

Qalenoee blames domestic league, injuries amid Iran's dip in form

Sports Desk

Under pressure after a string of disappointing performances, Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee believes the poor form of the domestic league players and injuries to his key men have played a major part in Team Melli's recent struggles on the pitch.

A 2-0 victory over Tanzania in Dubai on Tuesday offered some breathing space to the Iranian coach, who has been under growing scrutiny from fans and pundits at home, with less than eight months remaining until the World Cup finals.

Tractor striker Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh put Iran in front 17 minutes into the game at Rashid Stadium, sending the Tanzanian goalkeeper the wrong way from the spot, before FC Rostov forward Mohammad Mohebbi doubled the lead with a deflected strike from inside the box nine minutes later.

The result ended a three-game winless streak for the Asian powerhouse, which had suffered a 2-1 loss to Russia in a friendly game in Volgograd on Friday.



Iranian striker Kasra Taheri (27) is seen in action during a friendly win against Tanzania in Dubai, UAE, on October 14, 2025. ● FFIRI

While fellow Asian heavyweights Japan and South Korea faced Brazil and Paraguay during October's international break, Iran's match

against Tanzania – ranked No. 107 in the latest FIFA World Ranking – was hardly seen as a proper test ahead of next June's World Cup

finals in North America.

Qalenoee, however, saw it differently. "Tanzania was a decent side and well-organized in defense,"

he said. "The team didn't concede more than two goals in any of its World Cup qualifying games and even defeated Senegal in a friendly in July. Not to mention, our team had a five-hour flight from Russia, where the weather conditions are quite different from the UAE. We made some mistakes throughout the game, but in the end, it was a good result."

"We made a couple of errors in the early stages of the game but seized control after that and scored twice. We could have had more goals in the first half, but that's the problem with Iranian players — they tend to lose intensity after taking a two-goal lead. We also lost our rhythm after making several changes in the second half. The result is the last thing that matters in friendly games, but I'm still grateful to my players for the victory," Qalenoee added.

When Iran secured World Cup qualification in June, Qalenoee called on his players to maintain their form throughout the year leading up to the finals.

Asked if his expectations had been met in that regard, Qalenoee said, "Honestly speaking, no. The Ira-

nian players in the domestic and Emirati leagues have been far from their best form. A player at this level must have a more professional mindset and approach."

"The team's recent run of results and performances has been hampered by injuries to several key players such as Sardar Azmoun, Mehdi Ghayedi, and Hossein Kan'anizadegan. Some of the new players in the squad have struggled to fill their places, and I'm not sure if they will be with us for the next games, as we'll have to finalize our starting XI and squad during the upcoming international breaks. That will only happen if the injured players return as soon as possible," he added.

Qalenoee still found positives, praising Hosseinzadeh for "forcing his way into the loop with his recent contributions."

Next up for Team Melli is a four-team friendly tournament – also featuring Uzbekistan, Egypt, and Cape Verde – to be held in Dubai during November's international break. Iran will face Cape Verde in the opening match, with the winner meeting Egypt or Uzbekistan in the final.

Iran names star-studded GR squad for Islamic Solidarity Games

Sports Desk

Iran Greco-Roman head coach Hassan Rangraz has named a strong six-man squad, featuring world and Olympic champions, for the wrestling competitions at the upcoming Islamic Solidarity Games.

The sixth edition of the multi-sport event will kick off in Riyadh on November 7.

Reigning Olympic champions Saeid Esmaeili and Mohammad-Hadi Saravi, who also captured gold at September's World Championships in Zagreb, will be clear favorites in the 67kg and 97kg weight

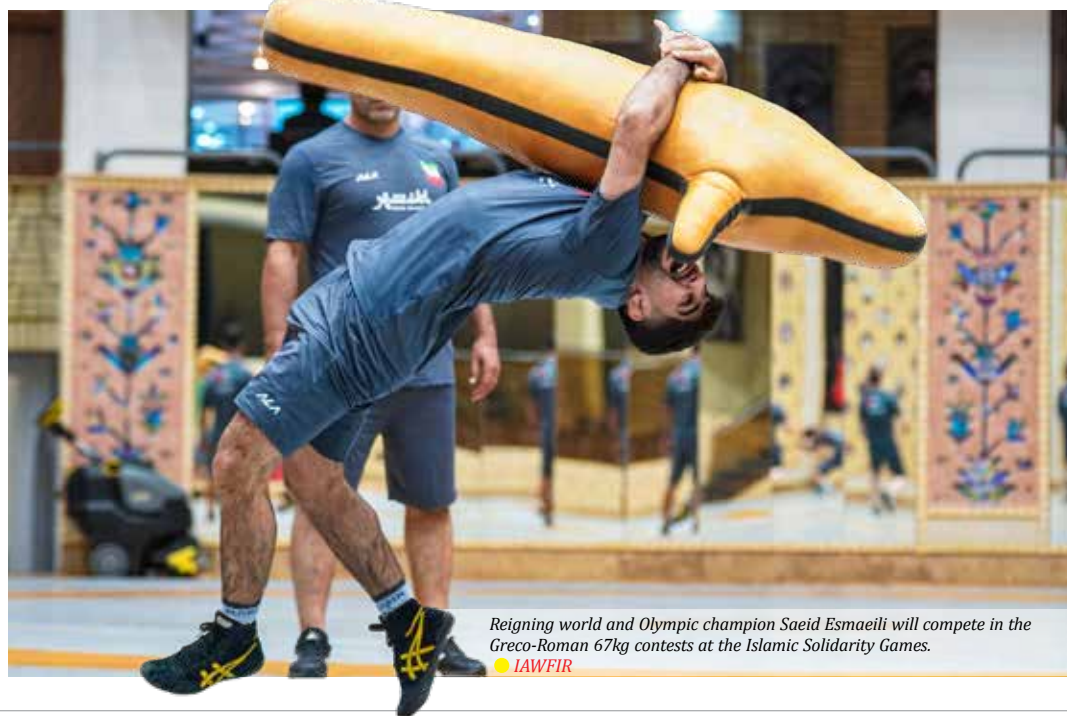
classes, respectively.

Gholamreza Farrokhi, fresh off a gold medal on his debut at the Wrestling World Championships, will also be the man to beat in the 87kg category. The Games, however, will mark his third major event in less than two months, as the young Iranian is also set to represent the country at the U23 World Championships starting Monday in Novi Sad, Serbia.

Joining the trio in the Iranian squad will be senior Asian champion Fardin Hedayati, who will first defend his world under-23 title before vying for 130kg glory in the Saudi capital.

Ali Ahmadi Vafa endured a 60kg campaign to forget in Zagreb after suffering a first-round exit against Japan's Kaito Inaba, but with the 2024 world U23 and junior titles under his belt, the 20-year-old Iranian will still be among the favorites for the ultimate prize in Riyadh.

Former world U23 and junior bronze medalist Amir Abdi is yet to make his mark at the senior level and will be eager to turn the tide in Riyadh after defeating two-time world U20 champion Alireza Abdevali – who finished fifth in Zagreb – to secure the 77kg spot in the Iranian squad.



Reigning world and Olympic champion Saeid Esmaeili will compete in the Greco-Roman 67kg contests at the Islamic Solidarity Games. ● IAWFIR

Asian Table Tennis Team Championships:

Iran finishes eighth in men's event, secures spot at World Ch'ships

Sports Desk

Iran had to settle for an eighth-place finish at the Asian Table Tennis Team Championships in Bhubaneswar, India, after a 3-1 loss to North Korea on Tuesday.

Despite the setback, Iran still managed to secure a spot at next April's ITTF World Team Table Tennis Championships in London.

Noshad Alamian was the only Iranian player to record a win against North Korea, defeating Chon Jong Bom in straight games (11-8, 11-4, 11-5). Iranian prodigy Benyamin Farajali fell to a narrow 3-2 defeat (11-5, 12-14, 11-3, 10-12, 11-9) against Ri Jong Sik and Mohammad-Taher Mousavi was beaten in three games (11-7, 11-7, 11-4) by Ham Yu Song, before Alamian reduced the deficit to one. Ri sealed the victory for the

North Koreans with a 3-0 win (11-9, 11-5, 11-6) against Mousavi.

Iran began the day with a 3-2 defeat to South Korea in the first of the 5th-8th placement matches in the competition.

The event may not go down as a success story for the Iranian team, but teenage sensation Benyamin Farajali produced several impres-

sive performances and results in Bhubaneswar.

The pinnacle of his campaign came during Iran's 3-1 loss to China in Monday's quarter-finals, when the 15-year-old Iranian rallied from behind to stun world No. 2 Lin Shidong in a five-game thriller (8-11, 12-10, 11-8, 5-11, 11-9).

Farajali then staged another comeback on Tuesday, recovering from two games down

to edge South Korea's world No. 13 An Jaehyun 3-2 (5-11, 7-11, 13-11, 11-7, 11-8).

Iran opened the tournament with successive 3-0 victories over the Maldives and Mongolia to top Group 2 and advance to the knockout stage, before defeating Singapore 3-1 to set up a last-eight clash with China.

Meanwhile, Iran finished 11th in the women's competition – courtesy of a 3-0 win against Sri Lanka on Tuesday – also booking a ticket for London as one of the continent's top 13 teams.

The Iranian team – comprising Neda Shahsavari, Seta-yesh Iloukhani, Shima Safaei, Fatemeh Yariseraji, and Saba Seraji – came out on top against Kyrgyzstan and Nepal without conceding a single match, but fell to a 3-0 loss to Malaysia to stand runner-up in Group 4, before beating Kazakhstan 3-1.



● ISNA

Moharrami aware of 'high expectations', eyes wushu glory in Riyadh

Sports Desk

Iran's Erfan Moharrami says he is fully aware of the high expectations surrounding him after his impressive gold medal at the World Wushu Champion-



● iranwushufed.ir

ships, but has set his sights on repeating the feat at the upcoming Islamic Solidarity Games.

The sixth edition of the multi-sport event will get underway on November 7 in Riyadh.

Moharrami defeated Kazakhstan's Alizhan Ablagatov to claim the ultimate prize in the men's sanda 70kg event in August's World Championships in Brasilia.

"After winning the world gold in Brazil, expectations have gone up, and that makes my job as world champion even tougher heading into the Islamic Solidarity Games. I'm still fully prepared and have no fear of the competition," Moharrami told Mehr News Agency.

"It won't be easy in Riyadh as everyone will be out to beat the world champion, but I'm confident I can return home with another gold medal," added the Iranian. "My Kazakhstani opponent in the world final will probably be competing in Riyadh as well. Together with the coaching staff, we've analyzed all our potential rivals."