

Volleyball Nations League:

Iran coach Piazza wary of tough job in Week 3

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Roberto Piazza said his team will have to brace for “a tough week ahead” as they resume action at the Volleyball Nations League on Wednesday. Sitting 10th in the 18-team table on a 4-4 record, Piazza’s men will take on European powerhouse Poland in their first outing in the third and final week of the preliminary round in Gdansk. The two sides met in a warmup game in the Polish city of Olsztyn on Saturday, with the home side – second in the VNL table with six wins – coming out victorious in straight sets (26-24, 25-20, 25-21) before Iran won an additional fourth set 25-20. “We had an average first set and were close to them, though I still believe we have a lot to learn from the Polish team. They’re truly among the world’s elite

and can instantly find the right solutions throughout the game,” Piazza said after the game. “We were aware of some of these challenges beforehand. But now we truly understand how much work lies ahead and, of course, our goal is to put in that hard work,” added the Italian. A second game in Week 3 for Iran will come against China on Thursday, followed by an encounter against Olympic champion France on Saturday. Iran will hope to be in contention for a top-seven finish in the table and a place in the VNL Finals when squaring off against Bulgaria in the final round of the preliminaries on Sunday. “We’ll have to prepare differently for each game, as our first game against Poland will be played at 8:00 p.m. and the second one will come on 4:30 p.m. the following day – leaving us with little recovery time be-

tween the two games. “So, we’ll need to completely reset our mindset. We’ll have one day to rest, then play again at 8:30 p.m. against France before the final match at 5:00 p.m. against Bulgaria the next day. “Overall, we have a tough week ahead. We know exactly what we want. Our fate is in our hands – if we want it, we can achieve it. But we need to take it day by day, not think about the whole week at once. So, our first challenge is the match against Poland,” Piazza said. Looking to progress to the Finals for the first time since 2022, Iran got off to a slow start in the competition under the new Italian coach, suffering successive defeats against Brazil (3-0), USA (3-2), and Slovenia (3-2), before salvaging a five-set win against Ukraine in the final Week 1 game in Rio de Janeiro. The Asian powerhouse, however, delivered much-improved



Iran (white) and Poland play in a warmup game in Olsztyn, Poland, on July 12, 2025. ● volleyball.ir

displays in the second week of action, defeating Serbia in four

sets in Belgrade, before claiming victories against Argentina (3-1)

and the Netherlands (3-2) either side of a 3-1 loss to Germany.

Asian U20 Wrestling Championships:

Iranians snatch double golds on Day 1 of freestyle event



Sports Desk

The first day of the freestyle contests at the Asian U20 Wrestling Championships saw Iranians collect four med-



Iran's Ebrahim Elahi (L) and Erfan Alizadeh won the gold medals in the freestyle 70kg and 97kg contests, respectively, at the Asian U20 Wrestling Championships. ● IAWFIR

als, including double golds, across five weight classes in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Ebrahim Elahi outmuscled the host's Zalkarbek Tabaldiev by technical superiority (10-0) in the semifinals before

defeating Ariya Yoshida of Japan 8-3 for the ultimate prize of the 70kg division. Erfan Alizadeh doubled Iran's gold tally later on Saturday, enjoying an emphatic run in the 97kg contests. The Iranian hammered Uzbekistan's Mukhammadjon Ismoiljonov (11-0) and Indian Vishal (11-1) for a place in the

final showpiece and then rounded off his campaign with a 5-0 victory over Kamil Kurugliyev of Kazakhstan. Elsewhere, Abolfazl Shamsipour had to settle for a silver medal after a 5-4 loss to Amit of India in the 79kg final, while Arshia Haddadi bounced back from a last-four defeat against Kazakhstan's Nurdanat Aitanov to beat Kabe Matjanov of Turkmenistan 11-0 for a consolation bronze in the 57kg class. Sajjad Pirdayeh, meanwhile, finished his 65kg campaign empty-handed following a second-round setback (2-0) against the host's Omurbek Asan Uulu.

The freestyle competitions came after the Iranian Greco-Roman squad bagged a remarkable four golds and five bronzes in 10 classes to win the team title in the Kyrgyz capital with 185 points – followed by Kyrgyzstan (166pts) and Uzbekistan (151pts). Payam Ahmadi (55kg), Ahoura Bouveiri (77kg), Mohammad-Hadi Seydi (97kg), and Abolfazl Fat'hi (130kg) were the Iranian gold medalists, with Seyyed Iman Hosseini (60kg), Mohammad-Javad Talebi (63kg), Gholamreza Abdevali (67kg), Amir-Mahdi Saeidinava (72kg) and Hamdireza Keshkar (87kg) adding five bronzes to the medal haul.

Qayeddi agrees permanent four-year deal with Kalba: Report

Sports Desk

Iran international winger Mahdi Qayeddi has agreed a permanent contract with Ittihad Kalba



FC, extending his career at the Emirati top-flight side until 2029, according to Dubai-based newspaper Emarat Al Youm. Qayeddi, 26, joined Kalba FC on loan from Shabab Al Ahli for the start of the 2023/24 season before bagging 34 goals, while providing teammates with 14 assists, in 60 appearances across all competitions. Qayeddi scored 16 in 23 outings to jointly finish second – alongside Al Whada's Syrian striker Omar Khribin – in the ADNOC Pro League's leading marksmen chart, following Al Ain's Kodjo Fodoh Laba, who had 20 strikes. The Iranian also registered seven assists as Kalba FC finished ninth in 14-team table of the Emirati league.

The report comes as a blow for Esteghlal fans, who were hoping to reunite with the wizard winger ahead of the new Persian Gulf Pro League season.

Meanwhile, Emarat Al Youm added that Kalba is also in talks with Al Wahda skipper Ahmad Nourollahi in an effort to lure the Iranian midfielder to the Ittihad Kalba Stadium. Nourollahi, who is also under the radar of former club Persepolis, registered six goals and assists apiece in 26 games to help Al Wahda finish third in the UAE Pro League table last season.

Arsenal target Gyokeres faces Sporting disciplinary action

BBC – Arsenal target Viktor Gyokeres is facing disciplinary action by his club Sporting after failing to report for pre-season training, says the Portuguese club's president Frederico Varandas. Varandas added that any potential transfer was now becoming “more complicated”. BBC Sport reported last week that Arsenal sporting director Andrea Berta held face-to-face talks with Sweden international Gyokeres in Portugal. Sources have told BBC Sport that talks are ongoing with Arsenal, who are still hopeful of striking a deal, with their most recent proposal for the 27-year-old totalling about 70m euros (£60m) including add-ons. Last month Sporting president Varandas said there was no ‘gentleman's agreement’ for Gyokeres to leave for 70m euros but added that the club would not demand his full release clause of 100m euros (£85m). Gyokeres, who scored 54 goals

in 52 games last season, has yet to publicly explain why he has not turned up for pre-season. Varandas told Portuguese news agency Lusa that “no one is above the interests of the club”. “We're calm. Everything can be solved with the closure of the market, a hefty fine and an apology to the group,” Varandas said. “If they don't want to pay Viktor's fair market value, we'll be very comfortable with that for

the next three years. “If the geniuses who are devising this strategy think that this puts pressure on me to make it easier for him to leave, not only are they completely wrong, but they are also making it more complicated for the player to leave.” Gyokeres has scored 97 goals in 102 matches during his two seasons in Portugal, firing Sporting to two league titles.



● PEDRO ROCHA/REUTERS