

'Morale-boosting' display for Iran U19 ahead of World Championship



● volleyball.ir

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Mohammad Vakili hailed his team's "morale-boosting" performance in a friendly tournament in São Paulo ahead of the upcoming FIVB Volleyball Boys' U19 World Championship in San Juan, Argentina.

On Sunday, Vakili's boys came out on top against Bulgaria in straight sets (25-20, 25-19, 31-29) in the final showdown of the four-team event, which also featured the Brazilian un-

der-19 side and SESI São Paulo U21 team.

This was a third victory in the Brazilian city for the reigning Asian champion, which will be chasing a third world title – first since 2017 – in San Juan. Iran beat Brazil in four sets (25-21, 28-30, 25-17, 25-19) in the opening game before suffering a straight-set defeat (25-21, 25-22, 26-24) against Bulgaria – runner-up to Poland in the previous World Championship in Tehran two years ago.

Vakili's side was back in the winning ways, beating SESI São Paulo 3-0 (25-21, 27-25, 25-21) for a place in the final showdown.

"The tournament was a morale booster for us and helped improve the harmony in the team before the World Championship," Vakili said after the final match.

"We were brilliant in attack and did much better than the Bulgarians in defense. Both sides will be among the favorites in Argentina," added the Iranian coach,

who was excited to see his boys receiving "such a massive support by the Brazilian fans."

"I didn't expect such a crowd cheering our team. This shows Iranian volleyball's strong fanbase all over the world, most notably in the South American countries," Vakili said.

There were also individual recognitions for the Iranian players in the tournament as Taha Behboudnia took the MVP and Best Middle Blocker awards while Mahan Barzkar was

named the joint Best Opposite Spiker.

A 2021 bronze medalist on home soil, Iran will begin its World Championship campaign with a game against fellow Asian side South Korea on Wednesday before taking on Puerto Rico, Columbia, and Nigeria in Pool C. The host country – also the reigning South American champion – will headline Pool A, with the United States, Egypt, Serbia, and Costa Rica also in the group. Bulgaria is in Pool B along-

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Iran U23 wins CAFA Futsal Cup



● FFIRI

Sports Desk

Iran's under-23 team claimed the title at the CAFA Futsal Cup thanks to a final-day 1-0 victory over Tajikistan.

Ali Akrami bagged the only goal of the game as Ali Sanei's side finished atop the six-team table with 12 points.

Iran got off to a losing start at the event in Dushanbe, suffering a shock 2-1 defeat against Turkmenistan, but bounced back to beat Kyrgyzstan (1-0), Afghanistan (5-1), and Uzbekistan (5-0) before Sunday's win against the host.

Akrami went on to pick up the Most Valuable Player award while his teammate Mehdi Rostami was named the Best Goalkeeper.

Afghanistan finished as the runner-up with 10 points, courtesy of three wins and one draw and defeat apiece, followed by Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and the Kyrgyz Republic.

Hosseini bags first gold for Iran in World University Games



● MNA

Sports Desk

The second day of the FISU World University Games saw Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini, representing Iran in the wushu competitions, grab a first gold for the country in Chengdu, China. Hosseini claimed the ultimate prize of the gunshu event to take Iran's tally in the men's taolu to two medals.

Shahin Banitalebi settled for a bronze in the nanquan contest, finishing behind the host's Cao Maoyan and Ziu Lizong of Hong Kong.

Elsewhere in the Games, Iran's poomsae squad finished its campaign with four bronze medals.

The Iranian trio of Seyyed Ali Zare', Reza Jalalifar, and Morteza Zendehelel shared the third podium with Vietnam in the men's team event – a second bronze for Zendehelel following a third-spot finish in the individual competition.

South Korea won the team gold, with China taking the silver.

In the women's contests, Yasaman Limouchi won the individual bronze and was also part of the Iranian side – alongside Mobina Sharifi and Reihaneh Moqaddam – that won the team bronze. Vietnam took the other bronze while South Korea and China again scooped the gold and silver medals respectively.

'Cheeky' Verstappen toys with rivals as third F1 title looms large



Red Bull's Max Verstappen celebrates with the trophy on the podium after winning the Belgian Grand Prix in Spa, Belgium, on July 30, 2023.
JOHANNA GERON/REUTERS

BBC – Max Verstappen is toying with Formula 1 at the moment.

The Dutchman won the Belgian Grand Prix for Red Bull on Sunday at a canter from sixth on the grid while barely appearing to extend himself. When he wanted to overtake Sergio Perez for the lead, he lapped two seconds faster than his Red Bull team-mate at will.

Once out front Verstappen spent the rest of the race engaging in light-hearted badinage with his race engineer Gianpiero Lambiase as they bickered about how hard he should push. Verstappen was so at ease once in the lead that he was able to joke with his team.

After being asked by Lambiase to take it easier on his final set of tyres, due to Red Bull's concerns about their durability, his response was to suggest he push

even harder, extend an even bigger gap and take another set to give the team some pit stop practice.

Not that they need it, given Red Bull consistently have the fastest pit stops.

"He has all reason to be a bit cheeky," said Toto Wolff, boss of the Mercedes team that two years ago were going toe-to-toe with Verstappen for the title, but now appear helpless and lost in trying to understand just why Red Bull's advantage is so big.

"[He's] just driving around. On merit. Nothing else to say. As much as it's annoying." Though Verstappen's searing pace may have given the impression that he ignored Lambiase's demands to back off, especially once he crossed the line 22.3 seconds ahead of the only man in the same car, that was not the reality. Verstappen, Lambiase said after the race, "did listen". It just didn't look like it, so great was his superiority. Verstappen took a dominant

pole position won by more than 0.8 seconds, but was demoted five places by a grid penalty for using too many gearbox parts.

It took him just over 16 of the 44 laps to reach the front of the field. "I'm surprised it took him so long," Red Bull team principal Christian Horner said.

Horner quickly qualified that he was joking, but you know what they say about many a true word. His remark actually reflected the belief throughout the F1 paddock – before the grand prix started many were debating how many laps it would take Verstappen to get into the lead.

"What we are witnessing with Max at the moment," Horner said, "is something you see once in a generation. Like all the great drivers, he has that extra capacity. And what we're seeing is his ability to read a tyre, read a race, extract absolutely everything out of it. It's great to see. He is just at the top of his form."