

## Asian Beach Games:

## Kabaddi kudos as Iran wins men's gold

## Sports Desk

The Iranian beach kabaddi team added a second gold to the country's medal count at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China, thanks to an impressive 44-31 victory over the sport's powerhouse, India, in the men's final on Monday.

The victory capped off a run of four successive wins for the Iranian team, which had beaten Pakistan (38-28), Bangladesh (47-31), and Syria (53-31) in the group stage.

Hassan Ajami had opened Iran's account in the multi-sport event by grabbing the top prize in the men's shot put on Sunday.

Elsewhere in the Games, Iran continued its perfect run in men's beach handball on Day 7, defeating the host in successive periods.

Mahdi Qashqaei's men won the first period 21-14 before coming out victorious in the second by a 20-10 scoreline at the Tianyaya Haijiao venue to complete a clean sweep of five victories and progress to the semifinals as Group A winners.

Standing between Iran and a fi-



Iranian players celebrate after winning the men's beach kabaddi gold at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China, on April 27, 2026. ▶ ANA

nal spot today will be Thailand, which defeated Bangladesh 2-0 (19-16, 18-6) earlier in the day to finish runner-up to Qatar in Group B on set difference.

Qatar and Bahrain will square off in the other semifinal today, with the two winners going head-to-head for the gold medal on Thursday.

In beach volleyball, the Iranian pair of Abolhassan Khakizadeh and Amirali Qalenovi headed into the men's last four with a straight-set victory (21-10, 21-14)

over Lebanon's Hadi El Chabib and Jad Abi Karam.

The country, however, was denied an all-Iranian semifinal today after the duo of Alireza Aqajani and Abbas Pourasgari surrendered a one-set lead to lose 2-1 (14-21, 21-17, 15-9) to Oman's Mazin Al Hashimi and Hood Rashid Al Jalaboubi – a massive setback for the Iranian Team A, which had not conceded a single set in five outings prior to the last-eight clash.

"My words fail me, and for that, I feel ashamed before the Iranian people and coaching staff," a stunned Aqajani said after the defeat.

"We really had done a good analysis, and as you saw, we did well to win the first set.

"Physically, especially with my knee and shoulder, I was under a lot of pressure. In the third set, I just couldn't play my game.

"We had a decent run in the tournament, but there was perhaps a bit of complacency on our part today, and we just couldn't manage the game properly – not to mention we weren't able to play in any warm-up tournament before the Games due to

the wartime circumstances," added the Iranian.

Iran's 3x3 basketball team, meanwhile, recovered from Sunday's defeat against China to beat the Philippines 21-14 in men's Group A.

Mohammad-Mahdi Rahimi topped the scoring chart for the country with eight points as Iran finished runner-up to the Philippines with two wins in three matches, joining China in today's play-ins for a place in the quarterfinals.

In men's water polo, Iran pulled off a sensational fightback to beat Asian heavyweight Kazakhstan 3-2.

The Iranian team conceded 2-1 and 5-4 defeats in the first two quarters but bounced back to win the next two 3-2 and 2-1, respectively, and force the contest into shootouts, where Iran prevailed 3-2 to remain on top of the table in the round-robin competition with three wins, following triumphs over Hong Kong (3-1) and South Korea (3-1). Next for Iran is a game against Thailand today, followed by a potential gold decider against China on Wednesday.

## Yousefi to make international return at Asian Weightlifting Ch'ships

## Sports Desk

Iranian weightlifter Alireza Yousefi is set to make his first international appearance in 18 months at the upcoming Asian Championships – starting May 12 – as Iran named a superheavyweight duo for the competition in Gandhinagar, India.

Yousefi will be joined by compatriot Alireza Nassiri in the men's +110kg weight class.

The Asian Championships – postponed by 40 days due to the military conflict in the Middle East – will be part of a busy 2026 calendar for Iranian weightlifting, which also features the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in September and October's World Championships in Ningbo, China.

"We never intended to send the team to the Asian Championships in the first place, and the wartime conditions only added to that decision. Our focus this year is on a powerful performance at the World Championships and the Asian Games. However, following per-

sistent requests from the world and Asian federations, we eventually decided to have a limited presence at the event," Iran head coach Behdad Salimi said on Monday.

A two-time world junior champion, Yousefi made his senior international debut at the 2024 World Championships in Manama in impressive fashion. He stunned fellow Iranian Alireza Davoudi and Armenian Olympic silver medalist Varazdat Lalayan to claim clean and jerk gold with a continental record lift of 262kg. He went on to secure bronze in the total with 456kg.

The 22-year-old Iranian then had to spend a lengthy spell on the sidelines due to surgery on his injured knee but marked his return to action in style in February, delivering a title-winning performance at the Iranian Weightlifting Pro League.

Yousefi will now look to carry his domestic momentum into the Asian Championships and bolster his case for a place on the Iranian team at the two major tournaments later in the year.

Nassiri, meanwhile, will step onto the platform at the Asian showpiece fresh off a solid display at last year's World Championships in Førde, Norway, where he bagged clean and jerk and total silvers in the 110kg class, setting new world junior records in the process with 231kg and 415kg.

"Yousefi has been away from international tournaments for nearly two years. That's why we will send him to the Asian Championships – to get him back into competitive shape," Salimi said.

"As for Nassiri, he performed poorly in the snatch in his last two competitions, so we decided to send him to the event to help him improve that area of his performance," added the former Olympic champion.

With the Asian Games and the global showpiece fast approaching, Iranian fans will likely be treated to a thrilling four-horse race in the superheavyweight category for a national team spot, which will also feature Davoudi and 2025 Asian champion Ayat Sharifi.



▶ IWFFIR

"Davoudi has been with the team camp from the very beginning. He's here with us and following the training regimen. After last year's World Championships, he suffered an injury, which is why we

need to take things slowly with him. Fortunately, he's in good condition, but he still needs time to get back to peak fitness," Salimi said of the former Olympic silver medalist.

## Qolizadeh dazzles in Polish league to give Iran World Cup boost

## Sports Desk

As Iran prepares for the upcoming FIFA World Cup – starting June 11 in North America – Ali Qolizadeh, one of Team Melli's most dynamic attacking players, is heading into the showpiece with an eye-catching statistical record in the Polish top flight.

The wizard winger, who plays for Lech Poznań, has once again turned heads in the Polish Ekstraklasa. The creative playmaker has been one of his team's most influential figures this season, much like the previous campaign, with his consistent displays drawing praise from the club's official media outlets.

The 30-year-old scored with a trademark left-footed curling effort from the edge of the box three minutes into the game at the Poznań Stadium to lead his team to a 4-0 victory over Legia Warszawa on Sunday, helping the club sit atop the

league table with 52 points – three clear of Górnik Zabrze in second – with four games remaining.

Qolizadeh has made 17 appearances for Lech Poznań this season, scoring four goals and providing four assists – numbers that underscore his direct contribution to the team's results. However, the most remarkable aspect of his performance goes beyond goals and assists.

According to published statistics, the Iranian winger has registered 36 key passes in the 2026 calendar year. That impressive figure confirms his status as one of the club's primary attacking architects. Key passes – which create genuine goal-scoring opportunities – are a critical metric in evaluating offensive output, and such a tally cements Qolizadeh's role as his team's creative engine.

Qolizadeh's sparkling form matters not only for his Polish club but also bodes well for the Iranian national

team and head coach Amir Qalenoei, who is eager to lead Team Melli to a maiden knockout spot in seven attempts at the World Cup.

Iran will kick off its Group G campaign in the United States against New Zealand at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California, on June 15, before facing European heavyweight Belgium at the same venue six days later.

With eight third-placed teams across the 12 groups advancing to the round of 32, Iran will fancy its chances of making World Cup history when taking on Egypt in the final group game at Lumen Field in Seattle, Washington, on June 26.



▶ Iranian winger Ali Qolizadeh (c) celebrates his goal with Lech Poznań teammates during a 4-0 win against Legia Warszawa in the Polish Ekstraklasa in Poznań, Poland, on April 26, 2026. ▶ lechpoznan.pl