

# Iran to Send Three Players to 2025 ITTF-ATTU Asian Cup



TEHRAN – Brothers Nima and Noshad Alamiyan and female player Neda Shahsavari will represent Iran at the 2025 ITTF-ATTU Asian Cup.

The competition will be held in Shenzhen, China, from February 19 to 23, 2025.

The ITTF-ATTU Asian Cup is an annual table tennis competition held by the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) and the Asian Table Tennis Union (ATTU).

The first edition was held in 1983. The competition features men's and women's singles events, with 16 players qualifying to take part in each event, subject to a maximum of two players per association.

The Asian Cup is not only a prestigious tournament but also serves as a crucial qualifying event for various international competitions. With a dynamic schedule of matches and activities planned, the 2025 edition promises to be an exhilarating showcase of skill, sportsmanship, and camaraderie among participating nations.

## Arsenal Climb to Second With 1-0 Win Over Struggling Ipswich



LONDON (Reuters) - Arsenal moved up to second in the Premier League and within six points of Liverpool after a largely trouble-free, if slightly pedestrian, 1-0 win at home to struggling Ipswich Town on a chilly night in north London.

A first-half goal from Kai Havertz, who pounced on a smart pull-back from Leandro Trossard, proved the winner although the hosts should have scored more as the Gunners' performance failed to provide many pre-New Year fireworks.

Lacking the creativity of the injured Bukayo Saka, it took 19 minutes before Arsenal mustered their first shot although Trossard's whipped cross.

Ipswich had a spell of pressure after 10 minutes of the second half but it proved fleeting and Arsenal should have comfortably put the game to bed after that.

Defender Gabriel Magalhaes missed a golden opportunity to extend his run of scoring from corners when he headed just wide when completely unmarked. Captain Martin Odegaard then blazed over after he danced from midfield into the visitors box.

The win lifted Arsenal to 36 points behind Liverpool, who have 42 and a game in hand, and meant the Gunners leapfrogged both London rivals Chelsea, who have 35 points, and one of the season's surprise packages

Nottingham Forest, fourth on 34.

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta told reporters he was "very happy with the victory, with the clean sheet and with large parts of the game. We should have scored more but it is the consistency, the team conceded nothing again.

The Gunners next visit Brentford on New Year's Day and Brighton & Hove Albion on Jan. 4 before playing two domestic cup games and hosting local rivals Tottenham Hotspur on Jan. 15.

Friday's match started slowly as Arsenal kept the ball effortlessly early on, although it was mostly in non-threatening areas until Trossard burst to the byline after 23 minutes and fired the ball across for Havertz to prod in.

Arsenal forward Gabriel Jesus thought he had added to his recent run of goals later in the half when he poked the ball through the Ipswich keeper Arijanet Muric's legs from an unfathomably tight angle but it was ruled out for offside.

The home side created a handful of good chances in the final 20 minutes too with Odegaard, Havertz and Trossard all getting shots in but if Arsenal are to keep up their challenge on Liverpool they will need to demonstrate more clinical finishing.

Ipswich remain second-bottom with 12 points from 18 games, three off the safety zone, before they host Chelsea on Monday.

## Vinicius Jr Should Have Won Ballon d'Or, Says Ronaldo

MADRID (Reuters) - Cristiano Ronaldo has weighed in on the decision to hand the men's Ballon d'Or award to Manchester City's Rodri, saying Brazil and Real Madrid forward Vinicius Jr. deserved to win instead.

Vinicius, 24, scored 24 goals in 39 appearances across all competitions to help Real clinch the LaLiga and Champions League double last season, and he also netted in their Champions League final win over

Borussia Dortmund.

However, he was pipped to the award by Rodri in October, after the midfielder led City to a fourth straight Premier League title last season before inspiring Spain to Euro 2024 success.

The awards ceremony was not attended by Vinicius' club Real, who decided to boycott it in anticipation of him not winning the men's award.

The Ballon d'Or is decided on the basis of a vote by a panel of journalists from the



Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior (right) receives an award, during the Globe Soccer Awards 2025 in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, on Dec 27, 2024.

top 100 FIFA-ranked countries.

## Union Berlin Fires Coach Bo Svensson After 9 Games Without a Win



Berlin's head coach Bo Svensson gestures during the German Bundesliga soccer in Bremen, Germany, Saturday, Dec. 21, 2024.

BERLIN (AP) — Union Berlin has fired coach Bo Svensson and his assistants after nine games without a win in all competitions.

The Bundesliga club said Friday it will decide on a new coach to take charge of the team from Jan. 2 in the "next days."

Union was knocked out of the German Cup and hasn't won a game since beating promoted

Holstein Kiel in October. It hasn't won any of its last eight Bundesliga games under Svensson, who took over in the summer, and the team showed little sign of development during his stay despite an encouraging start.

"We're convinced that a significant change is necessary to reverse the trend," Union sport-

ing director Horst Heldt said. "We have therefore decided not to continue our collaboration with Bo Svensson, Babak Khanfar, Kristoffer Wichmann and Tijan Njie."

Svensson's last game in charge was a chastening 4-1 loss at Werder Bremen on Dec. 21.

Union has had little luck with coaching appointments since firing club favorite Urs Fischer last season. Fischer had led the club to Bundesliga promotion for the first time in 2019, followed by ever-improving finishes in the Bundesliga until it qualified for the Champions League in 2023.

That success arguably upset the balance in the team as it prompted Heldt to bring in experienced big names like Leonardo Bonucci and Robin Gosens to prepare it for the additional demands of competing in European soccer's top club

competition. Both have since left Union.

Fischer was fired after a 14-game run without a win. Marco Grote took over on an interim basis, then Croatian coach Nenad Bjelica was appointed for what proved to be an unhappy spell. Bjelica was fired after a loss to relegation rival Bochum left the club a point above the drop zone. Grote returned and ultimately steered the club to safety on the final day.

Svensson, who was appointed almost as soon as last season ended, was supposed to toughen the team and restore the fighting qualities that had made it so successful under Fischer. Ultimately, he failed to do so.

Union next plays at Heidenheim after the winter break on Jan. 11, before hosting Augsburg. Both opponents are behind 12th-place Union in the standings.

## Italian Skier Brignone Wins World Cup GS

SEMMERING, Austria (AP) — Federica Brignone held on to her opening-run lead at a women's World Cup giant slalom on Saturday, becoming the first Italian winner of the Semmering event in 22 years.

Brignone could even afford a mistake near the end of her second run as she defeated Olympic GS champion Sara Hector by 0.57 seconds.

Alice Robinson of New Zealand was nine-tenths of a second off the pace in third.

"It was not easy the second run, but the slope was amazing," said Brignone, who earned her 14th career win in GS but had not been on the podium here before. "I really wanted it, I'm so happy. It's been a tough race but I felt really good, I wanted to fight and I was not too stressed."

In the absence of the injured Mikaela Shiffrin, Paula Molizan was the leading American racer, trailing Brignone by 1.11 in fifth, matching her best result in giant slalom.



Italy's Federica Brignone speeds down the course during an alpine ski, women's World Cup giant slalom race in Semmering, Austria, Saturday, Dec. 28, 2024.

## Cavs Beat Nuggets 149-135 for 6th Straight Win



Denver Nuggets guard Jamal Murray, front, drives past Cleveland Cavaliers forward Dean Wade in the first half of an NBA basketball game Friday, Dec. 27, 2024, in Denver.

DENVER (AP) — Donovan Mitchell scored 33 points, Evan Mobley had 26 points and the streaking Cleveland Cavaliers beat the Denver Nuggets 149-135 on Friday night for their sixth straight win.

Cleveland set a season high in points and improved to 10-1 since dropping two in a row to Atlanta last month.

Nikola Jokic had 27 points, 14 rebounds and 13 assists for his

league-leading 12th triple-double of the season, and Jamal Murray also had 27 with 10 assists for Denver, which has dropped two in a row.

Michael Porter Jr. scored 13 of the Nuggets' first 25 points to help keep pace with the Cavaliers but only scored five the rest of the way.

Cleveland led by as many as 19 to improve its NBA-best record to 27-4.