

Speraw 'disappointed' over US visa denial for three Iranian players



US head coach John Speraw makes instructions to his players during a 3-0 victory over Iran in the Volleyball Nations League in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, on June 23, 2023. ● FIVB

Sports Desk

USA volleyball head coach John Speraw said he was "disappointed" to hear that the US Embassy in Ankara has refused to issue visas for three Iranian national team players for the Volleyball Nations League.

Iran is to visit Anaheim in California for the final week of the preliminary round – starting July 4 – but head coach Behrouz Ataei will likely have to do without the trio of integral opposite spiker Amin Esmaeilnejad, setter Mohammad-Taher Vadi, and Arman Salehi.

Iran will kick off Week 3 against Tokyo Olympic champion France, before taking on Bulgaria, Argentina, and Cuba.

Speaking about the situation after his team's straight-set victory over Iran in Rotterdam, Speraw said: "I would have been disappointed. I think any coach wants to take his best players... I'm not sure who this has affected – which players or staff – but anytime you're going to a highly competitive environment, you wanna have everybody with you. No question I'd have been disappointed.

When told who the three players are, Speraw said: "Oh man! If I was a coach and three of my starters didn't get visas that would be frustrating.

"I know it's complex, you could see the emotions that were out

on the court today. I'm sorry that that happened," added the American.

Friday's defeat was a fifth in seven games for Ataei's men, while the Americans – last year's runners-up – celebrated their sixth victory.

USA took the first two sets by 25-22 and 25-18 scorelines before overcoming a 20-17 deficit in the third set to win it 25-23.

"Great volleyball match," Speraw said, adding: "We played with a lot of emotion and energy."

"I think the first set was really well played by both teams, [that was] very close. I think the end of that set and for the rest of the match, the biggest key was our serve versus their passing. They got a run of passing difficulties and that was the difference in the match."

Meanwhile, Milad Taqavi, the secretary of the Iranian Volleyball Federation, said the country may withdraw from VNL Week 3 as "it's impossible to take on the opponents with an incomplete squad."

"We'll have a meeting at the federation this week to discuss the issue and will consider all aspects of the situation before making the decision. We're not willing to take part at the event at any cost," added Taqavi, while he urged the sport's international governing body, the FIVB, to come up with the proper response to the United States' decision.

Iranians win three medals in Yasar Dogu wrestling event

Sports Desk

The first day of the freestyle competitions at the Yasar Dogu, Vehbi Emre & Hamit Kaplan wrestling tournament in Istanbul, Turkey, saw the Iranians walk away with a couple of gold medals, as well as a silver.

Representing the country in the 57kg contests, Ebrahim Khari was handed the ultimate prize of the weight class after Germany's Justin Junior Lehr withdrew from the final showdown with an injury.

Mohammadreza Shakeri bagged a second gold for Iran on Friday, thanks to a 10-2 victory over the host's Cavit Acar in the 65kg final. Meanwhile, Ali Rezaei came out on top against two Turkish wrestlers to reach the 70kg final, only to suffer an 11-6 defeat against Magomed Bashir Khaniev of Azerbaijan.

Friday's results came after a total of nine medals had seen Iran finish as the runner-up in the Greco-Roman event.

Saeed Esameili was the sole Iranian to leave Istanbul with a GR gold after a win against Turkey's Mus-



Ebrahim Khari (l) and Mohammadreza Shakeri won two freestyle golds at the Yasar Dogu, Vehbi Emre & Hamit Kaplan wrestling tournament in Istanbul, Turkey. ● iwfi.ir

tafa Safa Yildirim in the 67kg final. Meysam Dalkhani (60kg) – a world champion in 2018 – plus Mohammad-Mehdi Javaheri (55kg), Sajjad Imentalab (72kg), and Jamal Esmaeli (82kg) added four silvers to Iran's medal haul, while Amirmohammad Yarmohammadzahi (63kg), Amin Kavi-

aninejad (77kg), Pejman Poshtam (87kg), and Morteza Alghousi (130kg) grabbed a bronze in their respective weight classes. Turkey topped the Greco-Roman standings with 220 points, with Iran finishing on 169 points. Hungary tallied 111 points for the third spot.

Uzbekistan named 2024 Futsal World Cup host



Sports Desk

Uzbekistan will play host to next year's FIFA Futsal World Cup, the sport's governing body announced on Friday. The Central Asian country overtook Morocco, and United States in the bidding process.

Uzbekistan will be the fourth Asian country to host the competition following Hong Kong (1992), the Chinese Taipei (2004), and Thailand (2012). The top four of the 2024 AFC Futsal Asian Cup will join Uzbekistan in representing the continent in futsal's flagship

international event – starting September 14 next year. The draw for the Asian Cup qualifiers took place in AFC headquarters in Kuala Lumpur where record 12-time champion Iran was drawn in Group C alongside Lebanon, Maldives, and group host Kyrgyzstan.

United States to host expanded 32-team FIFA Club World Cup In 2025



Real Madrid players celebrate lifting the FIFA Club World Cup trophy in Rabat, Morocco, on February 11, 2023. ● AFP

AFP – The United States will host a new-look expanded 32-team Club World Cup in 2025, governing body FIFA announced.

The move means the U.S. will host major tournaments for three successive summers, culminating in the 2026 World Cup which will be co-hosted with Mexico and Canada.

In 2024, an expanded Copa America, featuring national teams from South America and the CONCACAF region, will be held in the United States.

The existing Club World Cup, which began in 2000, has

struggled to capture global attention and FIFA president Gianni Infantino has long targeted an expansion to bring the top clubs from Europe, South America and the rest of the world into a tournament format.

The most recent edition was held in Morocco in February and featured just seven teams.

"The Club World Cup 2025 will be the pinnacle of elite professional men's club football, and with the required infrastructure in place together with a massive local interest, the United States is the ideal host to kick off this

new, global tournament," said Infantino.

While many of the qualification slots remain to be decided, the tournament will feature the likes of Real Madrid, Manchester City, Chelsea, Brazilian clubs Flamengo and Palmeiras, Mexican team Leon and Seattle Sounders from Major League Soccer.

The dates, host cities and match schedule for the tournament will be established at a later date, FIFA said. FIFA decided in February that the new competition will feature 12 teams from Europe, six from South

America and four representatives each from Asia, Africa and CONCACAF, which includes North and Central America and the Caribbean. The Oceania region will also be given one slot and the host nation is guaranteed a place in the tournament.

The European participants will include the winners of last five Champions Leagues. The new tournament will, like the national team World Cup, be held every four years. The last edition in the smaller format is scheduled to be played in Saudi Arabia in December.

Teams from South America

will qualify through the Copa Libertadores and CONMEBOL's rankings.

FIFA is setting up operations in the United States with offices in Miami and recently signed an agreement to work jointly with CONCACAF on regional tournaments such as the Gold Cup and Nations League.

FIFA also announced on Friday it was pushing back the decision on the host of the 2030 World Cup from September or October to the second half of next year "to ensure additional consultation with all key stakeholders."