

Djokovic wants to emulate Brady and play on into his 40s



● AP

REUTERS – Novak Djokovic has no plans to hang up his racket any time soon and is hoping he might be able to emulate American football great Tom Brady by extending his career well past his 40th birthday, the 36-year-old Serbian said on Tuesday.

Quarterback Brady played 23 seasons in the National Football League, winning seven Super Bowls with the New England Patriots and Tampa Bay Buccaneers before finally calling it quits at the age of 45 earlier this year.

World number one Djokovic, who is preparing for the start of his 22nd season as a professional, said he had already learned plenty from Brady.

“Tom Brady is a great example of a champion in his sport and someone that has had such a great career and longevity,” the 24-times Grand Slam champion told reporters in the Saudi capital.

“He has put a lot of hours and a lot of time into self-care, into recovery, into making sure that in a way every aspect of his body and mind is covered so that he can have a long-lasting, successful career.”

“I know him personally and I learned a lot from him, from his example, and hopefully I can have a career that goes up to 40 or maybe even beyond – let’s see.”

Brady was in Djokovic’s box at Roland Garros in June to watch his friend win the French Open, one of three Grand Slam trophies the Serbian captured in 2023 along with the Australian and U.S. Open titles.

“I feel great in my own body right now and I’ve been playing some really high-quality tennis,” Djokovic added.

“2023 was one of the best seasons I’ve had in my life and why stop while you’re still playing great? So I’ll keep going and take (each) year, one by one, and see how far I go.”

Djokovic will make his final preparations for a tilt at an 11th Australian Open title by representing his country in the United Cup in Perth and Sydney in the first week of the new year.

Countdown is on for Iran volleyball coach appointment



Former Iran skipper and world-class setter Saeed Ma’rouf is joined by three high-profile coaches in Belgian Vital Heynen and Italian duo Angelo Lorenzetti and Roberto Piazza in the list of candidates for the job.



● FIVB

Sports Desk

The long wait for the announcement of Iran’s new volleyball national team coach could come to an end within the next couple of weeks after the sport’s governing body in the country stepped up the pursuit of a replacement for Behrouz Ataei in recent days.

The job has been vacant since October, when Ataei stepped down following a 3-1 defeat against the Czech Republic midway through the FIVB Olympic Qualifying Tournament in Rio de Janeiro.

Rumors and speculations have been swirling over Iran’s bench in recent months but the Iranian Vol-

leyball Federation on Tuesday unveiled a final four-man shortlist for the post.

Former Iran skipper and world-class setter Saeed Ma’rouf is joined by three high-profile coaches in Belgian Vital Heynen and Italian duo Angelo Lorenzetti and Roberto Piazza in the list of candidates.

Widely regarded as one of the best setters in the world for more than a decade, Ma’rouf will be looking to build on an illustrious playing career, if given the helm, though many believe that the role may come a bit too soon for the 38-year-old, who has had no coaching experience since retiring from the sport after the Tokyo Olympics in 2021.

Heynen is probably the most exciting name on the list for the volleyball fans in Iran.

The 54-year-old Belgian led Germany to the bronze medal at the 2014 World Championships before his storied three-year spell on Poland’s bench inspired the European heavyweight to the world title in 2018, as well as a silver and a bronze at the Volleyball Nations League.

The Iranians, however, would best remember the Belgian for coaching the Poles in some entertaining encounters with their national side over the years – including a five-set thriller won by the Asian powerhouse in Tokyo.

Lorenzetti, meanwhile, is the latest coach to enter the fray after an online negotiation with Vahid Moradi, the caretaker of the federation, earlier this week.

An ex-head coach of the Italian under-21 team, Lorenzetti, 59, has spent the best part of his managerial career with the clubs in his home country – including Modena, Verona, Piacenza, and Trentino Itas.

The Italian steered Sir Sicoma Perugia to the Club World Champs crown earlier in December, thanks to a straight-set victory over Brazil’s Itambe Minas in the final in Bangalore, India.

Piazza, 64, the Netherlands’ coach in the Olympic qual-

ifiers, has also been approached by Iran but, like his fellow Italian, is committed to club duty with Allianz Milano in the Italian league, which could rule him out of contention for the job.

The new coach, whoever he might be, will be tasked with leading Iran to a place in next summer’s Paris Olympics – a daunting challenge following a disappointing run in October’s qualifiers, which saw the Asian giant finish second from bottom in the seven-team table.

With Germany, Brazil, Poland, Canada, USA, and Japan guaranteed an Olympic quota – courtesy of a top-two finish across the

qualification pools – and Egypt likely to take the African berth, the four remaining slots will be decided through the FIVB Men’s World Ranking by the end of the Volleyball Nations League preliminary round in June.

As it stands in the ranking, Italy (third), Argentina (sixth), Slovenia (seventh), and Serbia (ninth) are the favorites to qualify, with Iran lagging behind in the 15th place.

Iran will be back in Rio de Janeiro on May 21 for the VNL Week 1, before heading to Japan for the second week and concluding the preliminary phase with a Week 3 visit to Manila, the Philippines.

Persepolis, Sepahan handed back points by Appeal Committee



● RASOUL SHOJAEI/IRNA

Sports Desk

The Appeal Committee of the Iranian Football Federation overturned a Disciplinary Committee’s ruling to deduct points from Persian Gulf Pro League clubs Persepolis and Sepahan.

Sepahan had been ducked four points, with one taken away from the Tehran Reds’ tally, earlier in the season following a complaint by several fellow Iranian top-flight sides – namely Esteghlal, Tractor, Irasco, and Paykan – over the two sides breaching the federation’s new transfer rules, which obliged the clubs to adhere to a ‘budget cap’ when spending in the pre-season window and signing contract extensions with current players. Sepahan had been convicted of wrongdoing in the contracts for Reza Asadi – the league’s joint top scorer with eight strikes – and Iranian international keeper Payam Niazmand, as well as Kaveh Rezaei, Hadi Mohammadi, and Ehsan Pahlevan.

Persepolis, meanwhile, received the punishment for paying Giorgi Gvelesiani’s taxes as part of the deal with the Georgian center-back.

the Appeal Committee still upheld the hefty fines in the initial verdict but the head of the committee Alireza Salehi said later on Tuesday that “the results and points should be decided on the football pitch to protect the integrity of the game.” The decision moved Sepahan to the top of league table with 31 points – two clear of Esteghlal with a game in hand – while Persepolis closed the gap on its archrival to three points to stand in the third place.

Yahya Golmohammadi’s men could go level on points with the Tehran Blues should they walk away with a victory in today’s rescheduled fixture from matchday 11 against Nassaji Mazandaran at home. Sepahan will be looking to extend the gap at the top when playing away to Golgozar Sirjan.