

Iran coach Saei urges 'realism' over poor run at world taekwondo meet

Sports Desk

When the dust settled at the 2025 World Taekwondo Championships in Wuxi, China, the performance of Iran's women's taekwondo team left many in the country with a sense of missed opportunity. Under head coach Mahrouz Saei, who assumed the job amid controversy, the results mustered neither the medal haul nor the breakthrough many had anticipated after an impressive Olympic campaign last year. While Olympic medalists Nahid Kiani (-57kg), and Mobina Nematzadeh (-53kg), as well as Saeideh Nasiri (-46kg), and Melika Mirhosseini (-73kg) failed to go beyond last 16 in their respective classes, Kowsar Asaseh (-62kg) and former world silver medalist Mahla Momenzadeh (-49kg) had their campaigns ended after two bouts, with Nastaran Valizadeh suffering a first-round exit in the -67kg division. Speaking to Varzesh3 in her first interview after the world event, Saei did not shy away from that reality. She acknowledged the gap between expectation and outcome, but also offered a pointed defense of the circumstances leading into the championships.

"The World Championships are different from all other events – in terms of organization and the competitive atmosphere," she said. Though she affirmed that "our team was technically, physically and psychologically at the highest possible level," the key issue, she explained, was that "the team entered the showpiece with no preparatory international tournaments," a sharp contrast with prior eras. That contrast is especially instructive given the wider backdrop of Saei's appointment. When she was named as the coach earlier in the year, many critics in Iran believed the decision was motivated by nepotism on the part of Saei's older brother and the chairman of the federation, Hadi Saei, rather than her own coaching credentials. However, the president of the federation, who had a long-standing feud with former coach Minoo Maddah after the Olympics, insisted that her sister "has the best CV for the job in the country." Mahrouz addressed that comparison head-on. "I have been in charge of the national team for about six months," she said, adding that post-Olympics the team had a very short training cycle. By contrast, she noted, her predecessor had "about three years



Iran's Nastaran Valizadeh (L) is seen in action during her first-round loss to Mexican Leslie Soltero in the women's -67kg class at the World Taekwondo Championships in Wuxi, China, on October 28, 2025.

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with the team, and before every competition the national squad had at least three tournaments and three training camps." "We had virtually zero warmup tourneys," she revealed, highlighting canceled trips and a missed Universiade in Germany due to the "12-day war" as critical setbacks. For all the criticism, Saei -

mains confident about what lays ahead for the Iranian women's taekwondo. She noted that there are more than two years before the next Olympics, and that gives time, but only if the proper foundations are built. "We have three national teams formed: Team A for the World Championships, Team B for Islamic Solidarity

Games, and Team C which combines Teams A and B for the World U-21 Championships." She described this as a sign of organizational renewal, saying, "We certainly have a program for the next Olympics. We will have ups and downs, but our benchmark is the outcome of the training camps and future tournaments. God willing, we

will discover and introduce new athletes. And one thing is certain: no athlete will have any security margin regarding their place on the national team." Her resolve to continue in the role was clear, though not unconditional. "As long as the federation and the technical committee want me, and I feel I can help the taekwondo community, I will certainly be at the service of the national team and this sport." In closing she returned to one of the starkest realities uncovered by the competition: "In the 2022 Worlds in Mexico our girls did not get past the first round and were defeated by a wide margin. The same happened in Baku last year, until Nahid Kiani made a bright showing and won the gold on the final day. In the past 10 years we had only one world medal and one standout athlete in the national team, so let's just be more realistic about the circumstances."

WSPS World Cup:

Ahmadi, Mirshafiei take silver in mixed air pistol

Sports Desk

Iran's Ahmadi and Mohammadreza Mirshafiei settled for silver in the P6 – mixed team 10m air pistol SH1 event at the World Shooting Para Sport World Cup in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates. The Iranian duo topped the qualification to book a place in Sunday's final before suffering a 17-9 loss to India's Shrishti Aroa and Rudransh Khandelwal. Nasrin Shahi – who won gold in the women's 10m air pistol on Thursday – and Mostafa Khadem were the other Iranian pair in the category but missed out on the podium following a 17-13 setback against Kazakhstan's Sevdaliyeva and Nikita Yermakov in the bronze-medal match. Sunday's mixed silver marked



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the second medal for both Ahmadi and Mirshafiei in Al Ain. Ahmadi had picked up a bronze in the women's 10m air pistol discipline on Thursday while

Mirshafiei teamed up with Shahi and Khadem to grab the gold in the mixed 50m pistol SH1 contest – thanks to a combined 424-point tally in the final.

Iranian karatekas impress with 10 medals at Moscow event

Sports Desk

Iran collected 10 medals, including double golds, to finish runner-up to Russia at the International Karate Universe Moscow 2025 Championship. Fatemeh Zahra-Saeidi defeated her fellow Iranian Fatemeh Sa'adati 4-0 in the final to capture the ultimate prize in the women's kumite -55kg category. The other all-Iranian women showdown saw Mobina Heidari come out on top (9-2) against Hana Hosseinpour to grab the -68kg gold. Mahdi Ashouri (men's +84kg) and Ma'soumeh Mohsenian (women's -50kg) also settled for silver in their respective events after final setbacks against the host's karatekas. Melika Ezzati, meanwhile, took a silver medal in the individual



Iran's Mobina Heidari (top) won the women's kumite -68kg gold at the International Karate Universe Moscow 2025 Championship.

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female kata, suffering a 40.6-39.6 loss to former European champion Paola García of Spain in the final. Mahdi Khodabakhshi (men's -84kg), Hannaneh Salehi (women's

+68kg), and Mehrnegar Ahmadi (women's -61kg) added consolation bronzes to Iran's medal haul at the prestigious tournament, which featured 361 participants from 44 countries.

WSPS World Cup:

Pakdaman ruled out of Saber World Cup with knee injury

Sports Desk

Iranian fencer Ali Pakdaman has been ruled out of the upcoming Saber World Cup – starting Thursday in Algiers, Algeria – with an injury setback. An Asian champion in 2023, the Iranian captain suffered an untimely knee problem during Saturday's final training session before heading to Algeria, and will face a race against time to recover for the fencing event, which begins on Nov. 17, at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh. Nima Aqaei, Mohammad Fotouhi,

Taha Kargarpour, and Nima Zahedi will represent the Iranian team in Algeria. The opening event of the international saber season will feature more than 200 contestants from the host nation, Canada, Chile, Egypt, Spain, France, Great Britain, Germany, Hong Kong, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Poland, Romania, Senegal, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United States, and Venezuela, as well as Russian fencers, who will compete as neutral athletes.



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Iran to play Poland, New Zealand in pre-Futsal World Cup friendlies

Sports Desk

Iran will play Poland and New Zealand in a friendly double header ahead of the upcoming FIFA Futsal Women's World Cup – starting November 21 in the Philippines – national team head coach Shahrzad Mozaffar confirmed. "We will leave for the Philippines on Nov. 13 to play Poland three days later, followed by a match against New Zealand on Nov. 17. We're thrilled to have the opportunity to play these two friendlies, as both opponents will be part of the World Cup," Mozaffar said af-

ter a training session on Monday. Iran has been drawn alongside futsal heavyweights Brazil and Italy, as well as Panama, in Group D of the inaugural World Cup. Iranian girls will get their campaign underway against eight-time Copa America champion Brazil – the top team in the latest FIFA World Ranking – on November 23, before facing Panama three days later. The two-time Asian champion will hope to be in contention for a top-two finish in the group and a place in the round of 16, when it squares off against world No. 7 Italy on November 29.