

Ex-Iran volleyball coach Ataei has 'unfinished job' with national team

Sports Desk

Former Iran head coach Behrouz Ataei says he will be looking to return to the national volleyball team at some point in the future to complete his "unfinished job." Ataei, 54, became the first domestic coach on Iran's bench in more than a decade when he took over from Russian Vladimir Alekno after the Tokyo Olympics in 2021. He got off to flying start to his reign by leading his rejuvenated team to the Asian title, thanks to a victory over host Japan in the final.

The Asian crown was followed by an impressive run to the 2022 Volleyball Nations League Finals, before Iran fell to a last-eight defeat against European powerhouse Poland.

However, a change in fortunes saw Ataei's team finish second from bottom in the VNL preliminary table the following year and suffer a comprehensive loss to Japan on home soil in the Asian Championship final.

Feeling hard done by for some of the criticism he received in the latter stages of his tenure, Ataei stepped down from his role midway through the Olympic qualification tournament in Rio de Janeiro in October last year, where Iran lost six in seven and failed to secure a place in the Paris Games.

A former world champion as Iran under-21 coach, Ataei managed to restore his reputation on return to club action with Foolad Sirjan, lifting the Iranian



Foolad Sirjan head coach Behrouz Ataei is thrown up by his players after the victory over Lube for the bronze medal at the FIVB Club World Championship in Uberlândia, Brazil, on Dec. 15, 2024.

● FIVB

and Asian trophies over the past 12 months.

The pinnacle of his helm at Foolad came in the FIVB Club World Championship in Uberlândia, Brazil, in early December, where his team beat Italian outfit Lube in a five-set thriller

for the bronze medal – only a second Iranian club to achieve the feat, following Paykan in 2010.

"The victory over Lube, which is among the top three teams in the world's best league and benefits from numerous inter-

national stars in the squad, is not an easy job at all," Ataei told Varzesh3, adding: "But Foolad managed to beat them not once but twice [after the first-day win in the preliminary round] and all of my players deserve credit for their resilience in both games. I'm

really proud to be working with this group."

Opposite spiker Ali Hajipour and outside hitter Alireza Abdolhamidi played massive parts in Foolad's remarkable run, with the former finishing second to Brazilian Wallace De Souza in

the top scorers' chart, while the latter was named in the team of the tournament.

"Abdolhamidi delivered a top-notch performance and played at the highest level throughout the event. Hajipour also enjoyed an exceptional tournament just as he did at the Asian Championship [in September]. However, I believe it was a team effort at the end, and all the players had the right mindset for this competition," added the Iranian coach.

Asked if he fancies his chances of being appointed as Iran head coach for a second spell, Ataei said he has much more to offer to the national team.

"I have an unfinished job with the national team, but all I can say is that I'll try to earn that right again through my future performance. That is what I'll be looking forward to, though I'm not sure if it will happen anytime soon and, for now, I'd rather stay focused on my duty with Foolad," said the Iranian.

Iran, meanwhile, will be looking to embark on a new chapter under Italian head coach Roberto Piazza, starting with next year's Volleyball Nations League in June.



Iran's Amirmohammad Rahmati is seen in action at the Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships in Doha, Qatar, on December 23, 2024.

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Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships: Gold rush continues as Iran collects nine medals on Day 5

Sports Desk

Iranians continued their prolific run at the Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships, bagging nine medals, including triple golds, on the penultimate day of the event in Doha, Qatar.

Representing the country in the men's junior event, Amirhossein Sepah walked away with a snatch gold, coupled with the clean & jerk and total silvers, with a 162-187-349 tally in the 96kg contests.

Joining Sepah on the podium was Mohammad Esfandiari, who registered 152-182-334 to make a clean sweep of three bronze medals.

There was further glory for Iran in the youth category of the weight class, with Hamidreza Zarei win-

ning three medals apiece.

The Iranian finished runner-up in the snatch discipline with a 146kg effort, and then won the ultimate prizes of the C&J and total categories, courtesy of 188kg and 334kg records.

Tuesday's results took Iran's haul to 30 medals, including seven golds, at the event.

Amirmohammad Rahmati headlined the country's medal hunt on Monday, collecting three medals, including one gold, in the men's youth 81kg class.

A 140kg lift in his third effort saw the Iranian claim the snatch gold, before his bronze-winning 167kg effort in the clean & jerk discipline was followed by the total silver on 307kg. Elsewhere in the men's competitions, Ilia Salehipour and Alireza

Abbaspour won six medals between them in the junior 89kg event.

Salehipour won the snatch silver with 161kg, and then went on to register 195kg for the C&J bronze, before adding the total silver to his account with 356kg.

Abbaspour, meanwhile, settled for the snatch bronze with 159kg, but finished one kilogram clear of his fellow-Iranian to take the clean & jerk silver.

A total tally of 355kg helped Abbaspour finish his campaign with a second bronze medal.

In the women's youth draw, Asal Kadkhodaei missed out on the snatch and C&J podiums in the 81kg weight class, finishing fourth on both occasions, but still managed to win the total bronze with an 87-106-193 record.

Inter's Inzaghi pleased with Como win, backs Martinez despite dry spell

REUTERS – Inter Milan coach Simone Inzaghi hailed his side's 2-0 Serie A home win over Como on Monday and said he was not worried about hard-working captain Lautaro Martinez's goal drought.

Despite the defending champions lacking the firepower from last week's 6-0 thrashing of Lazio, Inzaghi stressed his team were up to the challenge posed by battling Como.

"Clearly we are maintaining a very high level. All teams are running ahead, there

are opponents like Como who come to play great games, but we played an important game as a mature and aware team," the Italian told reporters.

"I feared this match a lot, we had some weaknesses in the back line. We played a game of concentration, in the first half we weren't as sharp as usual. Then in the second half we raised the intensity and struck at the right moments."

Goals from Carlos Augusto and Marcus Thuram earned Inter the victory that keeps them third with 37 points and a

game in hand on leaders Atalanta, who sit on 40 points.

Martinez has struggled to reach the form that made him Serie A top marksman last season and has failed to score in over a month since securing a 1-0 win over Venezia in early November.

Yet Inzaghi remains confident in his forward, saying the Argentine is playing a key role in his side's packed schedule.

"I was a striker. I know these moments happen," he said. "Lautaro was one of the outstanding performers against Lazio.

"The forwards are working hard, we ask a lot of them and are trying to rest them as much as possible in the circumstances.

"I told Lautaro to relax, because he has always scored goals and always will, luck will turn and he should only be worried if he doesn't get scoring opportunities."

● DANIELE MASCOLO/REUTERS

