

Iran lines up 21 players for Asian Handball Championship



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Spanish head coach Rafael Guijosa Castillo has named a provisional 21-man squad as Iran began an eight-day training camp in preparation for the upcoming Asian Men's Handball Championship, which starts on January 15 in Kuwait. Iran has been drawn in Group D at the 22nd edition of the flagship continental event alongside two-time champions Japan — beaten by Qatar in the 2024 final — four-time bronze medalist Saudi Arabia, and Australia. Iran will get its campaign underway against Saudi Arabia on the opening day of the competition before taking on Australia two days later. The final day of the preliminary round will see Iran face

Japan on January 19 — a rematch of their main-round meeting at the previous edition, which Japan won 25-23. The top two teams from each of the four groups will advance to the main round, where they will be split into two four-team groups. Iran, which achieved its best result with a bronze-medal finish in 2014, ended last year's tournament in Bahrain in sixth place after a narrow 27-26 defeat to South Korea. Castillo's men will be looking to bounce back from a below-par run at November's Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, where Iran suffered defeats to Qatar (39-23) and the UAE (28-25) on either side of a 57-14 demolition of the Maldives, finishing third in the group and missing out on a

last-four spot. As if added motivation were needed, World Championship berths will be up for grabs in Kuwait, with the four semi-finalists securing qualification for the 2027 showpiece in Germany. The following is Iran's provisional 21-man squad:

Ali Rahimi, Milad Qalandari, Vahid Masoudi, Yassin Kabirianjou, Amirhossein Firouzbakht, Reza Ezzati, Shahab Sadeqzadeh, Younes Asari, Ali Heidarian, Rouhollah Adelkhani, Reza Shojaei, Alireza Dadvand, Alireza Pirzad, Mohammad Siavoshi, Arman Rahmani, Taha Shokouhipour, Mohammadreza Kazemi, Omid Enayatijou, Saber Heidari, Saeid Aliakbari, Omidreza Sarpoushi.

UAE Pro League:

Qayedi at the double as Al Nasr edges Majidi's Al Bataeh



alnasrclub.com

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Iranian international winger Mahdi Qayedi scored twice against his former coach Farhad Majidi to help Al Nasr beat 10-man Al Bataeh 3-2 in the UAE ADNOC Pro League on Sunday. Al Bataeh started the home game brightly, with Anatole Bertrand testing the Al Nasr goalkeeper twice in the opening 21 minutes, but the early pressure failed to produce a breakthrough. The match turned on its head in the 34th minute when Al Bataeh goalkeeper Ibrahim Essa Al Balooshi was shown a straight red card for fouling Qayedi as the forward raced clear on goal. The breakthrough arrived shortly after the restart, as Qayedi sprinted onto Luka Milivojevic's perfectly weighted pass and finished confidently to give Al Nasr the lead. The Al Bataeh showed real character and were rewarded in the 72nd minute when Bertrand

capitalised on a goalkeeping error to bring the hosts level. The response was immediate. Just 60 seconds later, Qayedi struck again, drilling a low effort from outside the area to put Al Nasr back in front. Majidi's men refused to go away and stunned the visitors once more as Bertrand produced a sensational bicycle kick from close range to make it 2-2. With the match heading towards a draw, Al Nasr found a decisive moment in the 90th minute as Malian Cheickna Doumbia timed his run to perfection, latched onto Moussa Ndiaye's through ball and finished calmly to complete a dramatic win. A fourth win in nine games saw the visitors jump to sixth in the table on 14 points — nine adrift of league leaders Al Ain. Meanwhile, a seventh defeat of the campaign left Al Bataeh struggling in 12th place of the 14-team standings with six points — two above the relegation zone.

Iranian Volleyball Super League:

Foolad routs Razin in straight sets to go top

Sports Desk

Defending champions Foolad Sirjan extended its perfect start to the Iranian Volleyball Super League season, demolishing Razin Polymer in straight sets (25-12, 25-16, 25-18) in Tehran on Sunday. A seventh successive win of the campaign saw Behoruz Ataei's side move back to the top of the league table with 20 points — one clear of second-placed Shahdab Yazd, which has won six of seven matches. The home defeat left Razin 10th in the 14-team stand-

ings with seven points. Elsewhere, Tabi'at Es-lamshahr defeated Mes Rafsanjan 3-0 (25-19, 25-23, 26-24) at home to climb to eighth in the table with seven points from three wins. The sixth defeat of the season kept the visitors bottom of the standings with two points. Esteghlal Gonbad celebrated only its second win since returning to the Iranian top flight, beating San'atgaran Omid 3-1 (25-22, 31-29, 20-25, 25-19) at home to sit 12th with four points. San'atgaran remain seventh with 10 points from three victories.



Foolad Sirjan middle-blocker Mohammad Valizadeh (27) hits a spike during a 3-0 victory over Razin Polymer in the Iranian Volleyball Super League in Tehran, Iran, on December 21, 2025.

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Navidkia blames 'impulsive' Sepahan after Hazfi Cup exit

Sports Desk

Sepahan head coach Mohammad Navidkia blamed his side's "impulsive" performance after suffering a shock 3-1 home defeat to Khaybar in the Iranian Hazfi Cup last 16. Mohsen Sefidchoqaei gave Khaybar a fifth-minute lead at

Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium, only for his strike to be cancelled out 10 minutes later by in-form Mohammad Askari, who netted his seventh goal in 14 appearances across all competitions. Ali Khanzadi's header restored the visitors' advantage two minutes into the second half, before

Iranian international midfielder Omid Nourafkan was denied from the penalty spot by Khaybar goalkeeper Hossein Pourhamidi. Amirhossein Farsi came off the bench to double Khaybar's lead with 16 minutes remaining as Sepahan fell to its first defeat in 14 games in all competitions since a 2-1 home loss to Tractor in the Persian Gulf Pro League on September 21.

It marked another impressive result for Mahdi Rahmati's Khaybar, which has already defeated Iranian top-flight heavyweights Tractor and Persepolis in the league this season. "We missed out on a precious trophy," Navidkia said after the game. "It was a thrilling match with numerous chances for both sides, but we were unlucky to concede twice at the worst possible moments — in the early stages of both halves." Navidkia pointed to his team's high-risk attacking approach and a loss of tactical cohesion as the main reasons for the defeat. The situation worsened in the second half following the forced substitution of Brazilian midfielder Ricardo Alves as a

precaution due to injury. "Alves' exit disrupted our mid-field discipline," he explained. "The team then became impulsive, desperately pushing for an equalizer and leaving vast spaces for Khaybar's counter-attacks." He also underlined the unforgiving nature of knockout football, where any defeat results in elimination regardless of the scoreline. "We played with excessive risk, which unfortunately left us vulnerable defensively." The club legend offered his full support to Nourafkan after the missed penalty, saying: "Omid is a quality player with exemplary discipline. Missing a penalty does not diminish his ability. He delivered a brilliant performance against Foolad last time out, and I am confident he will be a major asset for the team as the season progresses. "Had our penalty been converted, the dynamics of the game would have changed. However, I must accept that impulsive play and a lack of discipline at certain spells were the primary reasons for our cup exit. We must address these weaknesses promptly."



RASOUL SHOJAEI/IRNA