

Volleyball Nations League:

Olympic aspirations fading away
as Iran hits rock bottom in Week 1

Sports Desk

Iran left Rio de Janeiro empty-handed after falling to a fourth successive defeat in Week 1 of the Volleyball Nations League.

Having suffered 3-1 losses to Serbia and Cuba either side of straight-set defeat against reigning world champion Italy, Mauricio Motta Paes's men produced a much-improved performance on Sunday but were still beaten by Argentina, which rallied from behind twice for a 3-2 win (23-25, 31-29, 20-25, 25-20, 15-13) in the Maracanãzinho venue.

Outside-hitter Morteza Sharifi chipped in a game-high 26 points – including double aces – with fellow-Iranian opposite spiker Amin Esmailnejad scoring 24, while Bruno Lima was the most prolific Argentine with 20 points, followed by middle-blocker Nicolas Zerba, who finished on 16.

The result left Iran rock bottom of the 16-team table, while it saw the Asian side drift further away from a place in July's Paris Olympics.

With Germany, Brazil, Poland, Canada, USA, and Ja-

pan having already joined host France, and Egypt set to take the African slot, only four Olympic quotas remain up for grabs, which will be decided through the FIVB Men's Ranking by the end of the VNL preliminary round on June 23.

As it stands, Italy and Slovenia – the top two in the preliminary round with a clean sweep of victories – are the favorites to punch their Paris tickets after standing second and fifth respectively in the latest ranking on Monday.

Argentina (eighth) and Cuba (ninth) will also fancy their chances to qualify with Iran lagging behind in the 16th place of the ranking.

Iran will head to Fukuoka, Japan, for Week 2 – starting with an all-Asian encounter against the host on June 4.

Brazil, Bulgaria, and VNL debutant Turkey will also come Iran's way in Fukuoka, before the final week of action in the preliminary round sees Paes's side take on USA, the Netherlands, France, and Germany in Manila, Philippines.

The top eight of the table will progress to the VNL Finals in Lodz, Poland.



Iranian setter Mohammad-Taher Vadi (18) defends against Argentine middle-blocker Loser Bruno during a game in the Volleyball Nations League in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on May 26, 2024.

● FIVB

FIFA Futsal World Cup:

Iran lands Venezuela, Guatemala, and France in group stage



● CHALINEE THIRASUPA/AFK

Sports Desk

Iran will begin its Futsal World Cup campaign in Uzbekistan with a game against Venezuela in Group F on September 16.

The draw for the 10th edition of the sport's flagship international event took place in the ancient Uzbek city of Samarkand on Sunday, where 24 teams were split into six groups, with Iran, seeded in Pot 1, also pitted against Guatemala and France. Ranked fourth in the inaugural FIFA Men's Ranking earlier in May, the Asian powerhouse, whose best World Cup finish came in 2016 thanks to a shootout victory over Portugal in the third-place playoff, will face Guatemala on September 19 before squaring off against the

European opponent three days later.

Having lifted a record-extending 13th Asian Cup trophy in April, Vahid Shamsaei's men will fancy a comfortable progress into the knockout stage after being handed a relatively easy task in the group phase.

Venezuela will be making only a second World Cup appearance after reaching the last 16 in Lithuania three years ago, while Guatemala, beaten by Iran in all six previous meetings between the two sides, has failed to go beyond the group stage in five attempts.

France, meanwhile, will be a World Cup debutant – alongside Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and New Zealand – courtesy of an elite-round group

win in the European qualifiers. Elsewhere in the draw, reigning champion Portugal was placed into Group E, alongside Panama, Tajikistan and Morocco, while Brazil – the most decorated team in the competition with five titles – is in Group B, also featuring Cuba, Croatia, and Thailand.

Host Uzbekistan will face the Netherlands, Paraguay, Costa Rica in Group A, with Argentina – the 2021 runner-up and champion in 2016 – landing Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Angola in Group C.

Two-time champion Spain is in Group D with 2021 semifinalist Kazakhstan, New Zealand, and Libya. The top two of the six groups will be joined by four best third-placed teams in the round of 16.

Taremi signs off with a goal, steers Porto to cup triumph over Sporting

Sports Desk

Iranian striker Mahdi Taremi brought the curtain down on a glorious four years with Porto on Sunday, scoring the winner in extra time during a 2-1 victory over Sporting CP in the Taça de Portugal final.

Set to join Serie A giant Inter once his contract runs out on July 1, Taremi came off the bench in the second half before sending the keeper the wrong way from the spot in the first period of the extra time – an 11th goal of the season for the Iranian, coupled with seven assists in 35 games

across all competitions.

Dutch center-back Jerry St. Juste put Sporting in front in the 20th minute, only to see his strike canceled out by Evanilson five minutes later, and then received his marching orders on the half-hour mark.

This was a seventh domestic trophy – including a league and couple double in the 2021/22 campaign – in a Porto shirt for the 31-year-old Iranian, who joined the Dragons from fellow-Portuguese side Rio Ave in 2020 and went on to become the club's third all-time top scorer with a remarkable 91 strikes in 182 appearances

– one goal shy of retired Colombian Jackson Martínez, with Porto's Brazilian legend Mario Jardel on top with 138 goals.

"I am proud to have spent four years with this group. This is simply unbelievable for me and I will always have fond memories of my incredible time in Porto," Taremi said after the game.

The newly-finished season was the least prolific for the Iranian, who surpassed the 20-goal mark in each of the previous three seasons – bagging 22 to finish as the leading marksman in the Portuguese top flight last year.

"Unfortunately, things didn't quite

go as I expected this season, as I was involved in the Asian Cup and had to be focused on the national team. I have to apologize to Porto fans for that, although I always gave my all on the pitch, as well as the training sessions," added the striker, who slipped down the pecking order in the Porto squad after returning from international duty in February amid reports of the him undergoing medicals at Inter ahead of the summer move. "I am a member of the Super Dragões from today and wish them the best of success with the club," Taremi said of the ultra group of Porto supporters.

