

Football chief details team's preparations ahead of 2026 World Cup

Sports Desk

Mehdi Taj, President of the Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran, has provided an update on the national football team's friendly matches ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

"We have scheduled two friendly matches against Nigeria and Costa Rica at the request of the head coach. One of these matches will be against an African team geographically close to Egypt. Although arranging these games has become very challenging recently, we will hold both matches in March in Jordan. We have also reached an agreement with the Jordanian Football Federation to invite the Jordan national team to Iran for a friendly match in the future," Taj said.

He added, "Two additional competitive matches are being prepared for June. The federation fully supports these plans, and we will not miss any FIFA international window,"

Fars News Agency reported. Regarding the status of US visas for World Cup participants, Taj explained, "The visa process is ongoing. One group traveled to Dubai on Monday, and another is set to depart on Thursday. Based on the head coach's recommendations, we may add a few more players, but ultimately, we will take only the selected players eligible to travel to the World Cup. Some Sepahan players will also travel to Dubai under suitable conditions."

Taj noted that a productive meeting was held with officials from IRIB, the Minister of Sports and Youth, Ahmad Donyamali, and other authorities. "In this session, we discussed media-related issues concerning the World Cup and made very good decisions that will help provide better and more professional coverage of the matches," he said.

On the departure of Antonio Mancione, the assistant to Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee, Taj emphasized,

"He submitted a letter to Nabi, the national team manager, who then referred it to us. Our position was not in favor of this separation. Given the current circumstances, the issues raised were unacceptable from our perspective, and we expect him to return to his duties. His return is possible."

Regarding Hossein Abdi, head coach of Iran's U17 national football team, who reportedly resigned due to an unsigned contract, Taj said, "I am not sure exactly what Abdi stated, but he came to meet me three days ago. My evaluation of him is very positive, and I believe he will return and continue his work in the best possible way."

Taj also addressed the under-23 and youth teams, noting, "We are working on new plans for the continuation of these teams. God willing, final decisions will be announced soon, along with the new structure for the under-23 and youth national teams."



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Iran paddle team eliminates Saudi Arabia in UAE event

Sports Desk

The Iran national paddle team, which traveled to the UAE to compete in the Dubai Ramadan Cup, secured a 2-1 victory over Saudi Arabia in their second match. According to Varzesh3, the Ramadan Cup paddle competition began on February 23 with the participation of the national teams of Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, and Bahrain.

Iran, placed in Group B alongside Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco, defeated Saudi Arabia 2-1 on Wednesday, establishing themselves as one of the strong contenders to advance from the group. With this loss to Iran, Saudi Arabia has been eliminat-



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ed from the tournament. In another match, Morocco defeated Kuwait 2-1.

In Group A, the participating teams are the UAE, Egypt, Bah-

rain, and Lebanon. The Iran national paddle team is led by Dariush Saber, with Farshad Sefati serving as team supervisor.

Iranian heavyweight wrestler misses Albania ranking tournament

Sports Desk

Iran's heavyweight Greco-Roman wrestler will miss the Albania ranking tournament due to an injury.

According to ISNA, the second ranking competition of the United World Wrestling (UWW) in 2026 for Greco-Roman wrestling will be held from February 27 to 29 in Tirana, Albania, ISNA wrote.

Fardin Hedayati, Iran's 130kg Greco-Roman wrestler and the main rival of Amin Mirzazadeh for a spot on the national team, was initially scheduled to participate in the tournament. However, due to an injury sustained during training, he will not be able to travel with the



Fardin Hedayati
● varzesh3.com

Iranian wrestling team to the competition.

Hedayati had a successful 2025, winning gold medals at both the World U23 Championships and the Islamic Solidarity Games.

The Iranian wrestlers partici-

pating in the tournament are as follows: 63kg: Ali Hajivand, 72kg: Mohammadjavad Rezaei and Hojat Rezaei, 77kg: Amir Abdi and Alireza Abdoli, 82kg: Mohammadamin Hosseini, 87kg: Jamal Esmaeili, 97kg: Amirreza Moradian

Ski Federation president reflects on Winter Olympics

Sports Desk

The president of Iran's Ski Federation said the team achieved what it aimed for over the past two to three months at the Winter Olympics. "Although our 25-day training camp in Italy was canceled due to visa issues, our performance was better than the previous Olympics," he noted.

In an interview with IRNA regarding Mohammad Kiadarbansari's retirement from skiing and competitive sports following the Milan-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics, Bahram Saveh-Shemshaki stated, "This was a personal decision. He dedicated years to skiing, participated in three Olympics, and decided to retire due to his age."

Speaking about his meeting with Thomas Bach, President of the In-

ternational Olympic Committee, on the sidelines of the 2026 Winter Olympics, he said, "During this meeting, we discussed the Olympics, winter sports, and women's participation in the Games. At these Olympics, we had a unified presence in both men's and women's competitions."

He emphasized the importance of participation, "Being part of the Games is significant because it shows respect for the Olympic spirit. The Olympics are not just about winning medals; the presence of countries enhances the event. Everyone who attends the Olympics is extraordinary, and that is truly valuable. We are the only federation responsible for winter sports."

When asked about hosting competitions, he said, "Next year, we are candidates to host the Asian

Junior Championships, and in September we will host the Grass Ski World Championships. These two events have been coordinated in advance with the international federation. Hosting depends on

regional security conditions — if the situation improves, we will host; if not, the events will be assigned to other countries."

Regarding the national ski team's performance at the Winter Olym-



● IRNA

pics, Saveh-Shemshaki explained, "As we predicted, we wanted the athletes to complete the courses themselves and ski with technical precision. The courses and competition quality were very challenging. These Games are for the best, but compared to the previous Olympics, we had no female participants in cross-country skiing before, and this time we secured a quota. Samaneh Beyrami performed exceptionally, overtaking 11 of her top-ranked competitors."

He added, "Our athletes competed according to their world rankings. Danial Saveh-Shemshaki delivered a technically better performance than before, although he started one second too early and received a penalty. Mohammad Kiadarbansari had been banned for doping

in the previous Olympics, and his last competitive result was at the 2018 Winter Olympics, but he completed both events successfully this time. In women's Alpine skiing, Sadaf Saveh-Shemshaki also finished her race compared to the previous Games. The President of the International Ski Federation commended her performance, took a photo with her, and expressed satisfaction."

Looking ahead, he said, "We will compete for medals at the 2029 Asian Games in Kazakhstan. Since Saudi Arabia could not meet hosting requirements, the Games were assigned to Kazakhstan. In the previous edition in Harbin, we performed poorly. We may not win medals in Kazakhstan either, but we will fight for them and also prepare for the 2030 Winter Olympics."

Esteghlal Kazerun maintains lead in Men's Handball Premier League

Sports Desk

The second phase of the 38th season of the Iran Men's Handball Premier League came to an end on Tuesday, as the remaining three matches of Week 16 were played in Kerman.

According to ISNA, the opening

match saw Saipa Tehran take on Hepco Arak. Saipa, who have been enjoying a strong run of form in recent weeks, continued their impressive performances and secured a comfortable 30-24 victory. The result further underlined Saipa's credentials as one of the main title contenders

this season. With the loss, Hepco slipped to sixth place in the standings, dropping one position compared to the previous week. In the second match, league leaders Esteghlal Kazerun faced Sepahan Novin Isfahan. Sepahan Novin put in a commendable display against the table-toppers

and managed to take the lead at several stages of the match. Despite their strong showing, Esteghlal Kazerun ultimately imposed their dominance in a hard-fought encounter, claiming a 25-19 victory. The win earned them two additional points and allowed them to conclude the

centralized second phase of the league as the team at the top of the table.

The final match of the week featured Naft va Gaz Gachsaran against Sang Ahan Bafgh. Following last week's victory over Parvaz Havaniruz, Naft va Gaz once again faced a tough chal-

lenge. However, they managed to edge past their opponents with a narrow 28-26 win. As a result of the defeat, Bafgh remained on six points, while Naft va Gaz wrapped up their successful stint in Kerman with two consecutive victories before heading to Isfahan.