

Bahrain dominate

Japan and Iran post big wins opening day of Asian U20 volleyball

TDI | Manama

Hosts Bahrain joined Asian powerhouses Japan and Iran as big winners on day one of the 19th Asian Men's U20 Volleyball Championship, taking place at Isa Sports City in Riffa.

The Bahrainis put on an impressive show this evening in front of their home fans, appearing dominant against a tough Iraq side in a 3-0 (25-23, 28-26, 25-15) victory in Pool D1 of the competition's Preliminary Round.

Japan and Iran, meanwhile, looked just as imposing in their respective games, with each needing just over an hour-and-a-quarter to dispose of their opponents. Playing against Thailand in Pool B1, the Japanese enjoyed a 3-0 (25-19, 25-17, 27-25) result, while Iran followed suit with their own comfortable 3-0 (25-22, 25-13, 25-22) win.

All three teams are competing in Division One for the Preliminaries, as are Sri Lanka, who beat Kazakhstan 3-1 (23-25, 25-16, 29-27, 25-10) in Pool C1.

From Division Two on the tournament's opening day, Taipei beat Saudi Arabia, Malaysia beat the Maldives, Hong Kong won over Jordan and India had their game against Uzbekistan cancelled following the late withdrawal of the Uzbeks.

The now 23-nation Asian U20 Championship has been organised by the Asian Volleyball Confederation in cooperation with the Bahrain Volleyball Association. It is being held under the patronage of His Majesty the King's Charity Works and Youth Affairs Representative, Supreme Council for Youth and Sports Chairman and Bahrain Olympic Committee President Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

Matches continue today at the same venue from 11.30am onwards. Games are being played simultaneously in two arenas. Entrance for spectators is free and all are welcome to watch.

In Bahrain's win in Pool D1, the nationals received a welcome boost from the vibrant singing and cheers from the massive group of local fans that turned up to support the team.

After a strong opening set, the Bahrainis found themselves trailing midway through the second but some brilliant blocking helped them rally and tie the proceedings at 22.

Their surge deflated their opponents and they took full advantage. The home side then carried over their momentum into the third set, while giving the Iraqis no chance at a comeback.

"This was our first game of the tournament so we played a little nervous today," said top talent Mohamed Abdulla after the match. "We had many mistakes in receiving and didn't do very well in our attack."

"But we hope to do better in every game and we are very happy we won today against a very strong team."

Hasan Abbas scored 11 points to lead the hosts, while Sayed Alabbar finished with seven. Abdulla had five blocks in the game. Ali Abushanan paced Iraq with 14 points in the losing effort.



Bahrain's Hasan Abbas goes for a spike in their match against Iraq

SCORES

Taipei beat Saudi Arabia 3-0 (25-18, 25-19, 25-19)
 India beat Uzbekistan (not held, Uzbekistan withdrew)
 Japan beat Thailand 3-0 (25-19, 25-17, 27-25)
 Malaysia beat Maldives 3-0 (25-9, 25-19, 25-10)
 Iran beat China 3-0 (25-22, 25-13, 25-22)
 Hong Kong beat Jordan 3-1 (20-25, 25-22, 26-24, 26-24)
 Bahrain beat Iraq 3-0 (25-23, 28-26, 25-15)
 Sri Lanka beat Kazakhstan 3-1 (23-25, 25-16, 29-27, 25-10)

Bahrain will now look to end their Preliminary Round campaign in Pool D1 with a win against Qatar tonight. Their contest is scheduled for a 7pm start.

In Japan's Pool B1 game with Thailand, they overcame a poor start to the third set when they faced a 3-6 deficit before bouncing back and rallying.

The Thais managed to make things interesting, building a 24-21 lead later on to almost certainly extend the contest to a fourth set.

But the Japanese came up with the big points from there, tying the proceedings at 24 before taking three of the next four points to close out the match in style.

"It is always important to begin a championship of this level with a win," Japanese head coach Kazushi Masunari said after their game. "Sometimes, we do not play to our best and we can only hold ourselves responsible. But the way we recovered in the third set, it shows you the mental strength of the Japanese team."

Japan captain Kento Miyaura had 13 points to lead his team. Ryuki Ban added 12 in the win, while Shunichiro Sato scored nine points. Both Miyaura and

Sato also had four blocks apiece in the game. Pipat Chansuksri paced Thailand in the loss with 11 points.

Japan next face Turkmenistan on Monday in their final Pool game.

In Iran's win in Pool A1, the world champions at the under-19 level were gave their opponents China no chance.

After losing the first two sets, the Chinese put in a spirited fight to begin the third. But the Iranians eventually found their groove and did enough to close out the contest.

"Our main target here is to win all the matches," said Iran head coach Behrouz Ataei. "Our team is considered to be very strong but we cannot predict what will happen in any of our matches. We are just taking things one game at a time and we try to be better each time."

Morteza Sharifi was their top scorer with 14 points, while Porrya Yali added 10. Feyzemadoust added four points and four blocks. Jianfei Diao led China with 16 points.

Iran next play against Korea on Monday in what is expected to be a thrilling and hotly contested affair between two juggernauts.

Today's matches

(in order of Time, Court 1 game, Court 2 game)
 11.30am: Pakistan vs Taipei, Macau vs Maldives

2pm: Korea vs China, New Zealand vs India

4.30pm: Turkmenistan vs Thailand, Australia vs Sri Lanka

7pm: Bahrain vs Qatar, UAE vs Jordan

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BAHRAIN'S MOHAMED ABDULLA



Japan captain Kento Miyaura tries to score against Thailand's Pipat Chansuksri and Saonram Chakkawat



Taipei captain Hsuan-Cheng Chiao attacks the net against Saudi Arabia