

Iran U21 gearing up for title defense at volleyball world meet

Sports Desk

Iran will once again be among the favorites at the FIVB Men's U21 World Championship when the global showpiece gets underway on August 21 in the Chinese city of Jiangmen.

A two-time champion over the past three editions, Iran will begin its title defense against Kazakhstan in Pool B on the opening day of the competition.

A second outing for Iran will come against Puerto Rico on Aug. 22, followed by games against South Korea – in a repeat of last year's Asian under-20 final, which Iran won in straight sets – Canada, and Poland.

The top four in each of the four six-team groups will progress to the round of 16.

Iranian head coach Mohammad Mo'menimogaddam will be looking to build on a 20-game unbeaten run at the helm, during which the country claimed back-to-back Asian under-20 titles either side of the world U21 crown in 2023 – thanks to a 3-2 victory over Italy in the final showdown in Manama.

Mo'menimogaddam said the primary goal for him and his coaching staff has been to develop a decent generation of young play-



ers for the senior national team, while chasing a second successive world title in Jiangmen.

"The team is highly motivated and eager to deliver a performance worthy of the Iranian volleyball's stature," the head

coach told reporters during a final training session in Tehran on Monday.

"The team will definitely go after glory in Jiangmen, although this year's tournament will be exceptionally tough as it is the

post-Olympic year and many countries are undergoing comprehensive changes in their youth setup," added the Iranian coach.

Pouria Ariakhah will be the player to watch in the Iranian squad after

the prolific opposite delivered an MVP display during the title-winning run at the Asian U20 meet in Indonesia last summer and was part of the national team in the Volleyball Nations League preliminaries in June and July.



Iranian under-21 players are seen in a training session in Tehran, Iran, on August 11, 2025.

● AMIRHOSSEIN KHAIRKHAH/
volleyball.ir

Young setter Emran Kookjili, along with middle-blockers Taha Behboudinia and Armin Qelichniazi, were also among the individual award winners at the Asian event and are expected to play integral roles for the Iranian team in Jiangmen again.

Joining the quadruple in the visit to China are Emad Kakavand (setter), Ali Mombeini (opposite), Morteza Tabatabaei (libero), Shayan Mehrabi (middle blocker), Matin Hosseini (outside hitter), Morteza Narimani (outside hitter), Arian Mahmoudinejad (outside hitter), and Mohammad-Mani Alikhani (outside hitter).

Elsewhere in the competition, the host nation will be joined by Egypt, the United States, Thailand, Morocco, and Turkey in Pool A, with four-time champion Brazil, Bulgaria, Czechia, Colombia, Japan, and Cuba completing the lineup in Pool C.

Italy, Argentina, Tunisia, France, Ukraine, and Indonesia will lock horns for a last-16 spot in Pool D.

Iranian Super Cup:

Tractor leaves it late against Esteghlal to win curtain raiser



Tractor players pose with the Iranian Super Cup trophy after beating Esteghlal 2-1 at the Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium, Isfahan, Iran, on August 11, 2025.

● TASNIM

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League champion Tractor came from behind to beat Esteghlal 2-1 in stoppage time and lift a maiden Iranian Super Cup trophy at Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium on Monday.

Tomislav Štrkalj came off the bench midway through the second half to net the winner in the first minute of added time. The Croatian striker burst past Esteghlal center-back Armin Sohrabian on Mahdi Hashemnejad's delicate through ball before finding the bottom corner with a composed finish.

Rouzbeh Cheshmi put the Hazfi Cup champion, which has Portuguese head coach Ricardo Sa Pinto back on the bench for the new season, ahead 12 minutes into the game, heading home Ramin Rezaeian's set

piece past young Tractor goalkeeper Adib Zarei.

There was little to separate the two sides for the remainder of the first half, before Tractor desperately pushed for an equalizer after the break. Serbian center-back Aleksandar Sedlar and Croatian midfielder Igor Postonjski came close to drawing Tractor level, only to be denied by the Blues' new Spanish keeper Antonio Adán.

Tractor's domination eventually paid off with four minutes remaining, as Esteghlal fullback Saman Fallah was deemed by a VAR review to have handled the ball in the box.

Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh, the leading marksman in the Iranian top flight last season, sent Adán the wrong way from the spot, before Štrkalj's strike turned the contest on its head

within five minutes.

The two sides will meet again in Tabriz next Tuesday in the opening round of fixtures in the Persian Gulf Pro League season.

Tractor head coach Dragan Skocic will hope Monday's triumph serves as a morale booster ahead of a tough campaign – including the AFC Champions League Elite – despite parting ways with two integral players from last season's title-winning squad in center-back Aref Aqasi and midfielder Ricardo Alves, while international keeper Alireza Beiranvand will be sidelined for four months due to suspension.

Sa Pinto, meanwhile, will be desperate to see new signings make an instant impact as the Blues will be looking to improve on the ninth-place finish last term.

Asian Men's U-17 Handball Championship:

Iran to play Uzbekistan in group opener

Sports Desk

Iranian handball team will square off against Uzbekistan in their Group D opener at the AHF Asian U-17 Championship in Amman, Jordan, on September 15.

The first edition of the competition was to kick off on July 1, but had to be rescheduled by the Asian Handball Federation due to regional conflict and flight

suspension.

A second outing for Iran will come against Maldives on Sept. 16, followed by a game against Asian handball powerhouse South Korea two days later.

The two top teams in each of the four preliminary groups will progress to the second-round group phase to battle for a last-four spot. The two finalists will qualify for the inaugural IHF Men's

U-17 Handball World Championship – starting October 27 in Morocco.

Elsewhere in Amman, Kuwait, Bahrain and Hong Kong will lock horns in Group A, with Group B featuring Saudi Arabia, China, and Qatar.

The host country will be joined by the Chinese Taipei, India, and Syria in fighting for a top-two finish in Group D.



● IRNA