

## FIVB Men's U21 World Championship:

## Iran fights back against Italy to retain crown

## Sports Desk

Iran bounced back from an early setback to defeat Italy 3-1 and secure back-to-back titles at the FIVB Volleyball Men's U21 World Championship in Jiangmen, China, on Sunday.

In a repeat of the 2019 and 2023 finals – which the Asian side had won both in five sets – the Italians marched to a 25-15 victory in the opening set. However, Iranian young guns swiftly returned to their familiar best, winning the next three sets 25-18, 25-22, and 25-14 to seal the country's third trophy in the history of the competition.

"We dedicate this success to the Iranian people, who are going through tough times, and I just hope we have given them something to cheer about," Iranian captain Mohammadmani Alikhani said after the game.

"From the very beginning, our ultimate goal was to win the title, and I'm glad that we have now achieved it. We had to go through a lot along the way, and just as our head coach said, we cried during training so that we



Iranian players celebrate after a 3-1 victory over Italy at the FIVB Volleyball Men's U21 World Championship final in Jiangmen, China, on August 31, 2025.  
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could laugh today after becoming champions," added the outside hitter.

Alikhani's teammate Ali Mombeini was also thrilled to see "six months of hard work pay off,"

adding, "Every game felt like a final for us, though victories in some, like those against South

Korea and the United States [in the semifinals], were even sweeter." Iranian outside-hitter Matin Hosseini stole the show at the Jiangmen Sports Center, contributing a game-high 18 points, courtesy of 10 kills, five aces, and three blocks. With Iran leading 14-11 in the fourth set, the 19-year-old prodigy stepped behind the service line and ignited a 7-0 run – powered by four aces – as his team capped off a dominant campaign in Jiangmen with a clean sweep of eight victories.

Prolific opposite Pouya Ariakhah finished a fourth game in double figures, chipping in 15 points, while Italian duo Tommaso Barotto and Pardo Mati had 14 points apiece.

Sunday's triumph extended Iran's winning streak in this age group to a remarkable 29 games over four years under head coach Gholamreza Mo'menimoqaddam – during which the country also claimed successive Asian under-20 titles either side of the world U21 crown in 2023.

There was further glory for the Iranian team in the awarding ceremony as Hosseini was

named the Most Valuable Player of the competition, while securing a place in the Dream Team as the joint Best Outside-Hitter – alongside American Sean Kelly, who helped his team to a historic bronze medal in the tournament. Hosseini rounded off the competition with 112 points, including 81 in attack, 13 from blocks and 18 from service, averaging more than 12 points per match.

Hosseini's teammate Taha Behboudnia was one of the two Best Middle Blockers, with Emran Kookjili and Morteza Tabatabaei claiming the Best Setter and Best Libero prizes, respectively.

The Dream Team also featured Italy's Barotto, who earned recognition as Best Opposite, while Mati completed the middle blocker pairing.

Iran began its title defense in Jiangmen with a 3-1 win against Kazakhstan and then defeated Puerto Rico (3-0), South Korea (3-2) Canada (3-0), and Poland (3-1) to finish atop the Pool B table, before coming out on top against Argentina (3-1), China (3-0), and USA (3-0) for a place in the final showpiece.

## Taremi joins Greek champion Olympiacos



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## Sports Desk

Iran international striker Mahdi Taremi left Inter to embark on a new chapter in his career, signing a two-year contract – worth £2.2 million – with Greek top-flight champion Olympiacos.

The move ends to weeks of speculation surrounding the future of 33-year-old Iranian, who joined Inter last summer as a free agent from Porto but endured a below-par campaign in Nerazzurri colors.

Taremi managed only three goals – including double spot-kicks – and nine assists in 43 appearances across all competitions, with his sole strike from open play coming in a 3-2 loss to archrival Milan at the Supercoppa Italiana final in January.

Despite receiving criticism for his lack of goals throughout the season, Taremi still had the full backing of former Inter boss Simone Inzaghi, who even fielded him in the starting XI for some of the big occasions in the Champions League. However, the introduction of new head coach Cristian Chivu in June marked the beginning of the end for the Iranian talisman.

The Olympiacos deal marks the fourth spell in European club football for the Iranian, who was first

introduced to the continent with Portuguese club Rio Ave in 2019.

A former player of Persepolis in his home country and Al Gharafa in Qatar, Taremi was the leading marksman in the Portuguese Primeira Liga in his sole season with Rio Ave, finishing with 21 goals and five assists in 37 games before signing for Porto.

The pinnacle of his club career came with Porto, where the Iranian scored 91 goals and provided 56 assists in 182 appearances – becoming the club's third all-time top scorer.

During his four seasons with the Dragons, he helped the Portuguese heavyweight lift seven domestic trophies, including a league and cup double in the 2021/22 campaign.

While a move from Serie A to Greece might be seen as a step backward for Taremi, he will still fancy his chances of shining in Europe's elite clubs' competition when Olympiacos returns to the UEFA Champions League.

Olympiacos will begin its campaign with a home game against Cypriot champion Pafos on September 17, and will then take on Arsenal (A), Barcelona (A), PSV (H), Real Madrid (H), Kairat (A), Bayer Leverkusen (H), and Ajax (A) in the league phase.

## Iran's Alamian win men's singles title at WTT Feeder event

## Sports Desk

Iran's Noshad Alamian won the men's singles title at the WTT Feeder event in Olomouc, Czechia, on Sunday.

Alamian defeated Indian world No. 82 Harmeet Desai 3-2 (11-9, 6-11, 11-8, 9-11, 11-8) to walk away with the prize at the OMEGA Sport Center.

Alamian's younger brother, Nima, and teenage prodigy Benyamin Faraji, as well as Amirmahdi Keshavarzi and Mohammadjavad Sohrabi were the other Iranians in the men's singles draw in Olomouc.

Faraji suffered a last-16 defeat against Noshad, while Nima fell short against Japanese Sota Noda in the same round. Sohrabi, meanwhile, had his campaign finished in the first round after a defeat against Yuto Muramatsu of Japan, with Keshavarzi beaten in five games by Spanish Albert



● WTT

Vilardell in the second round. There was further glory for Noshad as he teamed up with his brother to reach the men's doubles final, only to settle for a runner-up finish after a 3-1 setback (11-7, 4-11, 11-9, 11-9)

against the Japanese duo of Noda and Yuto Abe.

Alamian brothers began their campaign with a straight-game victory over Slovakia's Jakub Zelinka and Alexander Valuch, and then came from behind to

beat the Spanish duo of Rafael De las Heras and Diego Lillo in a five-game thriller before defeating Japan's Ryuusei Kawakami and Kazuki Yoshiyama 3-1 (11-6, 10-12, 14-12, 11-7) for a place in the final showpiece.

## Esmaeilnejad gives Iran injury scare ahead of World Championship

## Sports Desk

Iran head coach Roberto Piza was dealt a massive blow in his team's preparation for the upcoming FIVB Men's Volleyball World Championship after star opposite Amin Esmaeilnejad suffered an ankle injury during a 3-1 victory (25-22, 25-21, 23-25, 25-21) over Qatar in Doha on Sunday.

Esmaeilnejad, who was Iran's top scorer in the Volleyball Nations League preliminaries earlier in the summer, was forced out of the game in the closing stages of the second set. Early assessments, however, brought positive news for the Italian coach, showing

no fracture in his twisted ankle.

The Iranian will still have to

undergo an MRI scan today to determine the timeline for his return to action.



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Iran will begin its campaign at the World Championship against Egypt in Pool B on September 14, and then faces another African test in Tunisia two days later, before taking on host Philippines on Sept. 18.

The top two of the group will progress to round of 16.

Iran will be looking to build on a decent run in the Nations League, during which Piazza's men won six out of 12 games to finish eighth in the preliminary table but ultimately missed out on a place in the quarterfinals, as China – second from bottom in the standings – automatically qualified as the host of the VNL Finals.