

# Brazilian Motta Paes named Iran volleyball head coach

## Sports Desk

Brazilian Mauricio Motta Paes was appointed as the head coach of Iran's men's national volleyball team, the governing body of the sport in the country announced on Wednesday. A former number two to fellow-Brazilian Bernardo Rezende on France bench in 2021 and 2022, The 60-year-old coach replaces Behrouz Ataei, who stepped down from his role in the aftermath of a 3-1 defeat against the Czech Republic midway through last October's FIVB Olympic Qualifying Tournament in Rio de Janeiro, where Iran finished second from bottom in the eight-team table of Pool A and failed to secure direct qualification for the Paris Olympics. The announcement ends months of speculations and rumors surrounding the national team, during which several names – including former Iranian captain and world-class setter Saeid Ma'rouf, high-profile Belgian Vital Heynen, as well as Italian Gianlorenzo Blengini – had been lined up by the

federation for the job ahead of the Volleyball Nations League – starting May 21 – which will serve as the final phase of the Olympic qualifiers. The Brazilian's contract will be valid until the end of the volleyball competitions of the Olympic Games in August, the federation's caretaker Vahid Moradi said on Wednesday, adding it could be extended until the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028. Currently in charge of the Ukrainian club Epicentr-Podolyany, Motta Paes worked as an assistant to ex-France head coach Philippe Blain at the 2009 FIVB World League before he was part of the Brazil coaching staff at the annual competition between 2011 and 2017. As a head coach, Motta Paes steered his country to a silver medal at the 2015 Pan American Games, while lifting numerous domestic trophies during a four-year spell with Japanese club Panasonic Panthers. His toughest job to date, however, will probably come in the upcoming VNL event, where he will be facing a mammoth task to lead the Asian powerhouse to

the Games in the French capital. With Germany, Brazil, Poland, Canada, USA, and Japan having already joined host France, and Egypt likely to take the African slot for the Olympics, only four quotas remain up for grabs, which will be decided through the FIVB Ranking by the end of the VNL preliminary round on June 23. As it stands in the ranking, third-placed Italy, Argentina (sixth), Slovenia (seventh), and Serbia (ninth) are the favorites to punch the Paris ticket, with Iran lagging behind in the 15th place. Iran will be back in Rio de Janeiro for the start of its VNL campaign, squaring off against Serbia, Italy, Cuba, and Argentina. The final week of the preliminary round will see Iran play USA, the Netherlands, France, and Germany in Manila, Philippines. The top seven of the 16-team table of the preliminary phase will join host Poland in the VNL Finals in Lodz from June 27-30.



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## Persian Gulf Pro League:

# Cheshmi's screamer piles misery on Morais



Esteghlal midfielder Rouzbeh Cheshmi (4) celebrates with teammates after scoring the winner in a 1-0 victory over Sepahan in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on February 27, 2024.

ALI SHARIFZADEH/IRNA

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A Rouzbeh Cheshmi's stunning strike was the difference between Esteghlal and Sepahan in the Persian Gulf Pro League's highly-anticipated fixture on Tuesday. There was little to separate the two sides, with the only goal coming late in the first half when the Iranian international midfielder's sizzling effort from 30 yards out went in off the bar – reminiscent of his stoppage-time strike in the World Cup victory over Wales two years ago. The 1-0 victory maintained the Tehran Blues' perfect home record at the Azadi Stadium, while adding to the misery for the visiting-side and Portuguese head coach Jose Morais,

who fell to a sixth consecutive defeat across all competitions. Sepahan's frontline – the most prolific in the league this season – was thoroughly kept at bay and hardly made an impact over the course of the 90 minutes, for which the Blues boss Javad Nekounam deserves credit, but still had a couple of chances to find an equalizer. The top flight's leading marksman Shahriar Moghanlou's tame effort came off the bar before the break, while winter signing Ali-Asghar A'rabi missed a glorious opportunity to bag his first goal for the club when he was denied by Esteghlal keeper Seyyed Hossein Hosseini in a one-on-one situation after the break. The statement triumph saw

Esteghlal move eight points clear of third-place Sepahan on top of the table, though Morais' men have two games in hand. Elsewhere on Tuesday, Foolad Khuzestan and Malavan shared the spoils in a 1-1 stalemate in Ahvaz's Foolad Arena. Mohammadreza Soleimani gave Mahdi Tartar's Malavan the lead eight minutes after the interval, but his goal was canceled out by Mohammad Asgari in the 84th minute. In Sirjan, Roberto Torres, Ahmadreza Zenderouh, and Saeed Saharkhizan were on target as Golgozar walked away with a 3-0 win against Nassaji Mazandaran – a result to forget for head coach Saket Elhami on his return to the northern Iranian club's bench.

# Iranian swimmers win four Asian age group medals

## Sports Desk

The second day of the Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships saw the Iranian swimmers collect four medals, including one gold, in Capas, Philippines. Representing the country in the men's 50m freestyle final of the over-18 age group, Samyar Abdoli clocked 22.83 seconds to finish ahead of Uzbekistan's Eldorbek Usmonov (22.87s) and Qatari swimmer Mohamed Mohamed (22.90s), becoming only the second Iranian to walk away with the ultimate prize in the history of the competition after Mohammad Ali-rezaei had won a couple of

golds in 2005 and 2007. This was a second medal for Abdoli in Capas, following a 4X100m freestyle relay bronze-winning performance along with Mehrshad Afghari, Homer Abbasi, and Matin Sohran on Day 1. Having won the boy's 200m individual medley silver and the 50m backstroke bronze on the preceding night, Mohammad-Mahdi Gholami won a second medal for Iran on Tuesday, when he settled for the silver in the 200m butterfly event of the 13-14 age class, thanks to a second-best time of 2:05.99 minutes. Vietnam's Hoang quy Duong grabbed the gold with

2:03.54 minutes, with Yung-cheng Kan of the Chinese Taipei taking the bronze. Gholami was also part of the Iranian four-boy team – alongside Yashar Soleimani, Rayan Zare', and Shantia Nazari – that won the bronze in the 4X100m freestyle relay final. Meanwhile, Afghari finished his men's 100m butterfly campaign with a bronze, while Kiumars Aslani and Sam Vajer teamed up for a diving bronze, finishing third in the boy's synchro board level with 232.2 points. Vajer took his personal tally to two medals on Wednesday, courtesy of a boys' platform silver with 357.3 points.



Iranian swimmer Samyar Abdoli poses with the men's 50m freestyle gold at the Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships in Capas, Philippines, on February 27, 2024.

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