

UK, Ireland confirmed as Euro 2028 hosts



● REUTERS

BBC – The United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland will host the 2028 European Championship, UEFA has confirmed.

The joint bid ran unopposed after Turkey withdrew to focus on a bid with Italy for Euro 2032, which was also confirmed at a meeting in Switzerland.

Both bids ran unopposed but still needed official approval from UEFA.

The UK and Ireland focused on Euro 2028, with UEFA's approval, after they ended a plan to be Europe's preferred candidate for the 2030 World Cup.

It is understood that Cardiff's Principality Stadium will host the opening match of the 2028 tournament with the final at London's Wembley.

The Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Wales have never hosted a major football tournament.

Matches at Euro 2028 are set to be held at 10 different grounds, including Glasgow's Hampden Park and Dublin's Aviva Stadium. Belfast's Casement Park and Everton's Bramley-Moore Dock, the former unbuilt while the latter is still under construction, were also included in the bid.

England were one of the 11 countries to host Euro 2020 along with Scotland, as well as being sole hosts of the 1966 World Cup and Euro '96. England also hosted the record-breaking Women's European Championship in 2022.

While Italy had only bid for the 2032 tournament, Turkey had initially bid to host both Euro 2028 and 2032.

Turkey withdrew from the running to host Euro 2028 last week after their bid with Italy for 2032 was approved by European football's governing body.

They have 20 potential host stadiums, of which 10 will be chosen, five per country, by October 2026.

Turkey hosted June's Champions League final between Manchester City and Inter Milan at Istanbul's Ataturk Olympic Stadium, but a major international tournament has never been held in the country.

European champions Italy hosted the Euros in 1968 and 1980, while Rome's Stadio Olimpico was also used as a venue at Euro 2020.

Germany will host Euro 2024 with the most recent championship being played in 2021 instead of 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Staging a major tournament usually means the hosts qualify automatically.

But, when it comes to co-hosting, qualification for all five host nations is not guaranteed.

It is unlikely UEFA will offer more than two places, so three could miss out.

FIVB Olympic Qualifying Tournament:

Iran to pin hopes on a world-class coach after Rio fiasco



Iranian middle-blocker Mohammad Mousavi (6) and setter Mohammad-Taher Vadi (18) are seen in action against Brazil at the Olympic Qualifying Tournament in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on October 7, 2023.

● FIVB



Sports Desk

Iranian volleyball will lean towards bringing in a high-profile foreign coach for the national team after hitting rock bottom at the FIVB Olympic Qualifying Tournament in Rio de Janeiro.

The Asian powerhouse finished second from bottom in the eight-team table of Pool A – registering a single victory over Qatar – as the country's aspirations for a place in next year's Paris Olympics now appears to be fading away.

Germany was the surprise package of the group, mak-

ing a clean sweep of seven wins to finish above Brazil, with reigning world champion Italy in third. Poland, Canada, USA, and Japan also secured an Olympic berth as the top two finishers in Pools B and C.

The other five quotas will be decided through the FIVB Men's World Ranking by the end of the preliminary phase of 2024 Volleyball Nations League (VNL). Egypt will likely take the African slot for the Games, while the other four spots will go to the four highest-ranked teams, which have not qualified yet. As it stands in the FIVB

Ranking, Italy (third), Argentina (sixth), Slovenia (seventh), and Serbia (ninth) are the favorites to qualify for the Olympics, with Iran lagging behind in the 15th place.

Iran's qualification campaign was the latest episode in a disastrous five months under Behrouz Ataei – featuring a disappointing VNL run followed by a straight-set defeat against Japan on home soil in the Asian Championship final – which eventually led to the Iranian head coach stepping down from his role after a 3-1 defeat against the Czech Republic

midway through the tournament in Brazil.

His resignation came two years after he had become the first domestic coach on Iran's bench in more than a decade by taking over from Russian Vladimir Alekno following a group stage exit at the Tokyo Olympics.

Ataei's rejuvenated side got off to a flying start in the new era as it defeated host Japan for the Asian crown in 2021 and then went on to progress to VNL quarter-finals a year later.

Ataei was faced with the flip side of his job when the below-par results in the summer saw the pun-

its and former players in the country question his credentials for the rest of the way, urging the Iranian Volleyball Federation to make drastic changes in the coaching staff.

Mohammadreza Davarzani, the chairman of the federation, said at the time that he would avoid an "impulsive decision-making", as a hectic fixtures list – including an untimely participation at the Asian Games right before the Olympic qualifiers – was coming Iran's way.

However, in a statement after Sunday's five-set defeat against Cuba, the head of the federation conceded to

the "failed strategy [over the past two years]", while he vowed to "hire a world-class coach and put in all our efforts to succeed in next year's Volleyball Nations League and qualify for the Paris Olympics."

Several high-profile names have been brought up in the Iranian media in recent days – most notably Frenchman Stéphane Antiga, Italian Andrea Anastasi, and Belgian Vital Heynen, who led Poland to the world title in 2018 – though it might take a while for the Iranian volleyball governing body to mull over who will be in charge of the team next.

Sepahan, Al Ittihad set for rescheduled encounter: Report

Sports Desk

The AFC Champions League fixture between Persian Gulf Pro League club Sepahan and Saudi side Al Ittihad will be rescheduled for a new date, the Arabic edition of the Goal website reported.

The Group C game in Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium was called off right before the kickoff on October 2 after the Saudi Pro League giant reportedly refused to take to the pitch for unknown reasons.

In a statement later in the day, the Asian Football Confederation said the match was canceled for "unanticipated and unforeseen circumstances", adding: "This matter will now be referred to the relevant committees."

Goal added Sepahan could be fined by the AFC and the club will have to name a new home venue for the



Sepahan players and coaching staff leave the pitch after their game against Al Ittihad is called off at the Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium, Isfahan, Iran, on October 2, 2023.

● MORTEZA SALEHI/TASNIM

contest. Al Ittihad wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, last week that the club was

informed by the AFC's organizing official that "the game would not take place on the scheduled date and

the team is allowed to leave the stadium." Several sources, including the Iranian Fars and Tas-

nim new agencies, reported that the players of the Saudi side did not leave the dressing room due to a

bust of Iranian Quds Force General Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated in a US drone strike near the Baghdad airport in January 2020, being placed at the entrance to the pitch.

"Everything was in place for a proper game of football but Al Ittihad came up with demands that were not sport-related at all," Sepahan CEO Mohammadreza Saket said afterwards. Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said last Wednesday that the two countries have agreed on a second date for the encounter, while calling on the Asian football governing body to "act on a technical basis when deciding on the situation." Sepahan, third in the group with a point, will play away to Uzbekistan's AGMK on October 23, with Al Ittihad hosting Iraq's Air Force Club.