

# Roster revolution: Iran basketball coach Manolopoulos eyes fresh blood

## Sports Desk

Sotiris Manolopoulos, the new head coach of Iran basketball national team, says he will be looking to implement a "change of generation" with roster selection as he prepares his side for the upcoming FIBA Asia Cup qualifiers.

Appointed to the role in August, the Greek coach will be in charge of a first game on Iran bench against Kazakhstan in Tehran.

Iran will then visit Doha to square off against Qatar on Monday in the second window of the qualifiers in Group E.

Asked about his approach to team selection in a press conference, the 54-year-old said: "I think we all know what we have to do. There are no players like Hamed Haddadi in the Iranian team anymore, but we have young talents who could build the future of the team."

"We have to play with a different philosophy, and the same kind of mindset that saw Iranian basketball succeed a decade ago. We need to adopt a team-oriented approach, just like European teams do, rather than being over-reliant on individuals," added Manolopoulos, who also worked as a head coach and assistant with the national team in his home country two years ago. "From my previous experience in the [qualification] windows with the Greek national team, I decide [which player to pick] at the last moment, because I want to give everybody a chance to prove himself. At the end of the day, the selection has to do with the ability, but also with chemistry. Chemistry is a very important part when you are trying to make a team, as individual characteristics [of the players] must match with each other."

Speaking of his coaching style,

Manolopoulos said: "Basically, I'm a defensive coach. I rely a lot on defense and this is where I try to push my players on. I'm a defensive coach who likes the talented offensive players to put their talent on the court according to team rules."

"Regarding our short-term goals in the upcoming two games, and maybe the next window in February, we will try to rely mostly on defense, because my philosophy is that you win big games with good defending. That is how the players' attitude will have to be towards the games ahead of us."

Manolopoulos said he did not have much to do with the team selection for the first training camp in August as it started only three days after he signed his contract with the Iranian Basketball Federation.

"Of course, I had my opinion because I watched Iran's games in [last year's] World Championship and the Asian Games in China, but the technical committee had to help me [with selecting the squad] and based on the fact that we wanted to start a change of generation, we called up some young players for our first camp in August. I watched a lot of league games for the current training camp. There are two important factors for selecting a player: First of all, you have to be 100% healthy and then you have to be on a game rhythm, because it might be a problem if you haven't played for long or you don't get much game time with your club."

On the Iranian team's weak spot in recent major tournaments, the Greek said: "When I started watching Iran's games, the first thing I noticed was the high number of turnovers. Turnovers and transition defense are big parts of the game that we must improve. I believe that's about



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the way these players have learned to play the game. From the very first day, I tried to make them understand that a turnover is probably the worst thing you can do in basketball."

"I tell the players: 'Don't watch NBA', because the NBA is a completely different league with completely different players, and I tell them not to watch the league because 'you cannot be like them.' You cannot find the players with the size of those in NBA – in terms of how big and athletic they are – and the conditions [in which] they learn the game anywhere else in the

world. So, try to learn a game that is closer to what you can do. In the NBA, you have 100 offenses in every game, so maybe one turnover is not a big deal. But the way we play, in Europe and most of the other countries, where we don't have this high number of offenses, one turnover is very important. The first thing the players will have to understand is that turning the ball over is very serious. I might put a lot of pressure on them and they will be afraid of passing the ball to avoid a turnover, but it's a process."

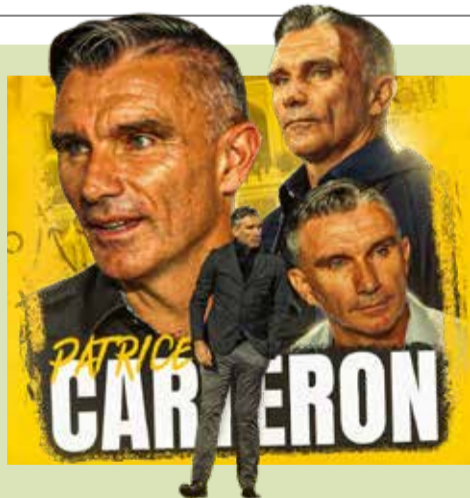
"We also have to correct the

spacing and passing [in the Iranian team]. I have been watching some under-16 tournaments, and the Iranian B team, which includes younger players. We can find tall guys, athletic guys, we can find guys that can really shoot the ball, and dribble. What we are missing, specially in the young ages, are good creators, and good passers with good decision-making."

"The young generation watch LeBron James and want to dunk the ball like him, but most likely they won't become like him. They watch Steph Curry and how he shoots the ball, and ev-

erybody wants to be like him. What you can learn from Steph Curry is how to move without the ball to find space for shooting. I tell the players to watch the San Antonio Spurs as they probably have the best passing game in the world, and that is how we need to play. We need to make it a more team-oriented game."

Iran sits atop Group E of the Asia Cup qualifiers with two wins in two, and another two victories against Kazakhstan and Qatar will secure a place for the three-time champion in next August's showcase in Saudi Arabia.



## Sepahan names Frenchman Carteron as new manager

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French coach Patrice Carteron was appointed as the new manager of Sepahan, the Persian Gulf Pro League leader announced. The Frenchman, 54, replaces Portuguese Jose Morais, who stepped down from his role after a 1-0 victory over Irilco in the

Iranian top flight on November 3.

Morais's number two Hugo Almeida took the interim role after his fellow-Portuguese's departure and led Sepahan to a 3-1 victory over Sharjah FC in the AFC Champions League Two, before a 1-1 home draw against Nassaji Mazandaran in the domes-

tic league.

A former head coach of Saudi outfits Al Nassr, Al Taawoun, and Al Ettifaq, Carteron was last in charge of Umm Salal in the Qatar Stars League, leading the team to a seventh-place finish in the 12-team table last season, before parting ways with the club following a 3-0 loss to Al Wakrah

SC – a fourth defeat in nine games in the current campaign – earlier in the month.

Carteron was also the head coach of TP Mazembe when the Congolese club lifted the CAF Champions League in 2015.

An Egyptian Premier League winner with Zamalek in 2021, Carteron

steered Mali to the third place in the 2012 Africa Cup of Nations, courtesy of a 2-0 win against Ghana. The Frenchman's first game on Sepahan bench will come against Pars Jonoubi Jam in the Iranian domestic cup on Friday – followed by an ACL Two encounter with Al Wehdah of Jordan on Tuesday.

## Federer pens tribute to retiring Nadal

REUTERS – Roger Federer paid tribute to his retiring rival Rafa Nadal on Tuesday, telling the Spaniard he challenged him like no other player and that he had made the tennis world proud during a glittering career lasting over two decades. Nadal is part of the Spain side that began their Davis Cup campaign against the Netherlands later on Tuesday, with the injury-plagued 22-times Grand Slam champion set to call time on his career after the team competition in Malaga. Federer, who was part of the "Big Three" of men's tennis

alongside Nadal and Novak Djokovic, posted a letter, opens new tab on X looking back at his rivalry with the 38-year-old.

"Let's start with the obvious: you beat me – a lot. More than I managed to beat you. You challenged me in ways no one else could," Federer said of Nadal, who edged their rivalry 24-16. "On clay, it felt like I was stepping into your backyard, and you made me work harder than I ever thought I could just to hold my ground."

"You made me re-imagine my game – even going so far as to

change the size of my racket head, hoping for any edge."

Federer, who won 20 Grand Slam titles before retiring in 2022, also poked fun at Nadal's court-side quirks.

"I'm not a very superstitious person, but you took it to the next level," Federer added. "All those rituals. Assembling your water bottles like toy soldiers in formation, fixing your hair, adjusting your underwear ... all of it with the highest intensity."

"Secretly, I kind of loved the whole thing. Because it was so unique – it was so you. And you

know what, Rafa, you made me enjoy the game even more."

Nadal was by Federer's side when they played doubles for Team Europe at the Laver Cup in 2022, with images of the pair crying together going viral on social media.

"It meant everything to me that you were there by my side – not as my rival but as my doubles partner," Federer added.

"Sharing the court with you that night, and sharing those tears, will forever be one of the most special moments of my career."



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