

Iranian players celebrate a goal during a quarterfinal win against Saudi Arabia at the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup in in Phang Nga, Thailand, on November 25, 2026.
AFC

AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup:

Iran hits six past Saudis to march into semis

Sports Desk

Iran strode confidently into the semifinals of the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup in Phang Nga, Thailand, with a 6-0 victory over Saudi Arabia on Wednesday.
Chasing a record-extending fifth title in 12 editions, the two-time defending champions, who thoroughly controlled proceedings, will meet either Bahrain or Lebanon in Friday's last-four tie.
Mohammadali Mokhtari put Iran ahead two minutes into the match, connecting with goalkeeper Seyed Mohammad Dastan's long throw to head home confidently from close range past a lunging Hassan Al Eid.
Ali Mirshekari saw his attempt sail over the bar, while Sobhan Faleh's overhead kick was parried by Al Eid before Reza Dayeri rounded off the first period with a first-time effort that flew into the stands, as Ali Naderi's men dominated without breaking a sweat.
Ahmed Al Hamami volleyed wide in the 16th minute as Saudi Arabia attempted to make their presence felt after the restart, before the defender sent his free-kick over the bar two minutes later.
Iran doubled its advantage in the 18th minute through a blistering free-kick from Mirshekari that gave Al Eid little chance to react, and added a third four minutes later when Ali Nazem smashed Dastan's lob into the bottom-left corner with a first-time effort.
Davoud Baghdabadi then forced Al Eid into a diving save with a fierce overhead kick in the 28th minute, while Faleh and Movahed Mohammadpour also saw their efforts saved by Saleh Al Ajami, who had replaced the injured Al Eid.
Al Ajami was beaten in the 33rd minute, however, when Baghdabadi dispossessed Saudi Arabia's Ramzi Dakman and fired into the bottom-right corner.
The goalkeeper was beaten again a minute later when he failed to properly handle Mokhtari's overhead kick.
Faleh then completed the scoring with a free-kick that struck the sand before bouncing beyond Al Ajami to send the four-time champions into the semifinals.
Wednesday's result marked Iran's fourth successive victory at the competition after Naderi's team had comprehensively defeated two-time semifinalists Lebanon 7-2 on Monday to conclude the group stage with a perfect record, having earlier beaten Afghanistan 9-2 and Vietnam 10-2 in Group B.

ITTF World Youth Championships:

Faraji enjoys historic win in U19 doubles quarters

Sports Desk

Iran's Benyamin Faraji made history at the ITTF World Youth Championships in Istanbul by reaching the semifinals of the U19 boys' doubles event, guaranteeing the country its maiden medal in the age group in the competition's 23-edition history.
Ranked No. 11 in the latest ITTF boys' U19 rankings, the Iranian prodigy teamed up with world No. 7 Alan Kurmangaliyev of Kazakhstan to edge out India's Abhinandh Pradhivadhi and Priyanuj Bhattacharyya in Tuesday's quarterfinal, rallying from behind to win 3-2 (11-9, 8-11, 7-11, 18-16, 11-9) in just over 54 minutes.
The emotion of securing a guaranteed medal proved too much for Faraji, who fell to the floor and rolled onto his back after India's Pradhivadhi failed to return his fierce backhand on match point.
"I have the best feeling right now," Faraji said. "I made history for my country, but this path was very hard. The game was very difficult. I am just happy to make my compatriots happy. We will do our best to win the final," added the Iranian, who also won a historic bronze in the U15 category two years ago in Helsingborg, Sweden – the country's first-ever international medal in the sport.
Standing between the pair, coached by Iranian Miad Mokayef, and a place in the final in Wednesday's semifinal are South Korea's Kim Daehwan and Lee Hyeondo.
Faraji and Kurmangaliyev had opened their campaign with a 3-2 victory over Poland's Samuel Michna and Patryk Zyworonek in the round of 16. The South Korean duo, meanwhile, defeated Chinese Taipei's Hung Che-Yen and Lin Chin-Ting 3-1 to reach the semifinals.
Faraji was also part of the Iranian trio that missed out on a semifinal spot in the U19 boys' team event after suffering a 3-0 defeat to China on Sunday.
Mohammad Habibi fell to a straight-game loss (11-8, 11-2, 15-13) against Wen Ruibo, before Faraji was beaten by Li Hechen, who came from behind twice to win 3-2 (9-11, 12-10, 5-11, 11-6, 11-4).
Arshia Lorestani completed Iran's disappointing quarterfinal outing with a 3-0 defeat (11-9, 11-3, 11-6) against Zhou Guanhong. Faraji will chase another singles milestone when he opens his U19 campaign against the host nation's Kenan Kahraman, who was part of the Turkish duo that won silver in the U15 doubles event last year.
Faraji's compatriot Faraz Shakiba, meanwhile, will take on world No. 21 Ukyo Kobayashi of Japan in the U15 boys' round of 32.



Iran's Benyamin Faraji (R) celebrates with Kazakhstan's Alan Kurmangaliyev after their quarterfinal victory in the U19 boys' doubles event at the ITTF World Youth Championships in Istanbul, Turkey, on November 24, 2026.
ITTF

How realistic is Iran's six-quota target for LA28 athletics?

Sports Desk

Iranian Athletics Federation President Ehsan Haddadi has set a target of securing four to six quota places for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games, but the ambitious goal faces a major test given the demanding entry standards and the growing importance of world rankings in the qualification process.
Iranian athletics fell short of its target of 10 medals at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in September, finishing with four, but the country's campaign could hardly be described as a failure.
Despite falling short of initial expectations, Iranian athletes produced several impressive performances and achieved significant milestones.
Zahra Zarei made history when she clocked 52.38 seconds to claim silver in the women's 400m – Iran's first-ever medal in women's athletics at the continental showpiece.
Mohammadreza Tayyebi, meanwhile, spearheaded the medal haul by winning gold in the men's shot put, setting a new Asian Games record of 20.81m in the process. His triumph ended Iran's 52-year wait for an Asian Games medal in the discipline, ensuring that the week-long campaign at Paloma Mizuho Stadium delivered some significant achievements despite falling short of the federation's medal target.
The federation has now shifted its focus from Nagoya to Los Angeles, with Olympic qualification the main priority as the 2028 Games draw closer.
During a recent meeting with the president of the National Olympic Committee, Haddadi, whose silver medal in the men's discus throw at London 2012 remains Iran's sole athletics medal in Olympic history, outlined plans to secure between four and six Olympic quota places. He also expressed hope that at least two Iranian athletes would reach the finals of their respective events at the 2028 Games.
However, achieving that target will be far from straightforward under the new qualification system. World Athletics has announced the entry standards and qualification regulations for the athletics program at LA28, which will feature 23 events each for men and women, as well as the 4x100m and 4x400m mixed relays. A closer look at the requirements highlights the challenges facing Iranian athletes.
Under the new system, approximately 40 percent of the available places will be allocated through direct qualification standards, with the remaining 60 percent awarded based on world rankings. The shift places even greater emphasis on athletes' consistent participation in international competitions and their ability to collect ranking points.



Iran's Mohammadreza Tayyebi competes in the men's shot put event at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in Japan on September 26, 2026.
AINAGOC

Iranian records fall short

A comparison of the entry standards with the current performances of Iranian athletes also highlights the gap that needs to be bridged.
In the men's 100m, for instance, the qualifying standard stands at 9.93 seconds, while the women's mark is 10.96 seconds.
The men's shot put standard has been set at 21.50 meters, some 70 centimeters beyond Tayyebi's record-breaking mark in Nagoya. In the men's discus throw, athletes must reach 67.20m, well beyond the 60.32m achieved by Sadeq Samimi on his way to bronze at the Asian Games.
These figures suggest that Iran cannot rely on its athletes' current performances to secure direct qualification. Significant improvements will be required in the time remaining before the Games.

Demanding road through rankings

The ranking route presents another challenge, as securing a competitive position depends on taking part in high-profile international meetings and accumulating enough points.
Without targeted and well-organized participation in overseas competitions, Iranian athletes will struggle to establish themselves in the world rankings and remain in contention for Olympic places.
To make its four-to-six quota target a realistic prospect, the federation must identify the events in which Iran has the strongest chances and draw up specific preparation plans for the athletes involved.
Providing suitable training conditions, improving performances and ensuring regular participation in international competitions must all be priorities if Iranian athletes are to have enough opportunities to enter the Olympic qualification race.

From Olympic promises to reality

Aichi-Nagoya 2026 demonstrated that Iranian athletics still has the potential to produce significant achievements. However, translating success at the Asian Games into competitive performances on the Olympic stage is a considerably greater challenge.
The question now is whether Haddadi and his federation can turn their ambitious target into tangible results through effective planning and preparation, and send a competitive Iranian team to Los Angeles in 2028.