

New volleyball coach Piazza aiming at 'world's top eight' with Iran

Sports Desk

Roberto Piazza, the newly-appointed head coach of Iran's national volleyball team, says his ultimate goal at the job is to restore the Asian powerhouse to the top eight in the FIVB World Ranking. Former coach of the Netherlands and now in charge of top-flight side Powervolley Milano in his home country, the 56-year-old Italian signed a four-year contract with the Iranian Volleyball Federation earlier this month, replacing Brazilian Mauricio Paes.

Paes was sacked midway through June's Volleyball Nations League after only seven games in charge, with his number two Payman Akbari serving as the interim coach for the remainder of the campaign as Iran finished second from bottom in the 16-team table of the preliminary round.

"I'm so excited to be taking on this new role. This is the position I wanted for a long time," the Italian said in a first interview since his appointment.

"A constant place among the top eight teams in the world is not just a dream for us, but our primary objective, and we will have to remain committed to that goal," added Piazza, who is set to start in the new role ahead of next June's Volleyball Nations League.

"My dream for the Iranian volleyball is to achieve its goal of succeeding at the 2028 Los Angeles



● LVM

Olympics." Sitting 15th in the latest World Ranking, Iran spent the best part of the 2023 season in the top 10, with the previous stint in the top eight coming during the 2022

World Championship, where then-coach Behrouz Ataei's men made it to the last 16 before being knocked out by Brazil.

Asked about his approach to preparation for next year's two

major tournaments before he officially begins his work, Piazza said: "I'm in constant communication with my assistant Tomaso Totolo and some of Iranian analysts. We're keeping a close eye on all

players in the [domestic] league and overseas."

"Some of them are playing in Italy, some in Poland, and there are also others in France. We're going to assess their progress in all as-

pects of their game, not just their attacking or defensive play. We're also keeping tabs on their physical condition and will be in touch with their fitness coaches to figure out how to bring the best out of the players for [next year's] Nations League and World Championship." Iran is drawn against host nation Philippines, Egypt, and Tunisia in Pool A of the World Championship - starting September 12 next year. Piazza said he was delighted to see Iran is in the same group as the Philippines, rather than seven top-ranked sides in the first pot of the draw, insisting his team will have to "win the pool first and then start thinking about the rest of the way."

Iran will be looking for a fresh start under the Italian, following a dire run of results over the past 16 months - during which the Asian team had dreadful campaigns in back-to-back Nations League events and failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics, while being outclassed by Japan on home soil in last year's Asian Championship final.

Piazza was pleased with the quick progress of the negotiations he had with Milad Taqavi, the head of the national governing body of the sport, saying: "He and I agreed on the deal as soon as he learned about my plans and targets. I want to be in the next Olympics with Iran, and the players, the federation, and I will have to fight to that end."

IWF World Junior Championships: Iran's Abbaspour collects triple medals

Sports Desk

The sixth day of the IWF World Junior Championships saw Iranian weightlifter Alireza Abbaspour bag three medals, including double silvers, in León, Spain.

Representing the country in the men's 89kg contests on Tuesday, Abbaspour had to settle for a bronze medal in the snatch event, courtesy of a sole successful lift of 156kg.

Uzbekistan's Diyorbek Ermatov

bagged the snatch gold with 162kg - four kilograms clear of Colombian silver medalist Jokser Albornoz.

A triple world youth gold winner in 2021, Abbaspour delivered a much-improved performance to win the clear & jerk silver.

The 20-year-old Iranian began his campaign with a 186kg effort and then went on to raise 190kg and 195kg above his head to finish second to Kazakhstan's Yedige Yemberdi,

who ended fifth in the snatch table but tallied 199kg to win the gold in the second event of the weight class.

Albornoz won the bronze, thanks to a 192kg lift on his third attempt.

The top three in the total standings were decided by thin margins as Yemberdi won the ultimate prize with 352kg, with Abbaspour claiming a second silver of the afternoon with 351kg, while Albornoz registered 350kg for the bronze.



Iranian weightlifter Alireza Abbaspour celebrates after a successful lift in the men's 89kg contests at the IWF World Junior Championships in León, Spain, on September 24, 2024. ● IRNA

Futsal World Cup:

FIFA opens probe into match-fixing allegations in Iran-France game

Sports Desk

FIFA said an investigation has been launched into match-fixing allegations following France's 4-1 loss to Iran in the ongoing Futsal World Cup in Uzbekistan.

After a lifeless first half, Iran easily prevailed after France conceded a soft opening goal in the second, triggering angry reactions from other teams, some of whom filed complaints to the international governing body of the sport.

"FIFA is aware of complaints filed by participating teams at the FIFA Futsal World Cup Uzbekistan 2024 regarding the Group F match between France and IR Iran," a FIFA spokesperson said in a statement.

"No further comment will be made while this process is ongoing."

While both teams had already qualified for the round of 16, Sunday's result meant Iran will face African champion Morocco in today's knockout game in Bukhara, ahead of a possible clash against world No. 1 Brazil.

France, meanwhile, will take on Thailand before a potential quarterfinal against Paraguay. Concerns were aired on social media as the match was being played, with the Thailand coach, Miguel Rodrigo, writing on X that his team would play Les Bleus "with open arms", calling both teams "a world disgrace" who had "dishonored my sport."



● ROBERTUS PUDYANTO/GETTY IMAGES

Retired Brazil great Falcao was quoted by French media as saying: "It shows a lack of respect for the World Cup. The match was clearly fixed from the first minute."

France coach Raphael Reynaud said the way the match played out was about avoiding bookings and injuries.

"It was Iran's responsibility to be in charge of the game," he said. "The draw is more open for us but our main goal was not to get booked and to avoid injuries."

The Frenchman's opposite number on Iran's bench, Vahid Shamsaei, was also quick to brush off the tanking accusations after the game, saying it was normal for his men not to

go all out for a victory as "even a draw would be enough for us to go through as the group winners."

"I think the critics should get tough on the team that was after it [tanking]. Several of our players came down with the flu before the game and needed to rest. We also had a couple of players suspended and one injured. Even I was not feeling well for today's game, and, not to mention, we have to be back in action in three days. Everyone is free to make their own decisions," said the Iranian coach, who was without the key trio in Hossein Tayebi, Saeid Ahmad-Abbasi, and Mohammadreza Sangsefidi against France.