

Sports Desk

Iranian international volleyball player Saber Kazemi passed away at the age of 26 in Tehran's Payambaran Hospital on Wednesday.

Kazemi, who had joined Al Rayyan for the new season of the Qatari Volleyball League, had been in a coma since October 17 after suffering a severe brain complication while recovering in a hotel pool in Doha.

The Iranian Volleyball Federation transferred him to Tehran on October 27, but despite the Iranian medical team's relentless efforts, the left-handed opposite spiker was declared brain dead in the early hours of Wednesday.

"It is with profound sorrow and grief that we extend our heartfelt condolences on the passing of dear Saber, a valued member of the Iranian national volleyball team," the national governing body of the sport said in a statement. "We pray to Almighty God to grant him eternal mercy and forgiveness, and to bestow pa-

Iranian volleyball star Saber Kazemi dies aged 26

tience and strength upon his family and loved ones."

The exact cause of the incident remains unclear. Initial reports pointed to electrocution in the water, but his club Al Rayyan suggested the possibility of a cardiac issue. Another theory later emerged, claiming he had suffered muscle cramps in the water, though this was denied a few days later by the Iranian Volleyball Federation and his attending doctors.

Born in Aq Qala, northeastern Iran, Kazemi made his international debut at the 2018 Volleyball Nations League. He was a two-time gold med-

alist at the Asian Games in 2018 and 2023, and was named Most Valuable Player of the tournament when Iran won the Asian Championship title in 2021. Kazemi also represented the national team at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 and was part of the silver-winning squad at the 2023 Asian Championship in Urmia, Iran. A former player of Turkey's Ziraat Bankası SK and Qatar's Al Arabi, Kazemi delivered an MVP performance to lead Foolad Sirjan to the Asian Club Championship title in 2021.



FIVB

Islamic Solidarity Games:

Iran coach Sahmsaei laments refereeing decisions after Morocco draw



Iran's Salar Aqapour (8) challenges Morocco's Soufian Charraoui for the ball during a futsal match at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on November 4, 2025. isg-2025.com

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Iran head coach Vahid Shamsaei hit out at the referee's controversial decisions after his team played to a 2-2 draw against Morocco in Group B of futsal event at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Tuesday. In a rematch of last year's World Cup last-16 clash, which Morocco won 4-3, Mahdi Karimi finished off a well-worked counterattack to put Iran ahead with seven minutes remaining in the first half, only to see his goal canceled out by Bilal Bakkali two minutes later. Karimi restored Iran's lead four minutes into the second half, smashing the rebound into the roof of the net after Saeid Ahmadabbasi's free kick had been kept out

by Moroccan goalkeeper Youssef Bensellam.

Morocco pushed hard for a second equalizer and its power play paid off in the closing stages as Soufian Charraoui brought the African champion level in the 39th minute.

"It was a beautiful, high-quality game of futsal between two top-tier teams in world. We should have been more focused in the final minute, though I'm still really pleased with my players," Shamsaei said after the game.

"Morocco is an exceptional team with quality players and a top-notch coach. Just look at the list of the teams they have played over the past year – Argentina, Portugal, Spain – all among the best in the world. I really enjoyed watching their per-

formance in the victory over Spain a couple of weeks ago. "All of their players compete in top futsal leagues abroad, but we really made it tough for them today. Their head coach, Dguig Hicham, even admitted that after the game and wall full of praise for the Iranian team.

"I think the referee lacked the required quality to officiate a match of this caliber," said the Iranian futsal great, adding, "The ball clearly struck a Moroccan player's hand in the buildup to their second equalizer and the referee saw it. But that's part of the game – we'll put today's result behind us and keep fighting in the next two matches."

Shamsaei and his team will face Afghanistan today, followed by a game against

Tajikistan on Saturday. Afghanistan defeated Tajikistan 9-5 earlier on Tuesday to sit atop the Group B table. "Afghanistan is a decent side. Their Iranian head coach [Majid Mortezaei] is a dear friend of mine and many of their players compete in the Iranian league. It's definitely going to be a tough game against them, who are one of our main rivals at the Asian Cup," Shamsaei said of Iran's next opponent.

Meanwhile, Uzbekistan came from behind to beat Saudi Arabia 5-2 and move atop the Group A standings on goal difference, while Azerbaijan edged Libya 5-4.

The top two in each group will progress to the semi-finals with the gold-medal match set to be staged on Tuesday.

Iranian women fall to Azerbaijan in ISG volleyball opener

Sports Desk

Iran got off to a losing start in the women's volleyball event of the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, suffering a straight-set defeat against Azerbaijan on Tuesday.

The Iranian girls were caught off guard in the opening two sets, losing 25-11 and 25-16, before South Korean head coach Lee Do-hee made several changes for the third set. A different lineup paid off as Iran went toe-to-toe with the European opponent but ulti-

mately lost 26-24.

Featuring five teams – Türkiye, Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan – the women's volleyball event in Riyadh is being held in a round-robin format until Wednesday, before the top two teams set to square off for the gold medal the following day. Iran will face volleyball powerhouse Türkiye today, before meeting Afghanistan and Tajikistan on Tuesday and Wednesday, respectively. Türkiye made quick work of Afghanistan later on Wednesday, coming victorious in straight sets (25-3, 25-4, 25-3).



volleyball.ir

AFC Champions League Two:

Navidkia rues missed chances as Sepahan held by 10-man Ahal

Sports Desk

Sepahan head coach Moharram Navidkia was frustrated with the number of chances by his players after the Iranian top-flight side was held to a 2-2 home draw against Ahal FC of Turkmenistan in Group C of the AFC Champions League Two in Isfahan on Tuesday.

Sepahan dominated from the start and took the lead in the ninth minute, as Arash Rezavand slotted home Arya Yousefi's cut-back from inside the box.

The visitors found an equalizer against the run of play in the 27th minute when Alibek Abdurahamanov intercepted a poor cross-field pass and surged forward before playing the ball to Suleyman Mirzoyev for an easy tap-in.

Ahal took a surprise lead through Bagtyyar Gurgenov's header in the 62nd minute, but was reduced to 10 men three minutes later after Azat Rahmanov was sent off for a sec-



Sepahan's Mohammad Askari (17) celebrates after scoring the equalizer during a 2-2 draw against Ahal FC at the AFC Champions League Two in Isfahan, Iran, on November 4, 2025. sepahansc.com

ond bookable offence.

Despite the one-man advantage, Sepahan had to wait until the seventh minute of added time to find an equalizer, thanks to Mohammad Askari's side-footed volley from Yousefi's cross.

"The match became complicated for us just like the reverse fix-

ture. We had decent chances to finish the game with more goals in our favor, but unfortunately, we made a couple of costly mistakes," Navidkia said after the game.

"I think they had just two clear-cut chances. I think they had only two clear-cut chances – one of them gifted by our

mistake – and converted both. Despite all our efforts and the numerous chances we created, we were unable to score, even when the opposition handed us opportunities with errors of their own," added the Iranian, whose team is now second in the three-team Group C table with four points – two adrift of Jordanian champion Al Hussein. "The only positive for me from this match was that the team fought until the final whistle to create chances. Overall, however, it was a disappointing night for us.

"Some might say the team played well, but that is of no consolation. In football, you have to win. Sometimes football produces strange results, and this was one of those bizarre nights," Navidkia said.

"I apologize to our fans. The responsibility for this lies entirely with me, and perhaps I failed to prepare my team mentally and psychologically.

Ultimately, we dropped points in a very damaging way, and that is extremely difficult for me to accept."

Sepahan will host Al Hussein in its final group outing on November 25.