

Iran names 30-man squad for Volleyball Nations League

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Behrouz Ataei announced a provisional 30-man squad for the Volleyball Nations League 2023.

All 16 teams will be allowed to name 14 players for each week at this year's competition.

The inclusion of outside hitter Milad Ebadipour in Ataei's list came as a surprise as the coach had said the Iranian captain would miss the best part of the three weeks due to injury and family reasons.

Injured middle blocker Ali-Asghar Mojarad is also in the list, while opposite spiker Saber Kazemi is probably Iran's biggest absentee in the preliminary round squad.

Veteran middle blocker Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi, who withdrew from the national team days before last August's World Championship, has been handed a call-up by Ataei again as Amirhossein Toukhteh will miss the event for serving a one-year doping ban.

Iranian prodigy Pouria Hossein Khanzadeh, 18, who reached the Iranian Super League final with Haraz Amol in March – only to come short against



Iranian players are seen in a training session in Tehran, Iran, on April 29, 2023.

● PAYAM SANI/volleyball.ir

Shahdab Yazad – has been rewarded with a place in the list and could fill in for Ebadipour.

Iran will open its campaign in Week 1 of the competition with a visit to Nagoya, Japan, where Ataei's men will take on the host on June 6.

The first round of fixtures will also see Iran face Poland, China, and Slovenia respectively.

Iran will then fly to Rotterdam for Week 2 to square off against Germany on June 20 before a double header against reigning world

champion Italy and USA, which was beaten by France in last year's VNL final.

The Asian powerhouse will finish the second round with an encounter against the Netherlands at Rotterdam Ahoy on June 24.

Week 3 will begin for Iran with a game against defending champion France in Anaheim, California, on July 5.

Ataei's team will play Bulgaria and Argentina and then cap off the preliminary round against Cuba

on July 9.

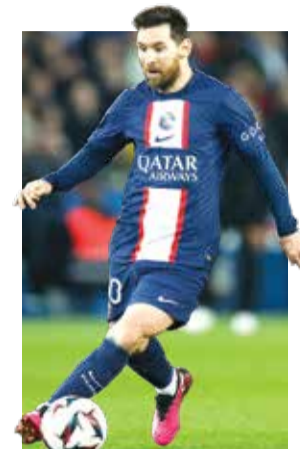
The top seven teams of the table will join host Poland in the VNL Finals – starting with the quarterfinals in Gdansk's Ergo Arena on July 19.

In his first experience at the competition, Ataei, despite a slow start, steered Iran to last year's Finals, where his men suffered a last-eight defeat against Poland after a five-set thriller in Bologna, Italy.

The following is Iran's full 30-man squad for the upcoming VNL:

Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi, Milad Ebadipour, Mehdi Jelveh, Amir-Reza Sarlak, Mohammad Falah, Esmail Mosafer, Mohammadreza Hazratpour, Mohammadreza Mo'azen, Amin Esmailnejad, Amirhossein Esfandiar, Ali Ramezani, Mohammad-Javad Ma'navinejad, Ali-Asghar Mojarad, Ali Hajipour, Meysam Salehi, Mohammad-Taher Vadi, Pouria Hossein Khanzadeh, Shahrour Homayounfarmanesh, Arman Salehi, Armin Afshinfar, Bardia Sa'adat, Javad Karimi, Fazel Pajouman, Mohammad Valizadeh, Amir-Mohammad Golzadeh, Mobin Nasari, Morteza Sharifi, Mehrab Maleki Sorkhi, Ehsan Daneshdoust, Mas'oud Gholami.

Messi suspended by PSG for two weeks over Saudi Arabia trip



● GONZALO FUENTES/REUTERS

BBC SPORT – Argentina captain Lionel Messi has been suspended by Paris St-Germain for two weeks after travelling to Saudi Arabia without the club's permission this week.

The trip followed the French club's home defeat by Lorient on Sunday, in which Messi played the full 90 minutes.

Messi will not train or play for PSG during the period of his suspension.

It is understood the 35-year-old asked permission to make the journey to carry out commercial work but was refused.

Messi, who has also been fined by the club, has a role as a tourism ambassador for Saudi Arabia.

The World Cup winner's two-year contract with PSG expires this summer. Barcelona vice-president Rafael Yuste claimed in March that the Spanish club were in contact with Messi about a return to the Nou Camp.

Messi has scored 31 goals and contributed 34 assists in 71 games in all competitions for PSG, and won the Ligue 1 title last season.

He is set to miss matches against Troyes and Ajaccio as PSG, five points clear with five games to go, look to clinch a ninth league title in 11 seasons.

Messi has taken a decision that effectively calls time on his Paris St-Germain career.

Yes, they have three games left after Messi's suspension has been completed and there is work remaining to secure another Ligue 1 title, but PSG are on a different course now – and it does not involve Messi, who less than five months ago achieved the crowning glory of his stellar career by lifting the World Cup.

PSG do not view their actions as being anything extraordinary. In their minds they are effectively punishing an employee who has gone somewhere else on a work day miles away from where he is supposed to be.

But they also feel it is a statement about the future direction of the club, which they are adamant will be around younger players. It is also confirmation of their zero-tolerance approach to discipline.

PSG's fans don't want Messi any more. It is certain his contract will not be renewed.

Davis, James deliver as Lakers top Warriors in Game 1; Embiid named NBA MVP

ASSOCIATED PRESS – LeBron James no longer has to do it all against Stephen Curry on the big stage, not even close. Anthony Davis plugs the middle and takes away the easy chances inside. Dennis Schröder has the energy to help chase No. 30 all over the court. D'Angelo Russell can hit a big shot with a hand in his face.

That's the thing about these new-look Lakers – they take so much pressure off the game's all-time scoring leader and LeBron believes in them, even with the defending champions on a 14-0 run with their home crowd rocking.

Davis had 30 points, 23 rebounds, five assists and four blocked shots, James added 22 points and 11 rebounds dueling with Stephen Curry in their latest postseason showdown, and Los Angeles held off a late flurry by the Golden State Warriors to win an entertaining Game 1 in the Western Conference semifinals 117-112 on Tuesday night.

"We've been playing playoff basketball for about 2 1/2 months now just to punch our clock to be able to play right now in the postseason," James said. "We were very resilient tonight. ... We know how great they are on their home floor, so to withstand that, it's another good step for our ballclub."

James' 22 points were his third-fewest in 23 playoff



Lakers forward Anthony Davis (3) shoots during a victory over the Warriors in Game 1 of the NBA Western Conference semifinal in San Francisco, CA, US, on May 2, 2023.

● JEFF CHIU/AP

games against the Warriors. His previous-low in a win was 27 in Game 7 of 2016 Finals.

Jordan Poole missed a 3-pointer to tie it with 9.7 seconds left as the Warriors rally in the closing minutes fell short. Curry's 3 with 1:38 left tied the game, then Russell answered right back before Davis blocked a shot by Curry moments later. James missed the first of two free throws with 1:05 to go.

Poole's 3 with 2:48 remain-

ing cut the Lakers' lead to 112-109, and James was called for traveling with 1:53 left.

For all-time scoring leader James and Curry – who has the most 3-pointers ever and is reigning NBA Finals MVP – this is a new chapter in the long rivalry between the superstars after they faced off in four straight NBA Finals from 2015-2018 while James played for Cleveland.

Curry scored 27 points, Splash Brother Klay Thompson had 25, and Kevon Looney grabbed a career-high 23 rebounds for his fourth game of this postseason with 20 or more. He also had 10 points and five assists. Thompson made a 3 with 5:19 to go that cut the Lakers' lead to 112-104.

The defending champion Warriors will try to even the series in Game 2 tonight back on their home floor at Chase

Center, where LA fans could be heard chanting "Let's go Lakers!" after the final buzzer. Elsewhere, Jalen Brunson scored 30 points and keyed the run the New York Knicks needed just in time to get by a Miami Heat team playing without Jimmy Butler, evening the Eastern Conference semifinals at a game apiece with a 111-105 victory.

Julius Randle returned from a sprained left ankle that sidelined him in Game 1 with

25 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists, and RJ Barrett scored 24 points for the No. 5-seeded Knicks.

Caleb Martin scored 22 points in place of Butler for the Heat, who host Game 3 on Saturday afternoon.

Embiid the MVP

Meanwhile, Philadelphia 76ers center Joel Embiid won the NBA's Most Valuable Player award for the first time, the league announced on Tuesday.

Embiid was chosen over Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic, to whom he lost the award in the past two seasons, and Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo, who won back-to-back awards in 2019 and 2020.

The Cameroonian big man received 73 first-place votes from a panel of 100 broadcasters and journalists, marking the fifth consecutive win for an international player.

The 29-year-old is only the second African player to become MVP after Nigerian-American Hakeem Olajuwon from the Houston Rockets in the 1993-94 season.

The third overall 2014 draft pick led the league in scoring for a second straight year, averaging a career-high 33.1 points per game on 54.8% shooting from the field, 10.2 rebounds and 4.2 assists in addition to 66 three-pointers.