

Volleyball Nations League:

Iran edged out by Slovenia, remains winless in Week 1



Iranian outside-hitter Amirhossein Esfandiar (12) hits a spike during a 3-2 loss to Slovenia at the Volleyball Nations League in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on June 13, 2025.
● FIVB

Sports Desk

Iran fell to a 3-2 (17-25, 25-23, 25-18, 18-25, 15-12) loss to Slovenia at the Men's Volleyball Nations League in

in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Friday night. This was a third successive defeat for the Asian powerhouse in the first week of action at the annual

event, though Iran again showed signs of improvement under new Italian head coach Roberto Piazza against last year's VNL semifinalist.

Iran was well-beaten in straight sets (25-19, 25-16, 25-18) by Brazil in their opening game on Tuesday, and then relinquished a two-set lead to suffer a 3-2 (19-25, 21-25, 25-21, 25-17, 15-17) setback against the United States in a five-set thriller at the Maracanãzinho arena the following night.

Slovenian opposite-spiker Nik Mujanović scored a game-high 30 points, with outside-hitter Rok Možič and middle-blocker Jan Kozamernik also finishing in double figures with 17 and 10 points, respectively.

Prolific opposite-spiker Bardia Sa'adat topped the scoring for Iran, chipping in 24 points, followed by outside-hitters Pouria Hosseinkhanzadeh (11 points) and Amirhossein Esfandiar (10 points).

"The situation in Iran clearly impacted our performance today as all the players and the coaching staff are extremely worried about their families," Sa'adat said after the match, referring to Israel's

airstrike on Iranian soil, where left dozens killed or injured on Friday.

Iranian players offered a military salute during their national anthem prior to the game – a symbolic gesture in response to the criminal military aggression. Piazza, meanwhile, was pleased with the way his players "gave it everything they had on the court", though the Italian believes they could have done better in a couple of crucial incidents.

"The players did OK today but there were moments we should have handled differently. We should have closed out the second set under better circumstances, but we lost that, and then couldn't find the same rhythm we had in the first set in the third. Then we bounced back in the fourth," the former Netherlands head coach.

"There were a couple of decisive rallies in the fifth set, and both went Slovenia's way. I clearly remember the first one early in the set, and the second

came after my timeout when we trailed by 12-10, which we should have dealt with differently."

Iran will finish Week 1 with a game against Ukraine today, before heading to Belgrade for the second week.

"We have one day to rest and recover our energy. A couple of key players like Amin [Esmailnejad] and Mohammad [Valizadeh] sat out today's game, but we'll have a full squad available against Ukraine.

"Ukraine is a strong team – they're also very experienced because they've played together for three straight seasons. They've only lost one player, [Oleh] Podnisky, while the rest of players has been together for a long time and know each other well. We need to focus on ourselves as we're in for another tough match."

Ukraine defeated USA 3-0 (25-22, 25-20, 25-23) on the opening day of the competition and came out victorious against Cuba in five sets (25-22, 20-25, 25-20, 17-25, 15-12).

Mirzazadeh, Farrokhi secure Iranian GR spots for Wrestling Worlds

Sports Desk

Greco-Roman wrestlers Amin Mirzazadeh and Gholamreza Farrokhi booked a place in September's World Championships in Zagreb, after coming out victorious against their respective opponents at the Iranian world trials in Shiraz on Friday.

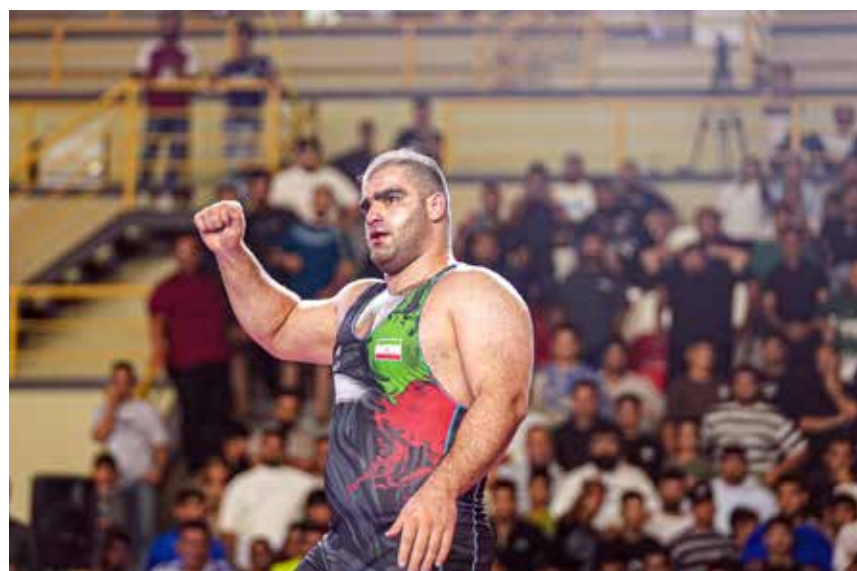
A 130kg bronze medalist at last year's Paris Olympics, Mirzazadeh edged out Asian and world under-23 champion Fardin Hedayati 2-1 and will be on course to defend his superheavyweight title at the upcoming world showpiece.

Hedayati had beaten Ali-Akbar Yousefi – world gold medalist in 2021 – 3-0 in the morning session to set the showdown against Mirzazadeh.

A gold medalist in February's Zagreb Open, Farrokhi, meanwhile, stunned Mohammad-Ali Geraei twice to make sure he will return to the Croatian capital in September. Needing two victories against the reigning world champion to secure the 82kg spot, Farrokhi, who had beaten Asian champion Mohammad Naqousi 4-2 in the morning session, repeated the score-

line in the first bout against Geraei, before cruising to an emphatic 6-0 victory to punch his Zagreb ticket. Joined by Mirzazadeh and Farrokhi in the Iranian 10-man Greco-Roman squad are Olympic champions Saeid Esmaili (67kg) and Mohammad-Hadi Saravi (97kg) plus Asian gold medalist Danial Sohrabi (72kg), two-time world under-20 champion Alireza Abdevali (77kg), and Alireza Mohamadi (87kg), who will be chasing a first world gold medal in Zagreb, having grabbed impressive silvers at the 2023 edition and Paris

Olympics. Iran head coach Hassan Rangraz is undecided on the 55kg, 60kg, and 63kg weight classes following a poor run of results for the Iranian contestants at the Ulaanbaatar Open and Benur Pashayan Tournament in Yerevan. Meanwhile, Iranian trio Mahdi Ahadi (55kg), Sajjad Abaspour (60kg), and former world champion Meysam Dalkhani (63kg) emerged as new contenders for a spot in Zagreb after grabbing the gold medal of their respective events at the International Takhti Cup in Shiraz.



Greco-Roman wrestler Amin Mirzazadeh celebrates his victory over Fardin Hedayati in the Iranian 130kg trials for September's World Championships in Shiraz, Iran, on June 13, 2025.
● IAWFIR

ParaVolley Asia Oceania Zonal Championships: Iranian women finish runner-up to China

Sports Desk

Iran settled for a runner-up finish at the ParaVolley Asia Oceania (PVAO) Zonal Championships in Hangzhou, China, after a straight-set (25-17, 25-17, 25-17) defeat against the host country in the women's final showpiece on Friday.

The result was still enough for the Iranian girls to secure a place in October's World Championships in Mersin, Türkiye. Iran began its campaign in Hangzhou with a comfortable 3-0 (25-5, 25-7, 25-6) win against Australia, and then did not concede a single set against Japan (25-8, 25-17, 25-22) and Mongolia (25-4, 25-8, 25-



● WORLD PARAVOLLEY

13) to progress to the semifinals as the top team in the pool. Iran also came out on top in straight sets (25-17, 25-8, 25-11)

against Thailand to set a final date with China, which defeated Japan 3-0 (25-8, 25-10, 25-23) in the other semifinal.

Thunder rally to beat Pacers and level NBA Finals

BBC – Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 35 points as the Oklahoma City Thunder came from behind late on to beat the Indiana Pacers and level the NBA Finals.

The Thunder won 111-104 at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis to tie the best-of-seven series at 2-2. They trailed by seven points entering the fourth quarter but outscored Indiana 31-17 in the last period, closing with a 12-1 run in the last three minutes.

"I knew what it would have looked like if we lost tonight," said Gilgeous-Alexander. "I didn't want to go down not swinging."

Thunder coach Mark Daigneault gave Gilgeous-Alexander, this season's Most Valuable Player, a break late in the third quarter rather than his usual rest early in the fourth. The Pacers led 101-97 with less than four minutes remaining, but Gilgeous-Alexander scored 15 of the Thunder's final 16 points and ended the game with 10 free-throws from 10 attempts.

Jalen Williams scored 27 points and made seven rebounds for the Thunder, while Alex Caruso added



● MADDIE MEYER/IMAGN IMAGES

20 points off the bench.

Pascal Siakam led the Pacers with 20 points and Tyrese Haliburton 18.

"We just didn't execute at the end of the game," said Siakam. "We didn't get easy shots. The easy shots that we got, we missed them. And they made them." The Thunder host game five at Paycom Center in Oklahoma City at 19:30 local time on Monday (01:30 BST, Tuesday).