

# Iran's youth handball team aims for world championship glory



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## Sports Desk

Iran's youth national handball team is gearing up to embark on a journey to showcase their talent in the 10th IHF Men's Youth (U19) World Championship. With the tournament scheduled to kick off in Croatia from August 2 to 13, the young team under the guidance of Head Coach Majid Rahimizadeh is ready to take on the challenge and make their mark on the global stage.

Drawing inspiration from their impressive performance in the Asian championship last year, Rahimizadeh believes his players have the potential to spring another surprise in the world junior handball event. Their goal is to reach the top 16 teams. However, it won't be an "easy path" for the Iranian team as they find themselves in group H, rubbing shoulders with some formidable European opponents. Sweden, the reigning

European champions, and the ever-strong Faroe Islands, who recently defeated Sweden and Denmark in friendlies, are set to pose tough challenges. On August 11 and 12, Iran will take on these powerhouses, followed by a crucial encounter against Burundi from the African continent. Rahimizadeh, speaking to ISNA on Monday, underlines the significance of every match in the world championships and emphasizes his team's unwavering determination to "represent their country with honor".

To prepare for the tough competition ahead, the head coach says, the players have already achieved an impressive 80% preparation level, and the team is working tirelessly to maintain this state of readiness. Additionally, the squad is gearing up for two friendly matches with Georgia, yet another strong team in the world championships. These encounters

are seen as good opportunities for the players to "build their confidence, fine-tune their techniques, and refine their tactics" before the main event. Rahimizadeh reflects on Iran's unexpected success in the Asian championship and holds hope for a similar outcome in the world championships. With a roster comprising 8 players from Iran's Premier League teams, the national team is undoubtedly a force to be reckoned with, he boasts.

Iran is set to take part in the forthcoming global event after a 14-year hiatus which is a monumental achievement for Iran's handball team. Rahimizadeh emphasizes the significance of "continuous participation" in such high-level competitions as a means to "enhance performance and ultimately secure better results". He draws inspiration from teams like Sweden and the Faroe Islands, who have consistently thrived

in such tournaments through sustained presence and dedication.

However, realizing their dreams of advancing to the top 16 teams requires more than just talent; it demands a well-structured, long-term plan. Rahimizadeh expresses concern about the "constant rotation of management" in Iran's handball, calling for a stable and sustainable strategy. He firmly believes in the immense potential of the current generation of players and "their ability to leave a lasting impact on the world stage". Yet, he acknowledges that only a "professional attitude, meticulous planning, and adequate resources" can unlock their true potential. Coach Rahimizadeh's hope is unwavering, and he remains confident that his players will rise to the occasion, showcasing their skills and determination to earn a spot among the world's top 16 teams.

# Iran's gymnasts set to make history at Asian Games

## Sports Desk

Reza Kheirkhah, the head coach of Iran's national artistic gymnastics team, has set his sights on securing medals in the upcoming Asian Games. With determination and confidence, Kheirkhah believes that the team has what it takes to improve their standing from the previous eighth place finish and even clinch the coveted gold medal in Hangzhou, China. Originally scheduled for September 2022, the 19th Asian Games had to be postponed to 2023 due to COVID-19 concerns in China. The multi-sport event is now to be held from September 23 to October 8 2023.

With a thorough preparation plan in motion, the Iranian head coach highlights the team's relentless efforts to achieve success at the Hangzhou Asian Games. The national team's rigorous training camps have been conducted without interruption, aimed at honing their skills and readiness for the grand event, Kheirkhah says, according to IRNA.

The final camp has already commenced, and after a series of tests, ten members of the national team have been selected to represent Iran in Hangzhou. Despite facing setbacks in Iran's Gymnastics Federation, the athletes showcased unwavering motivation

during training, he points out.

Kheirkhah expresses great faith in the potential of the artistic gymnastics team, citing their track record in securing 16 medals across Asian, world, and international competitions.

The team is more than capable of returning home with a handful of medals, he says.

The team's recent achievements speak volumes of their progress. Over the last seven months, the artistic gymnastics squad has proudly secured three valuable medals in international arenas.

Kheirkhah is optimistic that "history can be made" at the Asian Games, aiming for "two finalists and two medals" at the minimum. "With the current team's potential, these goals are well within reach."

Having clinched medals among 72 countries in previous competitions, including Olympic qualifiers and Asian Championships, the Iranian artistic gymnastics team has undoubtedly showcased their prowess on the global stage. In light of their impressive achievements, Kheirkhah urges the Ministry of Sports and Youth and the National Olympic Committee to provide the necessary cooperation to Iran's Gymnastics Federation, ensuring that the team is fully equipped to shine at the Hangzhou Asian Games.



# Iranian taekwondokas bag 30 medals in S Korea competitions

## Sports Desk

Iranian athletes won 30 medals in the 2023 Seongnam World Taekwondo of Hanmadang, South Korea, which was held with the participation of taekwondo athletes from 58 countries. Iranian taekwondo practitioners snatched 17 gold, eight silver and five bronze medals during the four-day event, which ended on Monday at the 2023 Seongnam World Taekwondo of Hanmadang in South Korea.

Iranian gold medalists in the competitions comprised of Mohammad Hossein Artman (two medals), Nima Faraji, Jalal Aqdam (two medals), Hadi Rajabi, Ronak Hosseinzadeh, Zahra Joudaki, Behnam Mohammadi, Hadi Asefi, Abolhassan Shahvardi, Firouz Asbaqi, Farnaz Amini, Niloufar Farahani, and Leili Alidoust (two golds).

The eight silver medals of Iran were also won by Amin Aramesh Far, Ahmad Bahram, Ronak Hosseinzadeh, Maliheh Asadi, Akbar Ghaffari, Shakiba Soltani, Niloufar Farahani, Reza Mohammadian and Hossein Samadi. Also, Laila Kashwari, Mahboubeh Shafizadeh, Maliheh Asadi, Behnam Mohammadi and Hadi Asefi won five bronze medals for Iran. Hanmadang is a Taekwondo Festival for competitions including the essentials of martial arts such as breaking, self-defense, and poomsae, which is held every year by the World Taekwondo Academy (Kukkiwon).



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# Women's cycling in Iran faces grim future

## Sports Desk

Women's cycling in Iran is teetering "on the brink of obliteration," as highlighted by Forouzan Abdollahi, a female Iranian cyclist, who is deeply concerned about the dwindling state of the sport. In an interview with ISNA published on Monday, the renowned athlete has shed light on the challenges faced by women cyclists and how "the lack of motivation and support is causing the sport to shrink each passing year". In a candid revelation, Abdollahi has exposed the dire situation of Iranian women's cycling and the demoralization felt by the athletes. She points out that apart from the Asian Championship, there are no other international competitive platforms for women cyclists in Iran.

"The league, which used to have two stages, saw one stage canceled last year," dealing a heavy blow to the athletes' motivation, she says. With minimal opportunities to showcase

their talent, the sport is losing its appeal among aspiring cyclists. The lack of support from clubs and sponsors has further exacerbated the predicament. Abdollahi stresses that without backing, the sport cannot flourish. "The young female cyclists put in tremendous efforts, training diligently alongside their male counterparts, yet their hard work often goes unnoticed and unsupported."

Abdollahi highlights a sharp decline in participation in the national championship, particularly in the youth category. While talented individuals have shown promise, many are forced to abandon their cycling dreams due to the high costs and lack of income. The inconsistency in athlete selection

for competitions has led to a decrease in motivation, particularly among young cyclists.

Looking toward the future, Abdollahi calls for a stronger focus on promoting youth talent and providing the necessary support for aspiring

female cyclists. The sport needs a "nurturing environment" to thrive, and "investing in the younger generation" is crucial to expect future medal-worthy performances.

She emphasizes that women's cycling has already showcased its potential, with notable achievements by athletes like Faranak Parto-Azer and Somayyeh Yazdani in mountain biking and road championships, respectively. However, without sustained support, the growth and success of such athletes remain uncertain. "We pushed ourselves as high as we could but we need support from here on out."

Abdollahi pleads individuals and organizations to step up and contribute to the development of women's cycling in Iran. She passionately believes that the sport holds great potential and has the ability to deliver remarkable results. While imploring for support, Abdollahi voices hope that her call would resonate with those who can make a difference in the future of women's cycling in Iran.

"I hope those people hear me out."

