

Iranian Women Beat Thailand at Paralympic Final Qualification



TEHRAN – Iran's women sitting volleyball team swept past Thailand 3-0 (25-11, 25-3, 25-14) in the 2024 Paralympic Final Qualification Tournament on Friday.

Iran had defeated Japan 3-0 (25-7, 25-19, 25-6) in its first match.

The tournament has brought Iran, Germany, Japan, Mongolia, Slovenia, Thailand and Ukraine together in Dali, China.

The winner will qualify for the 2024 Summer Paralympics.

The tournament follows a single round robin format.

Iran Remain in 20th Place in Latest FIFA Rankings



TEHRAN – Iran stayed unchanged at 20th to remain the second-best Asian side in the latest FIFA Men's World Ranking released on Thursday.

Japan is the best Asian team in 18th. Qatar climbed three spots to 34th - its highest-ever position in the ranking - with the top 10 staying unchanged, while Indonesia was the biggest mover after climbing eight spots to sit at 134th.

Korea Republic (23) and Australia (24) dropped one

spot.

Qatar is Asia's fifth highest ranked side while Saudi Arabia is sixth (53rd) followed by Iraq on 58th.

Occupying the eighth position is Uzbekistan (64th), followed by the United Arab Emirates (67th) and Jordan (71st). Besides Indonesia, Afghanistan also made a significant jump - advancing seven spots to 151.

The next FIFA World Ranking will be released on June 20, 2024.

Verstappen Fastest in First Practice for F1 Japan Grand Prix

SUZUKA, Japan (Reuters) - Max Verstappen and Red Bull laid down a marker in first practice for the Formula 1 Japanese Grand Prix on Friday, emerging fastest with a time of 1:30.056.

Verstappen's teammate Sergio Perez made it a Red Bull 1-2, with the Mexican 0.181s adrift of the reigning world champion.

After a disappointing Australian Grand Prix two weeks ago, in which Verstappen retired with a brake issue and Perez could only finish fifth, Red Bull appears to have returned to the form that saw them dominate the first two Grands Prix of 2024.

The session was red-flagged for 12 minutes when Williams' Logan Sargeant ran wide at the Turn 7 left-hander, skated over the gravel trap and clouted



Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen (right) drives during the first practice session ahead of the Formula One Japanese Grand Prix race at the Suzuka circuit in Suzuka, Mie prefecture, on April 5, 2024.

the outside wall. The American immediately apologized to his team for his error, suggesting the crash was not caused by a component failure.

With Williams having no spare chassis, Sargeant faces a race against time to see if his me-

chanics can ready his FW46 for this afternoon's FP2 session.

Behind the two Red Bulls, Ferrari's Carlos Sainz was best of the rest, setting a time 0.213s shy of Verstappen's benchmark.

George Russell and Lewis Hamilton were fourth and fifth

for Mercedes, with Sainz's teammate Charles Leclerc sixth followed by Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso in seventh, with every other driver over one second shy of Verstappen.

Further down the order, Ayumu Iwasa made his first appearance at a Grand Prix weekend, as the Japanese took over Daniel Ricciardo's RB for the morning session and finished in 16th place, 0.9s adrift of teammate and compatriot Yuki Tsunoda.

Iwasa has been a member of the Red Bull Junior program since 2021, but is not thought to be in serious contention for an F1 race seat in 2025.

Under F1's current regulations, each team must run a driver who has started two or fewer Grands Prix in two F1 sessions throughout the season.

Nadal Pulls Out of Monte Carlo Masters, French Open in Doubt



Rafael Nadal in action during The Netflix Slam at Michelob ULTRA Arena on March 03, 2024 in Las Vegas, Nevada.

PARIS (AFP)- Rafa Nadal withdrew from the upcoming Monte

Carlo Masters on Thursday, saying his body is not yet ready for

competition, casting more doubt on whether the 22-times Grand Slam champion will compete at his favorite major, the French Open.

The 37-year-old Spaniard, who has said he expected to retire after the 2024 season, returned to competition in Brisbane in January, after almost a year sidelined with a hip flexor injury, but has not played an ATP event since.

The Spaniard skipped the Indian Wells Masters last month saying he was not "ready to play at the highest level" but was expected to return for the claycourt swing in the build-up to the French Open, which he has won a record 14

times.

"You have no idea how hard this is for me to not be able to play these events. The only thing I can do is to accept the situation and try to look at the immediate future keeping the excitement and will to play in order to give me a chance for things to get better."

The Monte Carlo Masters begins on Sunday. Nadal has won the event a record 11 times, with his last victory coming in 2018.

The French Open main draw begins on May 26. Nadal, who last won the Roland Garros title in 2022, has not competed at a Grand Slam since a second-round exit at the 2023 Australian Open.

LIVERPOOL (Reuters) - Liverpool reclaimed the Premier league lead in an enthralling title race as Alexis Mac Allister's thunderbolt and a late header by Cody Gakpo secured a nervy 3-1 home victory over bottom club Sheffield United on Thursday.

Juergen Klopp's side have 70 points from 30 games, two ahead of Arsenal and three more than champions Manchester City, both of whom won on Wednesday to crank up the pressure.

A bizarre opener by Darwin Nunez after 17 minutes when he closed down keeper Ivo Grbic and blocked his attempted clearance into the net looked set to open the floodgates as Liverpool sought the win they needed to dislodge Arsenal from top spot.

But the Reds were way below their best and an adventurous United side stunned the Anfield crowd shortly after halftime when a Connor Bradley own goal levelled the scores.

The visitors looked capable of hanging on for a shock point before a loose ball came out to Mac Allister in the 76th minute and he smashed a swerving right-foot effort into the top corner.

Gakpo then made sure of the points in the 90th as Liverpool took another step towards the perfect Klopp send-off as the manager prepares to leave at the end of the season.

"We had to dig very deep, but that is normal. Our attitude was good, the football was not great in a lot of moments," Klopp said. "Then Macca's goal was the complete

game changer." United are 10 points adrift of the safety zone and look set for a swift return to the Championship.

If the key to winning titles is to keep grinding out wins even when performance levels dip, then Liverpool have the knack.

United were supposed to sacrificial lambs under the Anfield lights but gave their hosts a mighty scare until midfielder Mac Allister's moment of magic settled the nerves.

Liverpool were struggling to quell a lively United side but the Argentine took matters in to his own hands with a finish that sent the home crowd into raptures - his fierce shot spinning and rising into the top corner past a helpless Grbic.

If that goal was spectacular, Liverpool's opener had been comical as Grbic took too long to make a routine clearance and Nunez jumped to block with the ball rebounding into an empty net off the Uruguayan who had his back to goal.

Liverpool had begun in sloppy fashion with James McAtee wasting a first-minute chance for the visitors when his effort was saved by Caoimhin Kelleher.

Despite having a remarkable 83% of possession Liverpool never looked secure and an increasingly confident United equalised when Gustavo Hamer met a cross with a header which glanced in off the leg of the unfortunate Bradley.

Liverpool would not be denied though and chalked up their seventh win in their last eight league games to keep their title destiny in their own hands.

Philadelphia Rally Past Miami 109-105 to Tighten East Race

MIAMI (AP) — Tyrese Maxey scored 37 points, Joel Embiid added 29 and the Philadelphia 76ers topped the Miami Heat 109-105 on Thursday night to tighten the Eastern Conference playoff chase.

Maxey was one rebound shy of a triple-double, finishing with 11 assists and nine boards for Philadelphia. Kelly Oubre Jr. scored 18 points for the 76ers, who moved within a half-game of Miami for No. 7 in the East.

Terry Rozier had 22 points

and Jimmy Butler added 20 for Miami, which entered the night No. 6 in the East but ceded that spot back to Indiana. Bam Adebayo had 14, Haywood Highsmith scored 12, Kevin Love had 11 points and 16 rebounds off the bench and Nikola Jovic added 11 points for Miami.

Embiid, in his second game back after missing two months following surgery on the meniscus in his left knee, shot 11 for 25, and the 76ers were outscored by 19 points in his 32-plus minutes.



Philadelphia 76ers guard Kelly Oubre Jr. (9) and Miami Heat forward Kevin Love (42) go after a rebound during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Thursday, April 4, 2024, in Miami.