

Iran's Mesigar speaks up on retirement and sweetest success

Sports Desk

Moslem Mesigar, Iran's retired beach soccer captain, says he did not expect such a massive turnout by the fans for his farewell party on Saturday.

Mesigar, 40, called time on his illustrious career during a 2-1 victory over Belarus in his hometown of Bushehr in southern Iran.

A jam-packed crowd, including Mesigar's friends and family as well as the governor-general of Bushehr Province, watched from the stands as the Iranian brought the curtain down on a distinguished two decades on the sand.

"Beach soccer players are barefoot in this game, so I didn't have any boots to hang up," the Iranian joked about his retirement in an interview with Varzesh3, adding: "I had already said that I would finish my career after last year's World Cup. I never really thought I would retire in such a magnificent manner, and it was truly a great joy to see all my

family members, friends, and fellow citizens present for my last game."

Having made his international debut in 2006, Mesigar played an integral part when Iran enjoyed a best-ever World Cup run in 2017, finding the net during a 5-3 victory over Italy in the third-place match-up in Bahamas.

He wore the armband again as Team Melli repeated the success last year in the United Arab Emirates, thanks to a 6-1 win against Belarus.

Mesigar also won three Asian Cup titles with the country in 2013, 2017, and 2023 – claiming the Most Valuable Player prize in the latest edition in Thailand – while he lifted the Beach Soccer Intercontinental Cup trophy on four occasions (2013, 2018, 2019, and 2022).

Asked about the sweetest memory of his time wearing the Iranian shirt, Mesigar said: "It was definitely the dramatic Asian Cup triumph in 2013. I scored a last-gasp equalizer in the final against Japan

to push the game into the shootout, where we came out on top to win a first Asian title, while I was the top scorer in the tournament. So, I guess that goes down as the finest moment of my career."

The Iranian said the country's failure to reach the World Cup finals in 2019 remains the lowest point of his career.

"We had finished third in the 2017 edition, but were knocked out by Japan in the 2019 Asian Cup quarterfinals and failed to qualify for the World Cup later that year. One of the finest generations of the Iranian beach soccer missed out on the showpiece in Paraguay," said Mesigar.

Mesigar said he would be looking to contribute to the national team in a new capacity from now on.

"I played as a player-manager in club level over the past six years, and I will be thrilled to join the Team Melli's coaching staff if the technical committee of the federation gives me the green light."



FIFA

Iranian karatekas win eight medals in Marseille Opena

Sports Desk

The Iranian karate squad enjoyed a prolific run in the 2025 Marseille Open, collecting eight medals, including four golds, in the southern French port city.

Sajjad Ganjzadeh, a gold medalist at the Tokyo Olympics, came out victorious against Faadel Boussag of France to walk away with the ultimate prize of the men's kumite +84kg weight class.

Joining Ganjzadeh on the podium was Mahdi Ganjzadeh, who settled for a joint-bronze alongside Algerian Arbia Diyaeddine.

Elsewhere in the men's competitions, Behnam Dehqanzadeh de-

feated Carmine Luciano of Italy for the -60kg title, while Morteza Ne'mati beat Ali Rahimi in an all-Iranian -75kg final.

Mahdi Shahgol was also among the medalists in the -75kg class, sharing the third podium with former world bronze winner Nurkanat Azhikanov of Kazakhstan. Ghazal Naderi, meanwhile, added a women's bronze to Iran's medal haul in Marseille, standing third in the -61kg event.

There was further glory for the country in the cadet age group, as Abolfazl Arab Ya'qoubi outpowered Italian Leonardo Nannini in the boys' U14 -50kg final.

More than 780 karatekas from 34

countries took part in the three-day event, with the home country standing atop the team table with a remarkable 80 medals, including 14 golds, across different age categories.

Italy won 20 medals (seven golds) to finish runner-up, with Algeria (11 medals-six golds) and Iran in the following spots.

Iranian gold winner Sajjad Ganjzadeh (2nd L) and Mahdi Ganjzadeh (2nd R) pose with their medals in the men's +84kg class at the Marseille Open karate tournament in Marseille, France, on January 19, 2025.

KARATE FOKUS



Djokovic prepared for 'explosive' Alcaraz in Australian Open quarters



REUTERS – The Australian Open quarter-finals begin today and fans are expected to pack Rod Laver Arena when 10-times champion Novak Djokovic meets Carlos Alcaraz, who is bidding to complete a career Grand Slam.

Women's top seeds Coco Gauff and defending champion Aryna Sabalenka are also in action while men's second seed Alexander Zverev completes the lineup at the famous stadium.

When Djokovic was listed as the seventh seed at Melbourne Park this year, he was on a collision course with Alcaraz when the draw was made and the mouth-watering clash will come to pass as they meet for the eighth time, with the Serbian leading 4-3.

Alcaraz triumphed in straight sets in the Wimbledon final last year but Djokovic took revenge less than a month later when he claimed the Olympic gold medal on the Spaniard's favourite surface at Roland Garros.

"This is not the right player to play in a quarter-final, I guess," a smiling Alcaraz said after his fourth-round

match was cut short by Jack Draper's injury retirement.

"He almost broke every record in tennis. I'm trying not to think about that when I'm in the match. I'm just trying (to think) that I'm able to beat him.

"I know my weapons, I know that I'm able to play good tennis against him." Djokovic's aura of invincibility at the Australian Open has seen cracks with the 37-year-old dropping two sets in the early rounds while Alcaraz has come through largely unscathed in shorter matches, dropping just one set. For Djokovic, Alcaraz is a younger version of his long-time Spanish rival Rafa Nadal, who he beat in the marathon 2012 final lasting five hours and 53 minutes – the longest on record at the Melbourne slam.

"(He) reminds me of my match-ups versus Nadal in terms of the intensity and the energy on the court," Djokovic said.

"He's very dynamic, explosive player. Incredibly talented, charismatic player. Great to watch, not that great to play against. I look forward to it."

