

Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games:

Iran rallies past China to bag basketball bronze on Day 1



Sports Desk

The Iranian men's basketball team got the country off the mark at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan, coming from behind to beat China 79-70 in the bronze medal contest on Sunday.

Power forward Matin Aqajpour spearheaded Iran with 21 points, including 12 from beyond the arc, while Piter Girgoorian and Mahdi Jafari also reached double figures, chipping in 15 and 10 points, respectively.

Veteran forward and team captain Arsalan Kazemi, meanwhile, played his part with four points and 15 rebounds, as Iran – knocked out in the quarterfinals in Hangzhou 2022 – secured a fifth men's basketball medal in six editions of the Asian Games, having settled for silver in 2014 and 2018.

Iran made a flying start, taking an 8-4 lead in the opening minutes. China quickly regained its rhythm, however, and took control of the game, closing the first quarter 17-12 ahead.

Aqajpour's impressive three-point shooting kept Iran within striking distance during the opening 10 minutes and prevented China from building a more substantial lead.

Iran came out with a completely different attacking approach in the second quarter. Mobin Sheikhi's accurate shooting, combined with Kazemi and Mohammad-Mahdi Heydari's dominance under the basket and intelligent playmaking, breathed new life into the Iranian offense.

Iran's strong team play earned it a 17-14 advantage in the second quarter, reducing China's halftime lead to 31-29. The third quarter began at a frenetic

pace, with both sides trading baskets. Jafari's three-pointer tied the game at 34-34 before Aqajpour produced another decisive spell, scoring a mid-range jumper and following it with a three-pointer to give Iran five straight points.

Iran led 42-38 with five minutes remaining in the quarter. Salar Monji then added two crucial points in a physical battle under the basket to extend the lead to 46-42.

Iran dominated the remainder of the quarter, outscoring China 26-15 to take a 55-46 advantage into the final period. The Iranian momentum continued in the fourth quarter as disciplined defense and well-organized attacks stretched the lead to 13 points.

With China throwing everything forward in an attempt to turn the game around, Aqajpour responded with another three-pointer. Arman Zangeneh then hit from beyond the arc with six minutes remaining to keep Iran nine points ahead, although China immediately answered with a three-pointer to cut the deficit to six. Iran suddenly found itself under severe pressure after a series of individual mistakes allowed China to close the gap to just one point with less than two minutes remaining.

But once again, Aqajpour stepped up at a crucial moment. He drew a foul on a brilliant individual play and completed a three-point and-one, giving Iran four vital points and restoring a four-point cushion.

Iran then held its nerve in the closing stages, with its players extending the advantage to nine points and securing the country's first medal of the Asian Games. Iran's impressive performance was



Iranian players celebrate after winning the men's basketball bronze medal at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games at Aichi International Arena in Nagoya, Japan, on Sept. 20, 2026.
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reflected beyond the final score, as the team made 15 three-pointers and dominated China across several statistical categories, including rebounds, steals, assists and blocks.

Football

Elsewhere on the official first day of action at the multi-sport event, Iran's U23 side shared the spoils with China in a goalless draw in the men's football event.

Iran enjoyed a slight advantage in possession during the first half, with Hossein Abdi's side creating several half-chances through efforts from outside the box.

The game, however, turned on its head after the break, as China started on the front foot and went close to breaking the deadlock in the 49th minute, only to see Wu Xi's sublime volley from the edge of the box go just wide of the crossbar.

Sunday's draw at Wave Stadium Kariya saw Iran, which had beaten the United Arab Emirates 3-1 in its opening game, remain atop Group B with four points, thanks to a superior goal difference over China.

Chasing a first medal at the Asian Games since the Doha 2006 bronze, four-time gold medalist Iran will con-

clude the group stage against North Korea on Wednesday.

The top two teams in each of the four groups will advance to the quarterfinals.

Table tennis

In table tennis, Iran got off to a winning start in the men's team event, defeating Pakistan 3-0 in Group F. Teenage prodigy Benyamin Faraji got the Iranian trio off the mark with a 3-0 win (11-5, 11-3, 11-2) over Taha Bilal, before Nima Alamian came out victorious in straight games (11-5, 11-8, 11-3) against Muhammad Khan.

Noshad Alamian swept Abbas Khan 3-0 (11-6, 11-5, 11-2) to seal the victory for the Iranian team ahead of an encounter with India later in the day. The Alamian brothers also featured in the Iranian trio that won an impressive bronze in the previous edition in Hangzhou in 2022 – the country's first table tennis medal at the Asian Games in 65 years – and then teamed up to repeat the success in the men's doubles competition.

Beach volleyball

The Iranian pair of Abolhassan Khakizadeh and Amir-Ali Ghalehnovi opened their beach volleyball campaign in emphatic fashion, sweeping

Maldives' Naseem Adam and Sajid Ismail in straight sets (21-12, 21-14).

The Iranian duo will resume the preliminary phase against Bangladesh's Md Ali Al Murammar Rakesh Shaikat and Ratul Ahmed in Pool H today, with Abbas Pourasgari and Alireza Aqajani taking on Joninho Fernandes Xavier and Joel Savio Valente of Timor-Leste in their Pool F opener.

Karate

Iranian karateka Fatemeh Sadeqi was unfortunate to finish empty-handed in the women's individual kata event after being outscored 4-1 by Chinese Taipei's Chien Hui-hsuan in the bronze medal contest.

A six-time bronze medalist at the Asian Championships, Sadeqi defeated Thailand's Monsicha Sakulrattanatar by unanimous decision in her first outing, but fell to Grace Lau of Hong Kong by the same result in the semifinals. Lau settled for silver following a 5-0 defeat to the host nation's Ono Maho in the final.

Sadeqi will still have a shot at glory when she represents the country's trio alongside Zeinab Hosseini and Sepideh Amini in the women's team kata event, starting with a quarterfinal clash against Thailand.



The Iranian delegation parades at the opening ceremony of the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games at Paloma Mizuho Stadium in Nagoya, Japan, on Sept. 19, 2026.
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FIDE Chess Olympiad 2026:

Iran men back to winning ways, women beaten by Serbia

Sports Desk

Iran were back to winning ways in the Open competition at the FIDE Chess Olympiad 2026 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, defeating Moldova 4:0 in Round 4 on Saturday.

Having shared the spoils with Belgium in a 2:2 stalemate in the previous round, Iran's four-man team moved to seven points in a tight Open standings table – one behind leaders China – thanks to a third victo-

ry in four outings.

Mohammad-Amin Tabatabaei opened Iran's account with a victory over fellow grandmaster Jegor Lashkin, before Bardiya Daneshvar defeated Ivan Schitco to double the advantage.

Mahdi Gholami and Arash Daghighi sealed the fourth-round win for the Iranian quartet, which is captained by Saeid Pirmaleki, coming out on top against FIDE masters Semion Sapocinic and Dmitrii Gubin, respectively.

Iran had begun its Open campaign with a 4:0 victory over Mozambique before defeating Bolivia 3½:½ in the second round.

The women's fourth round, however, was one to forget for the Iranian team, which had its winning streak snapped by a 4:0 loss to Serbia.

Mobina Alinasab fell to International Master Teodora Injac in the first matchup, before Melika Mohammadi drew with Alina Bivol.

Mitra Asgharzadeh's setback against Elif Mehmed was then followed by Parva Behzad-Nazif's loss to Jovana Srdanovic, leaving the Iranian women on six points – two behind leaders USA.

Iran's women had outscored Cyprus 4:0 in the first round before defeating Sri Lanka 3:1 and France 3:1, respectively.

The 46th edition of the biennial Chess Olympiad will conclude with Round 11 on September 27.

