

NINTH GAMES GOLD FOR MEN, FOURTH FOR WOMEN

India keep kabaddi crowns

Nagoya: India's supremacy in the Asian Games kabaddi competition remained intact as both the men's and women's teams outplayed familiar foes Iran in their respective finals to successfully defend their gold medals here on Saturday.

The men's team prevailed 40-34, while the women clinched a 37-34 triumph to ensure that their dominance over the event continued. This was the ninth gold for the men and fourth for the women.

The men's win came without their most experienced player, Pawan Sehrawat, having to step on the mat.

ASIAN GAMES

With the defending champions struggling for control midway through the contest, it was the composure of raiders Arjun Deswal and Devank in the decisive phase that tilted a gripping final in India's favour.

Iran fought for every point, matching — and even exceeding — India's physicality, refusing to allow the defending champions to settle into a rhythm.

At half-time, Iran held a slender 18-17 lead and India had every reason to be concerned. The Iranian side's relentless approach had put the Indians under pressure.

But India did not panic. Instead, they changed the tempo of the game.

"After Iran were leading at half-time, we strategised that only those raiders who were pulling out the opponents would be sent, and here Arjun Deswal and Devank were spot on. Their raids completely turned the match



Gold medallists India women's kabaddi team after the presentation ceremony on Saturday. (Reuters)



The jubilant India men's kabaddi team after clinching the gold at the Asian Games on Saturday. (Reuters)

on its head," Sehrawat said after the final.

India also tightened its defensive lines, making it

increasingly difficult for the Iranian raiders to find easy points.

The turning point came

when India inflicted an all-out to stretch the advantage to 29-24. With the gold beginning to come into sight, the Indians showed another side of their experience. Rather than chase points recklessly, they slowed the contest down and outsmarted the Iranians.

Tense finish

The women also held their nerve in a more tense finish to clinch a record-extending fourth gold.

India exploited Iran's weak left flank. Raiders Nikita, captain Pooja and Sanju Devi repeatedly attacked from that side, and the strategy paid dividends.

The tall, athletic Iranians had the technique and the physical presence to trouble India, but their lack of experience at this level showed when India consistently found openings on the left.

India went into the break with a 22-16 advantage.

Iran came out with renewed purpose after the interval. They mounted a swift comeback and an all-out brought them within one point at 28-27, suddenly transforming what had looked like an Indian-controlled contest into a tense finish.

That was when India's experience became decisive. Most of the Indian players had also featured at the Hangzhou Asian Games in 2023 and knew how to handle the pressure of a final.

Rather than panic, they tightened their defence, became more conservative in their approach and forced Iran to take greater risks.

The strategy worked and India emerged champions.

With inputs from PTI