

FIVB Men's Volleyball World Championship: Piazza warns Iran against complacency before Czechia clash

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Roberto Piazza cautioned his players not to get carried away by their last-16 victory over Serbia, as they prepare to face Czechia in the FIVB Men's World Championship quarterfinals in Pasay City, Philippines, today.

Fresh off an epic five-set win against the host in their do-or-die final group game, the Asian powerhouse again had to come from behind twice to edge out Serbia 3-2 (23-25, 25-19, 24-26, 25-22, 15-9) on Tuesday.

Serbia led by as many as five points at 19-14 in the first set before Iran fought back to deny two set points and reduce the deficit to one, but Serbian outside-hitter Pavle Peric capitalized on the third, finishing off with a high-flying pipe shot. The second set stayed close until Iran broke away at 17-17, winning by six to level the scoreline.

A rollercoaster third set saw the lead change hands several times before Aleksandar Stefanovic's ace settled the scoreline. Iran again fought back to force the match into the decider. Iranians stormed to a 4-1 lead in the tiebreaker and never looked back to get the job done. Serbian opposite Drazen Luburic topped the scoring chart with 27 points, while opposite Ali Hajipour and outside-hitter Morteza Sharifi contributed with 23 points apiece for Iran.

Iran's outside-hitter Ali Haqparast and middle-blocker Mohammad Valizadeh also finished in double figures, chipping in 18 and 10



Iranian players celebrate a point during a five-set victory over Serbia at the FIVB Men's Volleyball World Championship last 16 in Pasay City, Philippines, on September 23, 2025.

● [MOJTABA ZAKIZADEH/volleyball.ir](#)

with six points – including Brazil – Czechia made quick work of Tunisia earlier on Tuesday, coming out victorious in straight sets (25-19, 25-18, 25-23).

"The next match will definitely be more difficult than this one," Piazza said of the last-four test, adding: "They are playing an amazing volleyball. They have two really important opposites, and the whole team is very good in every aspect. The players are big and tall, so we need to be smart and help each other."

In a meeting after returning to the hotel, Piazza told his players not to settle for what they have already achieved in the flagship international event.

"We haven't accomplished anything yet, so celebrating today's victory is enough. When I first met with [Iran Volleyball Federation president] Milad Taqavi, I promised him we would always be among the top eight teams in the world. But now, simply being in the quarterfinals is neither sufficient nor satisfying for me, and it shouldn't be for you, either," said the Italian.

Iran and Czechia last met in the Olympic qualification tournament in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in October 2023, with the European team coming out on top in four sets.

points, respectively.

Asked how pleased he was with Iran's performance after the game, the Italian head coach said: "We could have played much better in the first set and the second one. One the third one, we were leading the set at the end [but ultimately lost,]"

This is the kind of experience that we need to live on the court.

"We have 11 new players [in the squad], who have not been able to understand my language in volleyball until now, and that's why I'm a little bit disappointed for them. In the end, all the guys are really

happy. I'm happy too. The players know exactly that today was the game, but the next one in two days will be another 'the game,'" the Italian told VBTv.

When asked how long his players would celebrate before focusing on the next game, Piazza replied:

"I've already stopped celebrating, and they need to quit immediately because the other team played at 15:30 today and the game was not so long as ours, so we will have less time to recover."

Runner-up to Serbia in a tight Pool H table that featured three teams

Asian Men's U-17 Handball Championship: Iran runs riot against Bahrain, punches ticket for world meet



● [IRIHF](#)

Sports Desk

Iran hammered Bahrain 37-19 on Tuesday to progress to the final showpiece of the inaugural Asian Men's U-17 Handball Championship in Amman, Jordan.

Standing between Iran and the trophy in today's final at the Princess Sumaya Hall will be South Korea, which edged out Qatar 36-35 in the other last-four clash earlier on Tuesday. Today's game will be a repeat of the preliminary-round meeting between the two sides, which Iran won 31-25.

The semifinal victories saw Iran and South Korea secure a spot at the 1st IHF Men's U-17 Handball World Championship – starting October 24 in Morocco.

Iran dominated the early proceedings against Bahrain, storming to a 7-1 lead with 11 minutes into the contest, while goalkeeper Mehrshad Mansouri delivered a heroic performance as Iran led by 10 goals at halftime.

Iranian boys picked up right where they left off after the break to seal their seventh successive victory in the competition.

Iran's Mohammad-Taha Ebrahim Khanlari was awarded the Man of the Match prize after the game. Iran began its campaign in Amman with a 65-4 hammering of Maldives, and then went on to defeat Syria (44-22) and South Korea to win Group D in the preliminary phase.

The first game in the main round saw Iran beat Asia's traditional handball powerhouse Kuwait 35-30, followed by a 42-22 rout of the host team, and a commanding 46-25 win against Qatar on Sunday for a top-spot finish in Group 2.

Esteghlal backs head coach Sa Pinto despite poor run

Sports Desk

The Esteghlal hierarchy has offered "full support" to under-fire head coach Ricardo Sa Pinto, despite the Persian Gulf Pro League club's poor start to the season.

The Theran Blues have managed a single victory in six outings across all competitions in the new campaign – a 1-0 away win against defending champion Tractor on the opening day of the Iranian top-flight season.

Sitting eighth in the Iranian league table with five points from four games, Esteghlal has had to settle for hard-fought home draws against Zob Ahan (3-3) and 10-man Paykan (2-2) either side of a 1-0 away loss to Esteghlal Khuzestan.

Arguably the lowest point in the club's history, however, came last week when the Blues suffered a shock 7-1 defeat against Al Wasl in Dubai in their AFC Champions League Two Group A opener.

Sa Pinto returned to Blues' bench for a second spell in June, having led Esteghlal to a third-place finish in the league and a place in the Hazfi Cup final in the 2022/23 season.

The Portuguese hoped to build on the club's massive spending spree, which culminated in several high-profile summer signings – including former Barcelona winger Munir El Haddadi, ex-Sporting and Real Madrid goalkeeper Antonio Adan, Albania international Jasir Asani, and Iran international center-back Aref Agasi.



● [VARZESH3](#)

However, despite the dire run of results raising questions over his future in recent days, the club looks poised to stick with the Portuguese coach.

In a meeting with the manager and technical advisor Clarence Seedorf, Esteghlal board and chairman Ali Tajernia pledged "full and unequivocal support" for Sa Pinto, according to the club's statement on Tuesday.

"The necessary steps would be taken to address the team's weaknesses and provide the manager with all the resources needed to turn the season around," added the statement.

"Seedorf also voiced his support,

emphasizing the importance of clearly defined roles within the club's structure and pledging to work alongside the board and the head coach.

"For his part, Sa Pinto stressed that mutual understanding and support between the technical and managerial staff are essential for success – a sentiment that was well-received by the board."

Next for Esteghlal and Sa Pinto is an away game against Shams Azar in the domestic league on Friday, before they resume action in the Asian second-tier club competition against Bahraini champion Al Muharraq in Tehran on Wednesday.