

# Iran to learn from underestimating World Championships: *Hazratpour*

## Sports Desk

Iranian libero Mohammadreza Hazratpour said the national team must learn from underestimating the recently-concluded Men's Volleyball World Championship after missing out on a historic last-four spot at the sport's flagship international event in the Philippines. Iran's rollercoaster campaign in Pasay City came to an end following a 3-1 loss (22-25, 27-25, 25-20, 25-21) to Czechia in the quarterfinals last Thursday.

The Asian powerhouse was stunned by Egypt (3-1) in their Pool A opener, but managed to beat Tunisia in four sets before pulling off a dramatic fightback to edge the host in an epic five-setter to progress to the round of 16. Iran again had to come from behind twice to defeat Serbia in a thrilling five sets for a place in the quarterfinals.

"We did not have a decent start to the World Championship, and even struggled in the group stage. It was all finished for us against the Philippines, but a net fault by a Filipino player gave us a lifeline from above. We fought our way back into the tournament and ended up facing Serbia. In that match as well, the game turned around at a moment when we were on the verge of losing," Hazratpour told Varzesh3.

"Overall, I feel we underestimated this tournament. We thought the World Championship would be like the Volleyball Nations League and that we would find it easy against other teams. But all these events became a significant learning experience for our young team. Team Iran was the sec-



● MOJTABA ZAKIZADEH/volleyball.ir

ond-youngest squad in the World Championship, so some struggles were to be expected given the team's youth.

"I'm sure that the Czechia defeat was a major lesson for us, and it will benefit the team greatly in the coming years. Please see this defeat as a formative experience for our young team, one that will serve us well in the future. Next year, we have to compete in the Asian Championship in Japan, where the winner qualifies for the Olympics. The experience from this World Championship

will be a great asset for us in that tournament."

The tournament in the Philippines was Iran's second major competition in two months under new Italian head coach Roberto Piazza, following the annual Volleyball Nations League, where the team produced some impressive performances despite failing to advance to the VNL Finals.

Drawing a comparison between the two events, Hazratpour said: "The VNL and the World Championship are completely different competitions. The teams that

were at the World Championship performed at a much higher level than in the Nations League. The reason is simple: the World Championship carries more prestige; it's the second most important tournament in volleyball after the Olympics."

"I'm not saying that the teams in the Nations League didn't give their all, but at the World Championship, there were truly no weak teams. The Philippines, Tunisia, and Egypt were all fully prepared, and that's precisely why powerhouse nations like Brazil, Japan,

France, and Cuba were eliminated in the group stage."

Hazratpour also believes that playing with a whole new system proved costly for the Iranian team. "It was a system implemented by Mr. Piazza – one we were unfamiliar with and found difficult to execute. However, by the latter stages of the tournament, we were starting to get used to it," Hazratpour said, while rejecting the idea of a dip in form in the Iranian team compared to its VNL campaign.

"It had nothing to do with our

form. I just think the other teams came into the tournament with a better mindset and were able to perform better."

Hazratpour was one of Iran's standout performers at the world event, with the pinnacle of him campaign against Serbia, where he delivered a superb defensive display to play his part in the victory.

"During his five months with the team, Mr. Piazza held numerous sessions with us about coverage, reception, and defensive positioning. It has become a global trend in volleyball. Just look at the final match between Poland and Italy; the defensive coverage ultimately decided the outcome.

"Reception is a cornerstone of Mr. Piazza's philosophy, something he emphasized to us every single day. He repeatedly told us that one successful dig could completely turn the tide of a match. I personally have understood and internalized these lessons from Piazza, and I am trying to apply them in the domestic league so I can execute them more effectively with the national team.

"Piazza has introduced a new system to our volleyball, and we all must work together to ensure our domestic league also moves toward this system. In a way, Piazza is similar to [former Iran coach] Julio Velasco. He even works with players on the psychological aspect of the game. We must appreciate the value of this coach.

"I will say it again: the World Championship was a major lesson for us. You can be sure we will use this experience to our advantage in future competitions."

## World Para Athletics Championships: Iran's Salehi bags bronze in women's shot put



● IRNA

## Sports Desk

Elham Salehi claimed a second bronze medal for Iran at the World Para Athletics Championships, finishing third in the women's shot put F54 event on the fourth day of action in New Delhi, India. Salehi's best effort came with her first attempt, as she registered a 7.17m throw to secure her third bronze at major tournaments in 12 months – following last year's javelin throw medals at the World Championships and the Paris Paralympics.

Reigning Paralympic champion Gloria Zarza of Mexico defended her world title, thanks to a 7.97m throw with her final attempt, with Brazilian Elizabeth Rodrigues Gomes – a silver medalist in Paris – settling for the runner-up spot on 7.78m.

Amanollah Papi got Iran off the mark in

New Delhi on Sunday, winning a bronze in the men's javelin throw event.

Representing the country in the F57 class, Papi saved his best for the last attempt, registering a season-high 51.55m effort to win a consolation bronze.

Turkey's Muhammet Khalvandi and Yorkinbek Odilov of Uzbekistan grabbed the gold and silver medals, finishing on with 53.3m and 52.06m, respectively.

There was disappointment for Iranian Alireza Mokhtari – a Paralympic bronze medalist last year – in the men's shot put F53 contest on Monday, after he was stripped of the silver medal due to a successful protest against his efforts. More than 1,000 athletes from 104 countries will compete in the 12th edition of the World Championships at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium until Sunday.

## AFC Champions League Elite: Skocic has mixed feelings as Tractor, Al Wahda share points

## Sports Desk

Tractor head coach Dragan Skocic praised his team's performances but rued missed opportunities as the Persian Gulf Pro League champion and the UAE's Al Wahda played to a goalless stalemate at the AFC Champions League Elite in Tabriz on Monday.

Both sides came close to breaking the deadlock on several occasions, with the best chance coming Tomislav Strkalj's way in the 88th minute, but Tractor striker rattled the crossbar from the edge of the six-yard box.

This was Tractor's second draw in as many games at the Asian elite clubs' competition, following a first-day 1-1 result against Emirati champion Shabab Al Ahli in Dubai.

"The result was not satisfying, but the players' performance was excellent," Skocic said after the game, adding: "They played exactly the way I wanted, both defensively and offensively."

"We wasted many chances, but the team played well. Al Wahda's squad is more expensive than ours, and of course we felt the absence of (Mahdi) Torabi and Domagoj (Drozdek)," added the Croatian. "We had analyzed all aspects of their game, including their long balls. Sometimes, we built up with three players at the back, and at times we changed our shape. Our performance was good, but we were also unlucky."

Skocic's opposite number Jose Morais – the former head coach of Iranian club Sepahan – felt his team competed well throughout the 90 minutes and the Portuguese was proud with how



● Tractor captain Shoja Khalilzadeh (3) goes up for a header during a goalless draw against Al Wahda in the AFC Champions League Elite at the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium, Tabriz, Iran, on September 29, 2025.  
● MOJTABA SALEH/AFC

his side were able to handle the atmosphere at the jam-packed Yadegar-e Imam Stadium.

"From the very first minute, there was a real fight between the two teams," said Morais. "The pace of the game was very high, and the outcome was uncertain until the very last moment. In the end, I think justice was done, and the draw was fair." "Fortunately, our defense performed well for most of the match, and we managed to stop Tractor's attacks. They are a strong team who transition quickly from defense to attack. I must congratulate my players because they played very well."

Tractor will be chasing a first victory

of the campaign when playing away to Sharjah FC on October 20, while Al Wahda will host Al Duhail SC of Qatar on the same day.

Elsewhere on Monday, Marcos Leonardo struck 11 minutes from time as Al Hilal sealed a dramatic 3-2 win over a stubborn PFC Nasaf in Qarshi, Uzbekistan, to maintain their perfect start to the league phase of the competition. Al Duhail and defending champion Al Ahli Saudi both had the lead but eventually had to settle for a 2-2 draw in Al Rayyan, while Spanish striker Jose-lu and Ferjani Sassi were on target in the second half as Al Gharafa defeated Iraq's Al Shorta 2-0 at home.