

# Azmoun out as Iran names squad for Bulgaria, Angola friendlies

## Sports Desk

Iranian striker Sardar Azmoun will miss the upcoming friendly matches against Bulgaria and Angola as he continues his rehabilitation with his new club AS Roma.

Azmoun joined the Italian top-flight side from Bayer Leverkusen on a season-long loan deal last week but was ruled out of Friday's 2-1 home defeat against Milan in Serie A due to an injury he suffered during his time with the Bundesliga outfit.

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee named 24 players for the two games in September's international break, with Persepolis center-back Hossein Kan'anizadegan also absent in the list for disciplinary reasons in the aftermath of a red card he was shown during the CAFA Nations Cup final victory over Uzbekistan in June.

Injured Kayserispor defender Majid Hosseini will also miss the two games.

Iran will play away to Bulgaria at the Hristo Botev Stadium in Plovdiv on Thursday, five days before hosting Angola in Tehran. Ranked 77th in the latest FIFA Ranking, Bulgaria is fourth in Group G of the Euro 2024 qualifiers



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with two points after four rounds of matches and shared the spoils with Serbia in a 1-1 draw at home last time out in June. Angola, No. 116 in the

world, was last in action in July's COSAFA Cup – featuring Southern African national teams – and failed to progress beyond the group stage.

AEK Athens fullback Milad Mohammadi received a first international call-up since last year's World Cup, while Sepahan striker Shahriyar Moghanlou and Saman

Qoddous, who re-signed for Premier League side Brentford, are also back in the team after missing the CAFA tournament. Qalenoee, who replaced

Portuguese Carlos Queiroz after the World Cup, is tasked with steering his team in January's AFC Asian Cup in Qatar, where the three-time champion

will be chasing a first trophy since 1976.

Iran is drawn alongside the United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong, and Palestine in Group C of the continent's flagship international event.

The following is the full Iran squad:

**Goalkeepers:** Alireza Beiranvand (Persepolis), Payam Niazmand (Sepahan), Mohammadreza Akhbari (Golgozar Sirjan)

**Defenders:** Ehsan Hajsafi (AEK Athens), Milad Mohammadi (AEK Athens), Ramin Rezaeian (Sepahan), Sadeq Moharrami (Dinamo Zagreb), Morteza Pouraliganji (Persepolis), Mohammad Daneshgar (Sepahan), Rouzbeh Cheshmi (Esteghlal), Mohammad-Hossein Moradmamand (Esteghlal)

**Midfielders:** Ali Karimi (Kayserispor), Milad Sarlak (Persepolis), Saeed Ezzaatollahi (Vejle BK), Alireza Alizadeh (Golgozar Sirjan), Saman Qoddous (Brentford), Ahmad Nourollahi (Al Wahda), Vahid Amiri (Persepolis), Mohammad Mohebbi (FC Rostov), Mehdi Torabi (Persepolis), Alireza Jahانبakhsh (Feyenoord)

**Strikers:** Mehdi Taremi (Porto), Reza Asadi (Sepahan), Shahriyar Moghanlou (Sepahan).

## Iran's Hajimousaei wins World Taekwondo GP gold



Gold medalist Mahdi Hajimousaei (R) and his countryman Abolfazl Zandi celebrate with the Iranian flag after the men's -58kg final in the World Taekwondo Grand Prix in Paris, France, on September 1, 2023.

WORLD TAEKWONDO

## Sports Desk

The first day of the World Taekwondo Grand Prix in Paris saw Iranian Mahdi Hajimousaei walk away with a precious gold to take a massive step toward securing a berth in next year's Olympic Games in the French capital. The stage was set for an all-Iranian showdown, featuring Hajimousaei and his fellow 19-year-old Abolfazl Zandi, in the men's -58kg contests, before the latter withdrew from the bout to make sure Hajimousaei would earn 60 qualification points for the Olympics – moving up by five

spots in the latest World Rankings to stand in the 15th place. Hajimousaei caused a major upset earlier in the event by a victory over Italian Vito Dell'Aquila – a gold medalist at the Tokyo Olympics and last year's World Championships – in straight rounds and went on to beat Australian Bailey Lewis for a place in the final.

Beaten by Hajimousaei in June's Grand Prix semifinals in Rome, Zandi also enjoyed an impressive run on Friday as he outpowered South Koreans Jun Jang and Park Tae-joon – third and fourth in the World Rankings respec-

tively – and then came out victorious against Tunisian world number one Mohamed Khalil Jendoubi – silver winner in Tokyo – in the last-four bout.

Elsewhere on Friday, Iranian teenage girl Mobina Ne'matzadeh got off to a brave start against Tokyo Olympic silver medalist Adriana Cerezo of Spain in the -49kg semis, winning the first round, but eventually fell to a 2-1 defeat and settled for a joint bronze – alongside China's Xiaolu Wang. Turkey's Merve Dincel defeated the Spaniard for the ultimate prize.

## Djokovic fights back from two sets down to reach US Open last 16

**REUTERS** – A tenacious Novak Djokovic survived a US Open late night fright battling back from two sets down to tame fellow Serb Laslo Djere 4-6 4-6 6-1 6-1 6-3 on Friday, and move into the fourth round at Flushing Meadows.

On the ropes and reeling Djokovic, as he has done many times before, snatched victory from the jaws of defeat in front a record crowd inside a breathless Arthur Ashe Stadium court. It marked the 38th time Djokovic has won a five-setter and kept alive the 36-year-old's quest for a fourth US Open crown that would pull him level with Margaret Court's record haul of 24 Grand Slams.

"I hope you enjoyed the show, it was not so enjoyable for me especially in the first two sets," Djokovic told the crowd. "It was one of the toughest matches I have played here in many years." Djokovic had looked imperious in his opening two matches surrendering only 11 games in blowout wins over Frenchman Alexandre Muller and Spaniard Bernabe Zapata Miralles but his 32nd seeded countryman proved a far tougher test. The two Serbs had only clashed once before that in Belgrade last year but there were signs then that Djere was a danger, with the contest needing three sets and two tie-breaks before Djokovic claim the win.

"I did a little pep talk in the mirror," said Djokovic about his bathroom break after the second set. "I kind of laughed at myself because I was agitated and annoyed with the result, I had to kind of force myself to lift myself, to lift the spirits up." "Once I got the break in the third I thought 'OK, I have a shot, I have a chance,'" said Djokovic. "I might as well go after it."

"I started to play a bit more aggressive, started to read his games slightly more than I had in the first two sets and it worked well.

"But trust me, it was nerve wracking all the way till the last shot," he added.



Novak Djokovic celebrates during a third-round victory over Laslo Djere in the US Open in Flushing Meadows, NY, US, on September 1, 2023.

AP