

## Alcaraz aiming to join Spanish winners at Roland Garros



● REUTERS

**REUTERS** – Carlos Alcaraz reached the French Open final for the first time on Friday, a competition very close to his heart, and wants to add his name to the list of Spanish players who have won at Roland Garros.

Alcaraz came out on top against second seed Jan-nik Sinner, beating the Italian 2-6 6-3 3-6 6-4 6-3, and is excited by the prospect of emulating his heroes.

“Well, I have a special feeling to this tournament, because I remember when I finished school I’m running to my home just to put the TV on and watch the matches here in the French Open,” Alcaraz told reporters.

“Of course, Rafa Nadal dominating this tournament for, let’s say, 14, 15 years. It’s something unbelievable.

“I wanted to put my name on that list of the Spanish players who won this tournament. Not only Rafa. (Juan Carlos) Ferrero, (Carlos) Moya, (Albert) Costa, a lot of Spanish players, legends from our sport that won this tournament. “I really want to put my name on that list, as well.” Alcaraz also wants to be a player able to win on any surface, having already tasted success on the grass of Wimbledon and the hard courts at the U.S. Open.

“Well, I always wanted to be one of the best players in the world. If I want to be one of the best players in the world, I have to be a good player in every surface, like Roger (Federer) did, Novak (Djokovic), Rafa, (Andy) Murray,” he said.

“The best players in the world had success in every surface.

“So I consider myself a player who adapts very well his style in every surface. And, well, I grew up playing on clay but I feel more comfortable playing on hard court, for example.

“I think my game suits very well to the clay, to clay season, to the clay court, as well. So I just wanted to be a good player in every surface.”

The Spaniard became the youngest man to reach a Grand Slam final on all three surfaces, a fact he was aware of immediately after his semi-final success, but prefers to focus on what is to come.

“Yeah, I knew that. I mean, I checked the phone after the win,” a smiling Alcaraz said.

## Volleyball Nations League:

# No change of fortunes after Paes sacking as Iran falls to eighth defeat

### Sports Desk

Iran suffered an eighth successive defeat in the 2024 Volleyball Nations League, losing 3-1 (22-25, 25-23, 25-23, 27-25) to newcomer Turkey in the final outing in Week 2 of the preliminary round.

Saturday’s setback in Fukuoka, Japan, came less than 24 hours after Brazilian head coach Mauricio Motta Paes had been axed by the Iranian Volleyball Federation following a five-set defeat against Bulgaria. Paes had been appointed to the job in February, taking over from Iranian Behrouz Ataei, to lead the country’s last-ditch attempt to secure an Olympic quota through the FIVB Men’s Ranking by the end of the VNL preliminary round.

His spell, however, was cut short after seven games in charge for what was described as the 61-year-old’s failure in “exploiting the players’ potentials”, with the decision aimed at protecting “the international reputation of the Iranian volleyball.”

“The federation will surely plan for a rejuvenation within the squad after the Nations League and I can only promise that a world-class coach will be hired after the competition. We will have four years to prepare for the next Olympics,” Milad Taqavi, the chairman of the sport’s governing body in the country, said on Friday. Iranian Payman Akbari, a number two to Paes, was named the interim coach



Iranian players go up for a block against Turkish opposite-spiker Kaan Gürbüz (1) during a preliminary-round game in the Volleyball Nations League in Fukuoka, Japan, on June 8, 2024. ● FIVB

for the rest of the VNL campaign but could do little to change the team’s fortunes in Saturday’s match, with his men overwhelmed by Turkish opposite-spiker Kaan Gürbüz, who notched up a remarkable game-high 34 points to inspire his team to a maiden VNL

victory.

Amin Esmailnejad was Iran’s top scorer for the day with 18 points, while skipper Milad Ebadipour and middle-blocker Alireza Moslehadi chipped in 14 and 13 points respectively. “There is no doubt that we are in a crisis. The team’s

morale was severely damaged after the Bulgaria defeat and there was nothing we could do about it in such a short space of time. We’ll have to make sure the players will restore their confidence and enthusiasm for the future games,” Akbari said after Saturday’s loss.

Next for Iran is a visit to Manila, Philippines, for the final week of the preliminary fixtures.

Sitting rock-bottom of the 16-team table, Iran will face USA on June 19 before taking on the Netherlands a day later. Akbari’s men will square

off against reigning Olympic champion France and then conclude their campaign against Germany on June 23.

The top eight of the table will progress to the VNL Finals in Lodz, Poland – starting with the quarterfinals on June 27.

## Polyák Imre & Varga János Memorial:

# Yazdani granted a shot at Olympic history

### Sports Desk

Iranian wrestling sensation Hassan Yazdani made his long-awaited return from injury in emphatic fashion as he marched to the free-style 86kg gold at the Polyák Imre & Varga János Memorial tournament in Budapest. His triumph meant Yazdani will be in the Iranian five-man team in July’s Paris Olympics, where he will have a shot at history.

A gold medal in the French capital will see Yazdani overtake taekwondo great Hadi Saei as the most decorated Iranian in the history of the Games with double golds and a silver.

The Iranian Wrestling Federation had made it clear before the UWW Ranking Series event that Yazdani, who had been sidelined for nine months due to a surgery on his injured shoulder, would be a part of the freestyle squad in Paris “only if his health and fitness levels are approved of by the national team



Hassan Yazdani (1), pictured in last year’s World Championships in Belgrade, won the freestyle 86kg gold at the Ranking Series event in Budapest to secure his place in the Iranian team for the Paris Olympics. ● UWW

coaching staff in Budapest.” And the Iranian rose up to the occasion in the Hungarian capital as he was to back to his formidable best with less 50 days until the Paris extravaganza.

Yazdani claimed three superiority wins – including a last-four hammering of back-to-back world bronze medalist Azamat Dauletbekov of Kazakhstan – to reach the final showpiece,

before crushing American Trent Hidlay 12-2 for the ultimate prize. Yazdani’s dominant display makes the nine-time world and Olympic medalist the hot favorite for the gold in

Paris, especially after his familiar foe David Taylor, who holds a 5-1 head-to-head record against the Iranian, was stunned by fellow-American Aaron Brooks in the U.S. Olympic

trails in April.

“Our main objective here was to assess Yazdani’s fitness. This was his first tournament in nine months and we had concerns about his form but he seemed to have made a good recovery from the surgery. I’m sure he will reach his best for the Olympics,” Iran head coach Mohsen Kaveh said. Elsewhere in Budapest, Ali Rezaei bounced back from a semifinal fall defeat against Russian-born Uzbekistani representative Razambek Jamalov – a former world under-23 champion – to beat Giorgi Elbakidze 5-3 for the 74kg bronze.

Abbas Ebrahimzadeh (65kg), Adel Panahian (79kg) had grabbed a couple of silvers on the preceding night, with Shahdad Khosravi taking a 61kg bronze, as the Iranian eight-man side tallied 117 points to finish as the runner-up in the team table. Georgia won the team trophy with 133 points, with USA in third on 70.