

Iran Squad for 2026 AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualification Named



TEHRAN – Iran's women's national football team head coach Marzieh Jafari has announced the 23-player squad for the upcoming 2026 AFC Women's Asian Cup qualification.

The qualification matches will be held in Amman, Jordan, from July 7 to 19.

Iran will begin their campaign against Singapore on July 10.

Iran have been drawn into Group A, alongside Jordan, Singapore, Bhutan, and Lebanon.

Iran's squad are as following:

Fatemeh Adeli, Mina Nafei, Fatemeh Shaban, Atefeh Imani, Rojin Tamrian, Negin Zandi, Sara Zahra binia, Sara Didar, Melika Motevalli, Raha Yazdani, Atefeh Ramezanizadeh, Afsaneh Chatrenoer, Shabnam Behesht, Zahra Alizadeh, Fatemeh Pasandideh, Fatemeh Amineh Borazjani, Fatemeh Makhdoomi, Mohadeseh Zolfi, Zahra Ahmadzadeh, Zahra Khajavi, Zahra Ghanbari, Zahra Sarbali, and Maryam Dini.

Pogacar Eyes Fourth Tour Crown as Rivals Scramble to Keep Pace

PARIS (Reuters) - Reigning champion Tadej Pogacar begins his bid for a fourth Tour de France title on Saturday, seeking to cement his status among cycling's greatest all-rounders, with rivals Jonas Vingegaard and Remco Evenepoel hoping to find a weakness in his armor.

The race's 112th edition begins in Lille, with Slovenia's Pogacar, who previously triumphed in 2020, 2021, and 2024, aiming to join Britain's Chris Froome in the elite club of four-time winners.

That would edge him closer to the record five titles held by Bernard Hinault, Jacques Anquetil, Eddy Merckx and Miguel Indurain.

The 26-year-old world champion's scintillating spring classics campaign, featuring victories at the Tour of Flanders and Liege-Bastogne-Liege plus podiums at Milan-Sanremo and Paris-Roubaix, showcased his versatility and drew comparisons to Merckx and Hinault.

Pogacar's dominance continued at last month's Criterium du Dauphine, where he claimed three stages and overall victory by



Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar celebrates winning the race

59 seconds over two-time Tour winner Vingegaard.

"For sure, this helps the morale and motivation for the Tour because it is the biggest goal of the season. I think it is a mental boost for all the team," he said after his commanding performance.

His sole vulnerability emerged during the Dauphine's 17.4km time trial, where he conceded 48 seconds to Evenepoel and 28 to Vingegaard - a potential weakness with two time trials totalling 43.9km awaiting in this year's Tour.

Denmark's Vingegaard, enjoying smoother preparation than last year when he was recovering from a serious injury, aims to reclaim the crown after finishing over six minutes behind Pogacar in 2024.

The 28-year-old, who won the Tour in 2022 and 2023, suffered a concussion during March's Paris-Nice but rebounded to take second at the Dauphine.

Vingegaard will be backed by a strong Visma-Lease a Bike team featuring Giro d'Italia winner Simon Yates, 2023 Vuelta a Espana

champion Sepp Kuss, two-time Paris-Nice winner Matteo Jorgenson and the versatile Wout van Aert.

"With these eight very strong riders, we believe in the plan we made for the Tour de France. From day one we will have to be there as a team to optimally assist Jonas in the general classification," said Grischa Niermann, Visma's head of racing.

Belgium's Evenepoel, who claimed third on his Tour debut last year, underwent surgery after crashing during December training.

The double Olympic champion made a remarkable comeback, winning April's Brabantse Pijl before the Soudal Quick-Step rider finished fourth at the Dauphine, over four minutes behind Pogacar.

Germany's Florian Lipowitz emerges as a potential dark horse after his Paris-Nice runner-up finish and third place at the Dauphine.

The Tour's 3,338.8km route features 52,500 meters of climbing across 21 stages of cycling's ultimate test.

Chelsea Sign Brazilian Pedro From Brighton

LONDON (Reuters) - Chelsea have signed forward Joao Pedro from Brighton & Hove Albion, both Premier League clubs said on Wednesday.

Financial details were not disclosed, but British media reported that the deal was worth 60 million pounds (\$81.54 million).

"Everyone knows this is a big club with a great history," the Brazilian, who has signed an eight-year contract, said in a statement.

"They had brilliant players in the past and have brilliant players now. So I am excited to join and you know when you are a Chelsea player

you must think one thing — win."

The 23-year-old joined Brighton from Watford in 2023 and has scored 30 goals and provided 10 assists in 70 appearances for the south-coast club.

He has also made three appearances for Brazil's senior team.

Brighton head coach Fabian Huerzeler said it was an exciting move for Pedro.

"It gives him the opportunity to play Champions League football this coming season, and he will of course be keen to cement his position in the Brazil team ahead of the World Cup next sum-



mer," Huerzeler said in a statement.

Pedro is the fourth senior player to move from Brighton to Chelsea since 2022, following record signing Moises Caicedo, defender Marc Cucurella and goal-

keeper Robert Sanchez.

Chelsea added that Pedro had joined their Club World Cup squad in the United States, where he could be in line to make his debut in Friday's quarter-final against Palmeiras in Philadelphia.

Dortmund, Real Madrid to Meet in Club World Cup Last Eight



Borussia Dortmund's Niklas Sule (right) vies with Monterrey's Jesus Manuel Corona during their 2025 FIFA Club World Cup.

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Borussia Dortmund and Real Madrid will clash in the FIFA Club World Cup quarterfinals after eliminating Monterrey and Juventus in the round of 16 on Tuesday.

In Atlanta, Guinea international striker Serhou Guirassy struck two first-half goals as Dortmund secured a 2-1 win over Monterrey.

Guirassy opened the scoring in the 14th minute when he played a slick one-two with Karim Adeyemi before side-footing a low effort that beat Argentine goalkeeper Esteban Andrada at his near post.

The Mexican side was undone once more by the Adeyemi-Guirassy combination in the 24th minute as the center-forward caressed a first-time shot past Andrada after Adeyemi's layoff.

Former Real Madrid defender Sergio Ramos had a guilt-edged chance to equalize in the 91st minute but headed inches wide following Erick Aguirre's cross.

The result means Dortmund will face Real Madrid in New Jersey on Saturday for a place

in the last four while Monterrey bows out.

"I think I could have scored at least three goals but I'm happy to have helped the team win," Guirassy told broadcaster DAZN.

"It was difficult, they are a good team with experienced players. I think we had a very good first half; the second half was a little bit harder, but our mindset was tough."

The 29-year-old said the Bundesliga club would be ready for the challenge of confronting the 15-time European champions.

"I expect a very tough game. Real Madrid want to go through so it will be a tough game but we will be prepared," Guirassy added.

Ramos, who joined Monterrey on a free transfer in February, praised his teammates and said his side deserved to advance.

"Everyone who saw tonight's game realizes that this team gave its all," the 39-year-old former Spain international said.

In Miami, Gonzalo Garcia continued his prolific scoring form as Real Madrid edged to a 1-0 victory over Juventus.

Sabalenka Sees Off Bouzkova Challenge to Reach Wimbledon Third Round



LONDON (AFP) – World number one Aryna Sabalenka overcame a tough test to beat Marie Bouzkova 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 and progress to the Wimbledon third round on Wednesday, avoiding the fate of many of her title rivals.

A number of top players exited in the first round at the All England Club, including second seed Coco Gauff, third seed Jessica Pegula and fifth seed Zheng Qinwen.

Top seed Sabalenka was pushed hard by Bouzkova in Wednesday's opening match on Centre Court as her Czech opponent matched fire with fire in a bruising encounter.

The first set went with serve until Sabalenka doubled-faulted in the 11th game to give her 48th-

ranked opponent the chance to serve for the set.

But the Belarusian broke back with a searing backhand down the line and came out on top in the tie-break to establish a foothold in the match.

Sabalenka broke again in the fifth game of the second set to move within sight of victory and closed out the match with little fuss.

Although Sabalenka is a three-time Grand Slam champion, she has suffered agonising three-set defeats in this year's Australian Open and French Open finals.

The 27-year-old has never been beyond the Wimbledon semi-finals and missed last year's tournament with a shoulder injury.