

# Iran Remains Asia's Second Ranked Team in FIFA World Ranking



TEHRAN – Iran is unchanged at 24th in the latest FIFA World Ranking released.

Japan remained the best Asian team at 20th.

Korea Republic is the next highest-ranked Asian side at 27 while Australia (29) and Saudi Arabia (54) round off the top five.

Qatar, who will be hosting the AFC Asian Cup for the third time, dropped one spot to 61st with Iraq (67), United Arab Emirates (72), Oman (73) and Uzbekistan (74) completing the top 10.

Argentina leapfrogged Brazil, which is now third, after enjoying friendly wins over Panama and Curacao.

The next FIFA World Ranking will be published on July 20.

## Rashford Fires Man United Into Top 4 With 1-0 Win Over Brentford

MANCHESTER (Reuters) – Marcus Rashford scored the only goal with a brilliant half-volley as Manchester United beat Brentford 1-0 in the Premier League at Old Trafford to climb back into the top four.

The victory was a perfect response following a disappointing 2-0 defeat by Newcastle United on Sunday and lifted the Red Devils to 53 points, three ahead of fifth-placed Tottenham Hotspur and level with the Magpies in third.

United started brightly, forcing a series of corners and free kicks as Brentford pulled their outfield players behind the ball to try to close down space, and when the breakthrough came in the 27th minute it was from another set-piece.



Brentford's defender Ethan Pinnock (left) fights for the ball with Manchester United's English striker Marcus Rashford during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Brentford at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on April 5, 2023.

A Brentford clearance from a corner only made it as far winger Antony on the edge of the box. He lofted it towards

the head of Marcel Sabitzer, and Rashford met the Austrian's bouncing knockdown with a sumptuous half-vol-

ley that gave David Raya no chance to register his 28th goal of the season.

David De Gea almost gave Brentford a lifeline early in the second half when his loose attempt at a clearance cannoned into the onrushing Ivan Toney, but luckily for the United keeper the ball bounced to safety.

De Gea was called into action again in the 67th minute when substitute Kevin Schade collected a pass from Toney and ran at him, but the keeper stood firm to deflect the shot.

Manchester United could have sealed the game in the 80th minute as Rashford broke down the left and squared to Fred, but the Brazilian blazed the ball high over the bar with the goal at his mercy.

## Suns Beat Nuggets for 7th Straight Win



Phoenix Suns forward Kevin Durant (35) shoots over Denver Nuggets forward Bruce Brown during the first half of an NBA basketball game Thursday, April 6, 2023, in Phoenix.

PHOENIX (AP) — Chris Paul made a career-high seven 3-pointers and the Phoenix Suns won their

season-best seventh game in a row, holding off the short-handed Denver Nuggets 119-115 on Thursday night.

Kevin Durant added six 3s and led the Suns with 29 points in 40 minutes, while Paul scored 25. Durant also had seven rebounds as the Suns improved to 8-0 with the 13-time All-Star in their lineup. But it wasn't easy even though the Nuggets were missing all five normal starters.

Devin Booker made just 3 of 12 shots, but still scored 15 as he was 8 for 8 from the free throw line. Booker also had eight assists, while Deandre Ayton scored 16 points and reserve Torrey Craig had 11 for the Suns (45-35), who made 17 3-pointers to eight for Denver.

Paul's final 3-pointer of the night with 3:07 to play made it 114-107, the biggest lead of the night for either team at that point. Paul made 7

of 12 from behind the arc.

Bruce Brown led Denver (52-28) with 31 points on 11-of-18 shooting. Reggie Jackson had 20 points and six assists, Christian Braun had 15 points, Jeff Green scored 14 and DeAndre Jordan had 12 points and 11 rebounds.

Nikola Jokic had missed three games with a calf injury before returning to play 25 minutes in Tuesday's loss to Houston. He was sidelined again Thursday, as were Aaron Gordon (right shoulder), Michael Porter Jr. (left heel), Jamal Murray (right thumb) and Kentavious Caldwell-Pope (illness).

Nuggets coach Michael Malone was pleased that his team gave the full-strength Suns a game all the way.

## Women Football Team Defeats Myanmar



TEHRAN - Iran's women's football team beat Myanmar 1-0 in Group B of the 2024 Paris Olympic Women's Football Tournament Asian Zone Qualifiers.

Afsaneh Chatreoor found the back of the net for Iran in the 52nd minute of the match against Myanmar.

Myanmar is hosting the 2024 Paris Olympic women's football tournament in the first round of the Asian zone qualifiers.

Host Myanmar was in the first stage of Group B of the 2024 Paris Olympic Women's Football Tournament Asian Zone Qualifiers with Iran, Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Bangladesh.

As Bangladesh and the Moldovan teams withdrew from the tournament, the host Myanmar and Iran will continue to compete.

Myanmar and Iran will compete in two matches as the home and away matches system.

## Barca Stunned as Benzema Hat-Trick Sends Real Into Copa Final



Real Madrid's Karim Benzema (right) attempts a shot at goal and misses past Barcelona's Jules Kounde (left) during the Spanish Copa del Rey semifinal, second leg soccer match between Barcelona and Real Madrid at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona, Spain, on April 5, 2023.

BARCELONA (Reuters) - Karim Benzema has struck a hat-trick as Real Madrid thrashed arch-rivals and league leaders Barcelona 4-0 to reach the Copa del Rey final in stunning fashion.

Barca, bidding for a fourth successive Clasico victory this season, looked set for the final having edged a 1-0 win in the first leg of the semi-final in Madrid last month.

But after dominating the early stages of the second leg they fell apart in unlikely fashion to lose 4-1 on aggregate with Benzema becoming the first Real player to score a hat-trick in a Clasico at the Nou Camp since Ferenc Puskas in 1963.

Vinicius Jr gave Real the lead in first-half stoppage time following a lightning counter-attack and the semi-final was turned on its head when Benzema stroked a shot into the corner five minutes into the second half from a Luka Modric pass.

Eight minutes later Vinicius was fouled in the area and Benzema thumped his penalty past Marc-Andre ter Stegen.

With jeers echoing around the Nou Camp, Barcelona tried to respond but it was Real Madrid who looked the more likely to add to their tally with Benzema unstoppable.

In the 80th minute he was again set up by Vinicius to complete his second hat-trick in a matter of days having also hit a treble in the 6-0 destruction of Real Valladolid.

Real will fancy their chances of winning the trophy for a 20th time when they face Osasuna in the final after they beat Athletic Bilbao 2-1 on aggregate on Tuesday.

After suffering at the hands of Barcelona this season, it was a spectacular riposte by Ancelotti's side as Real beat Barca by at least a four-goal margin for the first time since 1995.

Real are a distant second behind Barca in La Liga having lost 2-1 to their bitter rival last month. But while the title may be gone, they regained bragging rights in style.

There was no hint of what was to come on Wednesday as Barcelona looked in the mood to kill the tie with Thibaut Courtois thwarting the hosts on a number of occasions.

It was from one Courtois save to deny Robert Lewandowski that the tie turned in an instant.

Real broke forward at pace and Vinicius exchanged passes with Benzema before his shot crept over the line despite the efforts of defender Ronald Araujo to keep it out.

Five minutes after the break Modric glided in from the right and rolled a pass to Benzema to send a precise finish into the corner. Xavi's Barcelona were in tatters minutes later when Vinicius was fouled and Benzema exacted punishment.

Tempers flared with players from both sides getting involved in skirmishes but Benzema had the last laugh to complete a magical night for Real and one Barca will want to forget.

## Top-Seeded Pegula Rallies to Reach Charleston Quarterfinals

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) – Top-seeded Jessica Pegula lost 10 straight games and trailed 4-0 in the final set before rallying Thursday to reach the Charleston Open quarterfinals.

Pegula, an American ranked No. 3 in the world, led the top four seeds including No. 4 seed and defending champion Belinda Bencic, into the round of eight in the season's first clay-court tournament.

No match was the equal of Pegula's fight with Irina-Camelia Begu, who was down 4-0 in the second set and two games away from a quick exit until finding her game.

Begu, the 15th seed, strung together a 10-game win streak to turn things around. Pegula dug in to win the final six game and the exhausting match.

"That was a pretty crazy match,"

Pegula said.

No doubt. Pegula will try to find more consistency against 12th-seeded Paula Badosa, a 6-3, 6-1 winner over Diana Snaider, for a spot in Saturday's semifinals.

Others moving on with No. 2 seed Ons Jabeur, No. 3 seed Daria Kasatkina and Bencic, who topped Jabeur to win last year's event on the Charleston's green clay.

Jabeur topped Caroline Dolehide 6-3, 7-5; Kasatkina defeated Bernarda Pera 6-3, 7-6 (3); and Bencic bounced back after losing to opening set to oust Shelby Rogers 4-6, 7-5, 6-2.

Pegula didn't totally understand how things went so wrong, then turned right again.

Pegula thought is she could stop Begu's winning streak, she could come back. "And then it just switched really quickly," Pegula



Jessica Pegula talks to the media

said.

Jabeur will take on Anna Kalinskaya, who defeated two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka 6-4, 7-6 (5).

Jabeur, who reached the finals at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open a season ago, likes where her game

early in the run up to Roland Garros next month.

Kasatkina will take on either Magda Linette or past Charleston winner Madison Keys on Friday.

Bencic will face Ekaterina Alexandrova, who defeated Julia Grabher 6-4, 6-2.