabs in Fukuoka, with the champion securing a berth at the multi-sport extravaganza in Los Angeles in two years. However, with defending champion Japan regarded as the ultimate favorite to punch the L.A. ticket on

home soil, Iran will have to deliver a much-improved performance from its disappointing Volleyball Nations League run in July in a likely showdown with the formidable hosts.

Entering the event on the back of nine defeats – including a 3-2 setback against Japan – in 12 outings in the VNL preliminaries, Iran defeated both New Zealand and India in straight sets before claiming a hard-fought 3-1 win (25-23, 23-25, 25-22, 25-23) against China on Wednesday to progress to the quarterfinals as the Pool B winner.

China surrendered a first-set lead to be stunned by South Korea 3-1 (17-25, 25-21, 25-22, 29-27) in the other quarterfinal on Thursday.

The two semifinalists in Fukuoka will be joined by the bronze medalist in qualifying for the rebranded FIVB Volleyball World Cup next year in Poland.

Asian Cadet, Junior & U21 Karate Championship:

Girls' glory inspires Iran to team title



Sports Desk

Iranian girls accounted for nine of the 11 gold medals as the country collected 31 medals to secure the team title at the Asian Cadet, Junior & U21 Karate Championship in Amman, Jordan. Iranian girls stole the show in the U21 women's kumite category on Thursday, bagging four golds and one bronze across five weight classes to bring the curtain down on a glorious campaign for the country in the Jordanian capital. Ghazal Fat'hi claimed the top prize in the -50kg event with an 11-1 victory over Saudi Arabia's Joud Myajan in the final, while Fatemeh Ja'farnejad defeated the host's Balsam Al-Saaidh 4-1 for the -55kg gold. Zahra Rezazadeh capped off her dominant -61kg campaign, during which she did not concede a single point across three bouts, with a

5-0 win against Macau's Lo Pui Cheng in the final. Mahla Sedaqat added a fourth gold on the final day in the +68kg division, beating India's Kalyani Vishwakarma 9-0 in the final. Boshra Imani, meanwhile, settled for a consolation bronze in the -68kg class, bouncing back from a semi-final setback against India's Anshika Bhardwaj to beat Jordan's Shadi Said Al Najjar in the third-place bout. Elsewhere, Abolfazl Tamadonzadeh added a silver to Iran's medal haul in the men's U21 contests following a 5-1 loss to Tajikistan's Makhosatullo Muminov in the -55kg final. Mahdi Choubakzan finished with a bronze in the -67kg class, courtesy of a 4-3 win against Chinese Taipei's Huang Tsu-en in the third-place bout. Abolfazl Hamdamjou (-60kg), Erfan Koshaqideh (-75kg), Vahab Shahmir (-84kg), and

Taha Yousefi (+84kg) were the other Iranians in men's U21 action but missed out on the podium in their respective events. Nirvana Razzaqi (-47kg), Baran Shadfar (-54kg), and Dina Karimi (-61kg) were the Iranian gold medalists in the girls' cadet category, with Abolfazl Arab-Yaqoubi (-63kg) and Hamidreza Rezayati (-70kg) triumphing in the boys' competition. In the junior kumite, meanwhile, Iran's sole gold medal came in the women's -53kg class, where Setayesh Qaneifard defeated Ramah Khayyat in the final. Iran was also not short of glory in the kata contests, spearheaded by Dina Safari, who outscored Iraq's Lanya Ahmed in the cadet girls' final. Saudi Arabia tallied 23 medals, including eight golds, to finish runner-up to Iran in the team standings, with Jordan in third place with seven golds.

Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games:

No room for another stumble after Iran falls to Qatar in basketball opener

Sports Desk

Iran's men's basketball team was left with no room for further slip-ups in its next two Group B games after getting off to a losing start at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games, suffering a 59-53 defeat against Qatar on Thursday. After an even opening quarter at the Aichi International Arena, Qatar outscored Iran 21-11 in the second to establish a 31-21 half-time lead. Iran fought back in the final period but could not erase the deficit, extending its losing streak after back-to-back setbacks against New Zealand and the Philippines in the FIBA World Cup qualifiers less than a fortnight ago. American-born guard Michael Lewis scored a game-high 21 points for Qatar, with Dejan Janjic adding 11. Matin Aqajanzpour led Iran with 15 points, while Piter Girgoorian finished with 10. Despite having several players capable of shooting from long range, Iran's poor three-point shooting ultimately proved costly. Iran attempted 36 three-pointers but converted only nine of them, finishing with a 25 percent success rate. More than 65 percent of the team's field-goal attempts came from beyond the arc, highlighting its heavy reliance on perimeter shooting and making it easier for Qatar to defend against a largely one-dimensional offense. Iran was also inefficient from inside the arc. The team attempted only 19 two-point shots during the game, making six for a 32 percent shooting rate. Qatar, meanwhile, made greater use of drives and play around the basket, converting 16 of its 30 two-point attempts for 53 percent and gaining a clear advantage in

the paint.

Iran's struggles at the free-throw line added to its problems in a game decided by just six points. The Iranians made only 14 of 24 free throws, leaving 10 points at the line and missing a valuable opportunity to close the gap or potentially turn the game around. The statistical battle was otherwise relatively even. Qatar narrowly won the rebounding contest 36-34, while Iran had slight advantages in assists and steals, 12-11 and 12-10, respectively. Qatar also committed more turnovers, 20 compared with Iran's 18.

day before concluding its group campaign against Jordan on Sunday, knowing that another defeat would leave its hopes of advancing to the quarterfinals hanging by a thread.

Greek head coach Sotiris Manolopoulos's side, however, will look to build on its recent success against its next two opponents.

Iran produced an epic fightback to overcome a 21-point deficit and defeat Chinese Taipei 78-75 in a thrilling quarterfinal clash at last year's FIBA Asia Cup in Saudi Arabia.

Iran met Jordan as recently as July at the preliminary stage of the



Qatar's Mike Lewis (2) dribbles past Iran's Mohammad Heidari in a Group B game in the men's basketball event at the 2026 Asian Games in Nagoya, Japan, on Sept. 10, 2026.

AFP

However, the decisive difference came in overall shooting efficiency. Iran made just 15 of 55 field-goal attempts for a dismal 27 percent, compared with Qatar's 43 percent. Chasing a fifth medal in six Asian Games editions, Iran will resume action against Chinese Taipei to-

FIBA World Cup qualifiers, where Manolopoulos's men comprehensively won 67-49 in Amman before completing a 5-1 run to progress to the second round, making amends for the 73-60 setback against their familiar West Asian foe earlier in the qualifiers in February. Chinese Taipei narrowly defeated Jordan 83-80 later on Thursday. The top two teams in each of the three groups will be joined by the two best third-placed teams in the quarterfinals.