AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup:

Naderi hails 'deserved' title as Iran completes historic three-peat

Sports Desk

Head coach Ali Naderi said a record-extending fifth title at the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup was nothing more than his team deserved after Iran came from behind to beat Japan 3-1 in Saturday's final in Phang Nga, Thailand.

Ali Mirshekari's 17th-minute strike canceled out Yohei Otsuki's first period opener for Japan, before Mahdi Shirmohammadi and Movahed Mohammadpour added two late goals in the third period as Iran became the first team to lift the trophy at the flagship continental showpiece on three successive occasions.

The result also marked a seventh final defeat for three-time champion Japan in 12 editions, three of which have come against Saturday's opponent.

Naderi, who was part of the squad when Iran won its maiden title in 2013, was pleased to see months of hard work and preparation pay off with the latest triumph.

"We organized a beach soccer Premier League in our country, held training camps and played friendly matches before this tournament," he said. "I believe our team delivered its best performance and we deserved to become champions."

"We were caught by surprise in the first period because Japan performed differently from what we had expected. They have improved considerably.

"However, we have many experienced players, and we tried to adapt to the situation as quickly as possible, adjust our approach, impose ourselves on the game and turn the result around."

Naderi was also full of praise for his players for their resolute mindset and determination during 11 days of action in Phang Nga.

"We played very well throughout the tournament, and this is due to the players fighting with all their hearts for their country and performing to 100 percent of their ability," said the Iranian, whose team scored 42 goals and conceded eight in a five-game perfect run to the title.

Having settled for a third-place finish last year, Japan started on the front foot at Ban Nam Khem Beach Arena, with Yuki Kibune hitting the crossbar before Otsuki got his team off the mark in the third minute, directing Ryota Morioka's pass beyond an out-of-position Seyyed Mohammad Dastan.



Iranian players and coaching staff celebrate lifting the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup trophy in Phang Nga, Thailand, on November 28, 2026.
● FFIRI

Kibune headed Shirmohammadi's attempt off the line in the ninth minute as the Central Asian side began to find its rhythm, with Reza Dayeri blasting the ball over moments later and Mohammadpour going off target in the 11th minute with a thunderous free-kick.

Japan then slowed the tempo by holding on to the ball, with Takuya Akaguma closing the first period by sending his acrobatic effort wide of the left post.

Mohammadali Mokhtari's overhead kick bounced off the left post a minute into the restart, with the striker hitting the opposite post with his next attempt before Iran was awarded a penalty. Mirshekari slammed home the rebound after Takeru Furusato saved his spot-kick.

Furusato acquitted himself well with a stunning save from Dayeri in the 27th minute and then blocked an attempt from Dastan, but was beaten by a powerful goal kick from his Iranian counterpart, which Shirmohammadi diverted into the net with the slightest of touches.

Mohammadpour dashed any hopes of a Japan comeback in the 34th minute with an overhead kick that whizzed past Furusato into the top-right corner.

"At the beginning of the second period, Iran had a lot of possession, and we were unable to attack them," Japan head coach Teruki Tabata said.

"Ultimately, it came down to their accuracy and the quality of their play, which made it difficult for us to catch up with them.

"We are still grateful for the opportunity to play against such a great team."

Mohammadpour and Dastan, meanwhile, capped off their campaign by collecting two of the three individual awards.

Mohammadpour was crowned the Most Valuable Player, while Dastan picked up the Best Goalkeeper award.

Mohammadpour scored in the group-stage victories over Afghanistan, Vietnam and Lebanon, as the Central Asian side coasted through Group B with maximum points.

"I am very happy, but I must say that this award belongs to all the players and the technical staff," said Mohammadpour. "It is not just for me; it belongs to all my teammates.

"It was the result of teamwork and our collective effort. Without working together as a team and following the coach's instructions, I would not have been able to receive this individual award. I am very happy, and I dedicate this achievement to all the people of Iran. It is not just for me."

Presidential praise

Asian Football Confederation (AFC) President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa applauded Iran's continued supremacy on the continent, writing in a message: "Iran have once again shown why they remain the undisputed pacesetters of Asian beach soccer. Capturing three consecutive titles and five overall is an extraordinary feat that speaks volumes about the depth of talent, professionalism, and enduring commitment of the Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI).

"On behalf of the entire Asian football family, I warmly congratulate Team Melli on another memorable triumph, and I also commend Japan for pushing them to the very limit in a gripping final. Together with third-placed Oman, both finalists have earned the honour of carrying Asia's hopes onto the global stage at the 2027 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup."

Earlier in the day, two-time champion and 2025 runner-up Oman defeated Lebanon 8-6 to claim a fourth third-place finish in the history of the competition.

World Taekwondo Grand Prix Final:

Zeinali strikes gold, Iran bags three medals on Day 1



Iran's Radin Zeinali (R) consoles Kazakhstan's Batyrkhan Toleugali after his victory in the men's -80kg final at the World Taekwondo Grand Prix Final in Astana, Kazakhstan, on November 28, 2026.
● WORLD TAEKWONDO

Sports Desk

The first day of the World Taekwondo Grand Prix Final saw Iranians collect one gold and two bronze medals at the Zhaksylyk Ushkempirov Martial Arts Palace in Astana, Kazakhstan, on Saturday.

Radin Zeinali spearheaded the medal haul by claiming the top prize in the men's -80kg competition, in which his compatriot Amir-Sina Bakhtiari settled for bronze, while teenage sensation Hana Zarrinkamar also finished her campaign with a bronze in the women's +67kg category.

An U21 world champion last year, Zeinali opened his campaign with a 2-1 victory over Spain's Juan Antonio Milan Canovas – a gold medalist at June's Grand Prix season opener in Rome – before defeating Croatia's Oscar Kovacic in straight rounds to set up an all-Iranian last-four clash with Bakhtiari.

A 2-1 victory sent Zeinali into the final, where he overcame the host country's Batyrkhan Toleugali 2-1 to win the title.

Bakhtiari, meanwhile, having beaten Serbia's Stefan Takov and American world No. 3 CJ Nickolas on his way to the semifinals, defeated Georgia's Zurab Kintsurashvili in straight rounds to finish with the bronze medal, adding to his -74kg title at May's Asian Championships in Ulaanbaatar.

Reigning two-time world junior champion Zarrinkamar continued her impressive breakthrough at senior level with a bronze medal in the +67kg weight class.

Zarrinkamar overcame China's Xu Lei in her opening bout, followed by a 2-0 quarterfinal victory over South Korea's Song Da-bin, before suffering a 2-1 loss to world No. 1 Anastasiia Kosmycheva of Russia. She bounced back with a 2-0 win over Uzbekistan's Svetlana Saidova in the bronze-medal bout, securing her fifth international medal of the season after winning titles at the World Junior Championships, Chuncheon Korea Open and WT President's Cup, as well as silver at August's Women's Open Championships.

The opening day of the G10 tournament, which offers valuable Olympic qualification points, was, however, one to forget for two Iranian hopefuls, Nahid Kiani and Mahdi Hajimousaei.

Having suffered a last-eight exit at the Paris Grand Prix in October, Olympic silver medalist and Asian champion Kiani endured another disappointing campaign in this year's series, falling in straight rounds (17-8, 7-6) to world No. 2 Fadia Khirfan of Jordan in her opening bout in the women's -57kg division.

World silver medalist Hajimousaei, meanwhile, crashed out in the men's -68kg quarterfinals in controversial fashion.

The Iranian defeated South Korea's Moon Jin-ho, the world No. 1, 2-0 in his opening bout but fell to Spain's Adrian Vicente Yunta in his second outing, with the Iranian Taekwondo Federation blaming "a technical malfunction with the Spaniard's electronic scoring protector" for preventing Hajimousaei's kicks from registering.

Asian Women's Handball Championship:

World berth up for grabs as Iran faces Kazakhstan in quarters

Sports Desk

A place at next year's World Championship will be on the line when Iran and host Kazakhstan square off in the quarterfinals of the Asian Women's Handball Championship in Almaty today.

The Iranian women fell to a 25-16 defeat against defending champion Japan on Saturday, suffering their second loss in four group-stage games and finishing third behind Japan and China in the Group A standings.

Iran had opened its campaign with a commanding 33-16 victory over Hong Kong before losing 34-32 to 10-time silver medalist China. The team then bounced back to rout Thailand 23-15, securing a place in the knockout stage with one game to spare in the group phase.

Having twice denied Iran the bronze medal, in the 2021 and 2024 editions, Kazakhstan, meanwhile, finished runner-up to South Korea – the most decorated team in the competition with 16 titles and silver medalist in the previous edition – in the group standings, thanks to three wins in four outings.

The host team claimed three successive victories over Australia (37-18), India (33-27) and Uzbekistan (32-29) before losing 34-20 to South Korea in Saturday's top-spot decider.

The four semifinalists will secure direct qualification for the global showpiece, which is scheduled to be held in Hungary from November 30 to December 19 next year.



● IRIHF