

# Volleyball Nations League: Iran beaten by Bulgaria in thrilling five-setter



Bulgarian outside-hitter Asparuh Asparuhov (8) hits a spike during a 3-2 victory over Iran in Week 3 of the Volleyball Nations League in Anaheim, CA, US, on July 6, 2023.  
● FIVB

## Sports Desk

Bulgaria came from behind twice to beat Iran in a five-set thriller (21-25, 25-21, 22-25, 25-22, 15-11) in Week 3 of the Volleyball Nations League in Anaheim, California, on Thursday. An eighth defeat in 10 outings means Iran will surely miss out on a place in the

VNL Finals, having progressed to the quarterfinals last year. Bulgarian Asparuh Asparuhov stole the show for the European side with a game-high 23 points, while his fellow outside-hitter Martin Atanasov chipped in 18 – including a couple of aces. Opposite spiker Ali Hajipour topped the scoring

for Iran with 17 points – three aces – followed by team captain Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi, (13 points, seven blocks), and Morteza Sharifi, who finished on 10 points. Iran was again without head coach Behrouz Ataei as well as prolific opposite Amin Esmailnejad, first-choice setter Mohammad-Taher

Vadi, and Arman Salehi – after all four were denied an entry visa by the US Embassy in Ankara. The FIVB Board of Administration's official announcement on Thursday – in the face of the United States' controversial decision – confirmed that "no ranking points will be applied to Iran nor their op-

ponents" during the final week of the preliminary round. Teams' status in the FIVB Men's World Ranking will play a decisive part in the qualification process for next year's Paris Olympics. Having suffered a straight-set defeat against reigning Olympic champion France in the final-week opener,

Iran will take on Argentina tonight before finishing its VNL campaign against Cuba a day later. Iran got off to a disappointing start in this year's event, falling to a 3-0 defeat against Asian rival Japan on the first day of Week 1 in Nagoya, before giving away a two-set lead to leave the court empty-handed against Poland. Ataei's men then bounced back to beat China in four sets but finished the visit to Japan with a straight-set loss to Slovenia. The second week started with a 3-0 victory over Germany for Iran, before straight-set defeats against reigning world champion Italy and USA – last year's VNL runner-up – were followed by a 3-2 loss to the Netherlands in Rotterdam. Elsewhere in Pool 5, Argentina eased to victory over Germany in three sets (25-23, 25-18, 25-17), while Serbia rallied past Cuba in five sets (19-25, 25-23, 25-21, 22-25, 15-11). The top seven of the 16-team table will join host Poland in the VNL Finals – starting with the last-eight round on July 19 in Gdansk.

## Iran's men, women into Asian para volleyball finals



● MNA

## Sports Desk

Iranian men's and women's team will be looking to secure double titles for the country in the ParaVolley Asia Oceania Zone Championships when playing in today's final showdowns in Astana, Kazakhstan. Iranian men's team came out on top in straight sets (25-10, 25-7, 25-15) against Iraq on Thursday and will be chasing a ninth Asian crown against the host today. The winner of the competition will be handed a berth in next year's Paralympic Games in Paris, though Hadi Rezaei's men – a record eight-time Paralympic gold medalist – have already booked their tickets for the French capital as the reigning world champions, meaning Kazakhstan will join the sitting volleyball powerhouse in the Games, no matter what the outcome of today's contest. In the women's event, Iran also eased to victory in three sets (25-16, 25-7, 25-12) against Japan and will square off against China for the ultimate prize.

## Joshua-Whyte rematch agreed for 12 August in London

Heavyweight Anthony Joshua will face fellow Briton Dillian Whyte at London's O2 Arena on 12 August in a rematch of their 2015 bout. Joshua, 33, knocked out Whyte in the seventh round of their heated British title fight eight years ago, which also took place at the O2, avenging a loss to his rival in the amateurs. Olympic gold medallist Joshua went on to become a two-time world champion. Whyte, 36, lost his only world title challenge to Tyson Fury in 2022. "I've been clear that my plan is to be active this

year," said Joshua. "August 12 is the date – I'll be ready to fight. I look forward to dealing with business." Whyte beat Joshua by decision as an amateur in 2009, forming the basis of their bitter rivalry. Joshua gained revenge when the pair met again as professionals in December 2015. 'AJ' was rocked in the second round but recovered to force a stoppage in the seventh. "I'm looking forward to returning to the London O2 on August 12 and going to war," said Whyte. "It's 1-1, so this is the decider." Joshua beat American Jer-



● PA

maine Franklin on points in April, his first win in more than two years, having lost consecutive bouts to WBA (Super), IBF and

WBO world champion Oleksandr Usyk. The Londoner – who has won 25 fights and lost three – turned profession-

al after winning gold at London 2012. He won a world title in his 16th fight, but suffered his first professional loss in a shock stoppage defeat by Andy Ruiz Jr at Madison Square Garden in June 2019, before reclaiming his unified titles on points in the rematch six months later. Joshua is expected to face former world champion Deontay Wilder in December in Saudi Arabia, with a deal reportedly close to being agreed. It is understood he wanted a second fight under the tutelage of trainer Der-

rick James before taking on hard-hitting American Wilder. After weeks of negotiations, and Joshua and promoter Eddie Hearn accepting Whyte's request to remove a rematch clause, the fight has been agreed. "I can't quite believe this fight is happening and there was absolutely no stopping either man," Hearn said. "The rivalry runs deep and there is something about these two where they will never back down from each other. "It is an absolute must-win for both. Get ready for fireworks."

## Iran eyeing world handball U20 berth against Kazakhstan



● MNA

## Sports Desk

A place in next year's World Championships will be up for grabs when Iran takes on Kazakhstan at the Asian Women's Junior (U20) Handball Championship in Hong Kong today. Iranian girls marched to a 45-16 victory over the host on Friday to book a spot in the fifth-place matchup against Kazakhstan, which defeated fellow Central Asian opponent Uzbekistan 34-28 earlier in the day. Iran defeated Uzbekistan (37-36) and India (39-31) and suffered defeats against China (23-29) and the Chinese Taipei (18-28) to finish third to the latter two in Group B of the competition. South Korea progressed to the semifinals – thanks to a clean sweep of four victories in Group A – followed by Japan. The top five of the tournament will qualify for 24th IHF Women's Junior (U20) Handball World Championship, to be held in North Macedonia from June 19-30, 2024.

## Hamilton backs peaceful Just Stop Oil protest at British Grand Prix

THE GUARDIAN – Lewis Hamilton has said he would support a peaceful protest by the Just Stop Oil group at this weekend's British Grand Prix. Environmental activists are targeting sporting events and are expected to take action at Silverstone and the seven-time world champion, who has expressed sympathy with their cause in the past, believed they had a valid point to make. On Wednesday, campaigners disrupted two matches

at Wimbledon and also did so on the first day of the Lord's Ashes Test. The organisers of the British Grand Prix have already said they are planning the weekend with the expectation of disruption. However, while Hamilton was unequivocal in stating that protesters should not climb on to the track or endanger lives, he did support their right to make a point about the climate emergency. When asked if he would agree with a protest at the race not involv-

ing invading the track, he said: "Yes. I support peaceful protests." He has expressed concern about the climate emergency in the past and has been working actively with his Mercedes team to address issues of sustainability and attempting to minimise the environmental impact the team makes by participating in F1. At Silverstone, Hamilton was clear he supported the cause Just Stop Oil were promoting but did emphasise they should

make their point without endangering lives by climbing on to the track. "From my perspective, and my team's perspective, we are focused on sustainability and we believe in what people [the protesters] are fighting for and we are making those changes as a sport," he said. "But safety is key. We don't want to put them in harm's way and we don't want to put anyone else in harm's way. If there was to be one [a protest] we hope it is not on track."



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