

Battle of last four

Korea, Thailand, Iraq, Iran march on to semis

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Only four teams remained standing this evening as the Semi-finalists were set in the 19th Asian Men's U20 Volleyball Championship.

The top-ranked duo of Iran and Korea were joined by fifth seeds Thailand and 11th-ranked underdogs Iraq in qualifying for the last four.

The Iraqis were the darlings of tonight's events at Isa Sports City in Riffa, as they posted a major upset with a stunning victory over defending champions China.

Iran comfortably defeated Kazakhstan 3-0 (25-13, 25-15, 25-16) to book their Semi-final seat, while Korea were in fine form as they made things look easy in a dominant win over Australia 3-0 (25-19, 25-19, 25-18).

Thailand, meanwhile, enjoyed a similar straight-sets result against Taipei 3-0 (25-19, 25-22, 28-26), while Iraq overcame the odds and took down their heavily favoured Chinese opponents 3-2 (17-25, 25-22, 15-25, 25-22, 15-10) in what was an epic, two-hour battle.

Iran and Thailand now face off in the first Semi-final of the competition, scheduled for 4.30pm today at the same venue. The other will be between the Koreans and the Iraqis at 7pm.

Elsewhere yesterday in classification fixtures, Macau beat Malaysia, Pakistan defeated Saudi Arabia, Japan took care of India, Sri Lanka defeated Qatar, and the UAE outplayed Hong Kong.

Iran needed just over an hour to seal their victory against an overmatched Kazakhstan. Morteza Sharifi was their best scorer with 13 point, 10 of which were in attack and the other three in blocks. Nurperzent Topar had just five points as Kazakhstan's leading scorer.

"We had a good rotation today, we used all our players and they performed really well," said Iran head coach Behrouz Ataei. "We have achieved our first goal coming into this championship, which is to secure a semi-final berth. It is difficult to predict future results, but we will prepare a good game plan for our semi-final match."

Strong play

Thailand booked their semis tickets led by the strong play of Chaiwat Thungkham, who was able to post 19 points, all of which came in attack. Pipat Chansuksri added another 18



Iran skipper Amirhossein Esfandiar goes for a spike in between the defence of Kazakhstan's Kaiyrkhan Asset and Semurg Turdiniyazov

YESTERDAY'S SCORES

Maldives beat Uzbekistan (25-0, 25-0, 25-0)
 Macau beat Malaysia 3-1 (25-21, 25-21, 23-25, 25-18)
 Pakistan beat Saudi Arabia 3-0 (25-13, 25-20, 25-18)
 Japan beat India 3-0 (25-20, 25-21, 25-13)
 Sri Lanka beat Qatar 3-1 (25-21, 21-25, 25-18, 26-24)
 UAE beat Hong Kong 3-2 (25-23, 10-25, 25-20, 15-25, 15-13)
 QF-Iran beat Kazakhstan 3-0 (25-13, 25-15, 25-16)
 QF-Thailand beat Taipei 3-0 (25-19, 25-22, 28-26)
 QF-Korea beat Australia 3-0 (25-19, 25-19, 25-18)
 QF-Iraq beat China 3-2 (17-25, 25-22, 15-25, 25-22, 15-10)

markers for the winners, while Yu-Sheng Chang led Taipei with 20 points.

In Korea's win, Donghyeok Im was once again the best scorer for his team, finishing with 18 point including 13 in

attack. Im is one of the tournament's best servers, and his skills were on full display with three aces in tonight's contest. James Takken had eight points in pacing the Australians in the loss.

"We will be prepared for the semi-fi-

nals," said Korea head coach Kang Sunghyung.

In Iraq's victory, they managed to take down the continental giants in a thrilling match that needed to go the maximum.

Ali Sahib Abushanan came up with the heroics. He scored 28 points overall in the game, 26 of which were in attack. He also had two blocks as he almost inspired his team to the well-deserved triumph.

Cong Tian put in a solid effort with 19 points as China's best scorer.

Aside from the Semi-finals today, there will also be several classification games, including Bahrain's clash with Turkmenistan, which is scheduled for an 11.30am start.

Today's matches

(in order of time, Court 1 game, Court 2 game)
 9am: Uzbekistan vs Malaysia (not to be played), Maldives vs Macau
 11.30am: Sri Lanka vs Taipei, Turkmenistan vs Bahrain
 2pm: Australia vs China, Jordan vs New Zealand
 4.30pm: SF-Iran vs Thailand, India vs Saudi Arabia
 7pm: SF-Korea vs Iraq, Japan vs Pakistan
 NB: Match order is subject to change



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IRAN HEAD COACH BEHROUZ ATAEI



Thailand's Pipat Chansuksri reacts after winning a point for his team against Taipei



Action from the match between Japan and India

'We must be proud': Bahrain Assistant Coach

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Bahrain have plenty to be proud of even after being eliminated from title contention in the Round of 16 of the 19th Asian Men's U20 Volleyball Championship, says national assistant coach Protic Nebojsa.

After winning their first three games, the hosts' dream run in the prestigious biennial competition came to an abrupt end on Wednesday night following a thrilling five-set defeat to Australia.

While they came up short in achieving their goal of making it to at least the Quarter-finals, Coach Protic says that their players must not hang their heads in defeat.

"We gave our best shot," Coach Protic says. "We made mistakes that

we regret, but this is sport.

"Our players are young, full of hope, full of dreams, and they wanted to do well in this tournament so bad. After the game, most of them were crying and it was very emotional."

Coach Protic had some strong words of encouragement for the young Bahraini spikers.

"This is life, and losing is part of the game," he says, adding, "But it's not losing that is bad; what's bad is if you don't take a lesson from this and if you don't grow."

"If you do, it can be a good thing. We, as a team, are still growing and we are all proud of these boys, they gave it their best shot."

"Now it's important that you pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and move on."