

# Iran to open VNL campaign against Brazil



## Sports Desk

Iran will begin its 2026 Men's Volleyball Nations League campaign against Brazil in Brasília on June 10. Volleyball World announced the full match schedule for the annual flagship event on Friday, with 18 teams learning their paths in the preliminary round. Iran and Brazil also squared off in their VNL opener last year in the Brazilian capital, with the South American powerhouse emerging victorious in straight sets.

Tricky tests will come thick and fast in Week 1 for Italian head coach Roberto Piazza's men, who will take on Bulgaria — finalists at last September's World Championships — on June 11, before facing Argentina and Belgium later in the week at the Nilson Nelson Gymnasium.

Iran also played Argentina and Bulgaria in last year's edition, defeating the former 3-1 before concluding the preliminary phase with a straight-sets win against the European powerhouse. Iran will then visit Orléans, France, for the second week

of action, starting with a daunting task against the hosts and reigning Olympic champions France at the CO'Met Arena on June 24. This will be followed by matches against the United States (June 25), Japan (June 26) and Cuba (June 28).

Iran's game against France will be a repeat of last year's preliminary encounter, which the European heavyweights comfortably won in straight sets. Meanwhile, Iran squandered a two-set lead to fall to the United States in a five-set thriller in Brasília.

The third and final week of the preliminaries will see Roberto Piazza's men go head-to-head with Ukraine in Belgrade on July 15, with further tests against Germany (July 16), Slovenia (July 17) and Türkiye (July 19).

Iran will again be looking to make amends for last year's preliminary setbacks, having suffered defeats against both Germany and Slovenia. The top eight teams in the 18-team standings will progress to the VNL Finals, which begin in Ningbo Beilun, China, on July 29. Hosts China are already guaran-

teed a place in the quarterfinals.

Iran will aim to build on a promising first year under Piazza by securing its first quarterfinal berth in four years at the prestigious tournament. After finishing in the bottom three in the two previous editions, Iran staged a late surge in the 2025 preliminaries to place eighth with six wins from 12 matches. However, Piazza's team ultimately missed out on the Finals, as China's host status secured them a quarterfinal spot despite the Asian side finishing second from bottom.

Momentum from several impressive VNL performances carried into the World Championship in the Philippines, where Iran advanced to the quarterfinals before suffering a 3-1 defeat to surprise package Czechia.



Iranian middle-blocker Mohammad Valizadeh (27) hits a spike during a straight-set defeat against Brazil in the 2025 Volleyball Nations League in Brasília, Brazil, on June 11, 2025.

• VOLLEYBALL WORLD

## Zagreb Open Ranking Series:

### Jarkani grabs Greco-Roman gold, Dalkhani settles for bronze

#### Sports Desk

The opening day of the Greco-Roman contests at the Zagreb Open saw Iranian wrestler Erfan Jarkani cap his 63kg campaign with a gold medal, while former world champion Meisam Dalkhani finished with bronze on Friday. A world junior and under-23 bronze medalist in 2024, Jarkani overcame Kazakhstan's Saifulla Kurman (10-1), Uzbekistani Khusniddin Olimboev (9-1) and Moldova's Vitalie Eriomenko (3-1), before

defeating India's Chetan Chetan 8-4 in a thrilling final at Arena Zagreb. With the opening Ranking Series event of the season serving as the second phase of Iran's team selection process for major events later in the year, the gold medal secured the 22-year-old a place at April's Asian Championships in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Meanwhile, Dalkhani, who beat Uzbekistan's Islomjon Bakhrayev 2-0 in the quarterfinals, was outclassed 14-5 by

Chetan in the semifinals, but recovered to hammer Kazakhstan's Dastan Zarlykhanov by technical superiority (8-0) and claim a shared bronze medal alongside Eriomenko. Elsewhere, Iran's Mohammad Kamali and Ahmadreza Mohsennejad endured disappointing runs in the 67kg category. Kamali bounced back from a last-16 defeat (6-4) to Georgia's Diego Chkhikvadze by edging former European champion Murat Firat of Türkiye 5-4 in the repechage, before falling 3-2 to

Japan's Katsuaki Endo in the bronze-medal bout. Mohsennejad's campaign ended in the qualification round after the 21-year-old – winner of the 2024 world junior title and a world under-23 bronze medalist last October – suffered a 9-0 rout at the hands of Uzbekistan's Oybek Sharibjonov. The Iranian duo's results mean compatriot Saeid Esmaeili is all but guaranteed a shot at a second successive World Championships gold in Manama, Bahrain, in October.



Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Erfan Jarkani (red) has his hand raised as the winner against India's Chetan Chetan in the 63kg final at the Zagreb Open in Zagreb, Croatia, on February 6, 2026.

• IAWFIR

## CAVA Women's League:

### Sepahan sweeps Nepal Police to maintain perfect run

#### Sports Desk

The third day of action at the CAVA Women's League saw Iran's Foolad Mobarakeh Sepahan continue its perfect start to the event in Malé, Maldives, with a straight-set victory (25-14, 25-15, 25-18) over Nepal Police

Club in Pool B on Friday.

The Iranian side set the tone early and sustained its level throughout the match to remain in pole position for a place in the semifinals.

Fatemeh Khalili topped the scoring for Sepahan, with additional contributions from Elaheh Poursaleh, Ma-

soumeh Qadami and middle blocker Zahra Karimi.

Sepahan had opened its campaign with a 3-1 win over home favorite Huraa Community Club the previous day at the Social Center Indoor Hall.

Iranian international outside hitter Khalili also impressed with a game-high 19 points as Sepahan won the opening set 25-14 but slipped 25-23 in the second, before easing to 25-14 and 25-12 in the following sets to close out the contest.

Organized by the Central Asian Volleyball Association (CAVA), the tournament features seven clubs from across Central and South Asia and serves as a qualification pathway for the upcoming AVC Women's Championships, with the champion earning a place at April's showpiece event in Goyang, South Korea.

Sepahan outside-hitter Fatemeh Khalili (16) hits a spike during a 3-0 victory over Nepal Police Club at the CAVA Women's League in Malé, Maldives, on February 6, 2026.

• AVC



## Sabzi wins U21 silver

### at Asian Snooker Championships

#### Sports Desk

Iran's Shahin Sabzi settled for silver in the under-21 event at the Asian Snooker Championships in Doha, Qatar, after a 4-1 defeat to Pakistan's Ahsan Ramzan in a drama-filled, error-strewn final on Friday. Ahsan, the 2022 World Amateur Snooker champion, edged a scrappy opening frame 79-30, producing a superb clearance after Sabzi – who had led by 26 points – missed several chances to close it out.



Iran's Shahin Sabzi (1) poses for a photo alongside Pakistan's Ahsan Ramzan ahead of the men's under-21 final at the Asian Snooker Championships in Doha, Qatar, on February 6, 2026.

• ACBS

Sabzi leveled the match by claiming the second frame with a 57 break, capitalizing on Ahsan's frustration following a missed straightforward shot.

The 20-year-old Ahsan responded emphatically in the third frame. A clinical 65 break, followed by a sublime 54 clearance, restored his lead at 2-1.

The fourth frame encapsulated the tension of the contest. Sabzi, trailing throughout, mounted a gritty comeback from the colors, only to miss

a simple green with the frame at his mercy. After both players traded further errors, Ahsan eventually potted the blue and pink to move within one frame of the title at 3-1. With the championship in sight, the fifth and decisive frame turned into a nerve-racking safety battle. Sabzi started strongly but was repeatedly wasteful, while Ahsan capitalized on a fluked pink to establish a lead. With only the colors remaining, the drama of the previous frame resurfaced. After both players missed the brown, Sabzi made the final error, allowing Ahsan to pot the pink and seal the title. The result marked Sabzi's second medal in Doha, following his impressive bronze in the men's senior event.

Armin Javaheri and Shahab Ali Esmaeili were the other Iranian competitors in the under-21 age group, exiting in the last 16 after 4-0 defeats to opponents from Pakistan and Hong Kong, respectively.