

Asian Beach Games: Gold rush as Iran revels in water polo, wrestling glory



Members of the Iranian water polo team pose with the men's gold at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China, on April 29, 2026.
● ISNA



Aliakbar Zaroudi celebrates with the Iranian flag after winning a beach wrestling gold at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China, on April 29, 2026.
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Sports Desk

Iranians enjoyed a gold-laden run on the penultimate day of action at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China, grabbing top prizes in water polo and beach wrestling on Wednesday. In men's beach volleyball, however, the Iranian duo of Abolhassan Khakizadeh and Amirali Qalenoee settled for silver after a straight-set loss (21-15, 21-12) to the high-profile Qatari pair of Cherif Samba and Ahmed Janko.

It marked the Iranian team's second setback in Sanya against the Olympic bronze medalists. Wednesday's morning-session results saw Iran jump to third place in the medals table with seven golds and one silver, China has dominated the Games on home soil with 50 medals – including 22 golds – with Thailand, which has collected 10 golds, eight silvers, and six bronze medals, in the second spot.

Iran's gold rush began with

a hard-fought 3-2 water polo victory over China in the men's final outing. After dropping the first set 2-1, Iran bounced back to win the next two sets 3-2 and 4-1. China leveled the scoreline with a fourth-set 3-2 win, sending the match to a shootout. Iran had the last laugh, prevailing 3-2 in penalties to finish atop the round-robin table with five wins in as many matches – securing the country's first water polo gold in six editions of the Games.

"We came here with the goal of winning the gold medal, and this is the result of our long-term training," said Iran's Amin Qavidel. "China is a very strong and young team. Sanya has brought us good luck, and we appreciate the excellent organization by the host."

In men's beach wrestling, Iran stole the show with a clean sweep of four gold medals. Aliakbar Zaroudi opened Iran's account with an emphatic 3-0 victory over India's Siddharth in

the 70kg final. The second gold came at 80kg, where Ali Gholami pinned Muhammad Asad Ullah of Pakistan in the final.

The other final featuring Iranian and Pakistani wrestlers saw Amirhossein Kavousi defeat Muhammad Inam 3-0 in the 90kg showdown, refusing to let the former world champion settle into his usual defensive shell.

In the +90kg final, Seyyed Amirreza Sahraei beat China's seven-foot-tall Da Lu 3-0, dashing the host nation's hopes of winning

at least one gold in the men's division.

Represented by 57 athletes across 10 sports, the Iranian delegation had bagged two gold medals prior to Wednesday's action at the multi-sport event, which concludes with the closing ceremony today.

Hassan Ajami got Iran off the mark by winning gold in men's shot put on Sunday, followed by the men's kabaddi team stunning India 44-31 to claim the top prize on Monday.

Iranian FS wrestlers to ramp up preparations with 10-day camp

Sports Desk

The Iranian freestyle wrestling team is ramping up its preparations for upcoming international tournaments after naming a 13-man roster for a 10-day training camp set to begin May 10.

With September's Asian Games and the World Championships in October fast approaching, head coach Pejman Dorostkar and his staff are eager to finalize their 10-man squad.

Milad Valizadeh (57kg), Ahmad Mohammadnejad-Javan (61kg), Rahman Amouzad (65kg), Sina Khalili (70kg), Mohammad Nokhodi (79kg), Kamaran Qasempour (86kg), and Amirhossein Zare' (125kg) have received call-ups for the upcoming camp. All seven have already secured their places at the World Championships under the national team selection process.

Valizadeh, Qasempour, and reigning world champion Zare' claimed gold at the Asian Championships in Bishkek in early April to lock in their spots. Javan and Khalili also earned shots at world glory despite settling for bronze in their respective weight classes in the Kyrgyz capital.

Meanwhile, Amouzad and Nokhodi – gold and bronze medalists, respectively, at last year's World Championships – are set to return to the global stage after their domestic rivals turned in poor performances at the Asian Championships.

Peyman Ne'mati suffered a first-round exit in the 65kg division, while under-20 world champion Mahdi Yousefi fell to Olympic gold medalist Razambek

Zhamalov of Uzbekistan in the 79kg quarterfinals.

The race for the remaining three spots, however, remains wide open. June's Ranking Series event in Ulaanbaatar, the International Takhti Cup, and domestic trials are expected to settle the 74kg, 92kg, and 97kg classes.



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All eyes will be on the 97kg division in the coming months, with two global stars – Hassan Yazdani and Amirali Azarpira – in the mix despite shaky recent form.

Yazdani, winner of a national-record 10 world and Olympic medals, made a statement return to action on the final day of the Iranian Wrestling Premier League last December. He had been sidelined for 489 days after undergoing shoulder surgery, which cost him the 86kg final at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

The Iranian sensation appeared

back to his ruthless best when he cruised to three technical-superiority victories en route to the Zagreb Open final in February. However, a comprehensive 13-3 loss to unheralded American Stephen Buchanan – the first technical-superiority defeat of Yazdani's career – raised serious doubts about his bid for an elu-

But if Azarpira is knocked out before meeting Yazdani, he will get a second chance against his compatriot at a future event, the Iranian Wrestling Federation has confirmed. The domestic battle at 92kg will also be one to watch, as Amirhossein Firouzpour and Mohammad-Mobin Azimi look to build on strong results over the past 12 months to aim for World Championships success. Firouzpour, a winner of four combined junior and under-23 world golds, bagged Asian gold last year and then marked his senior World Championships debut with a bronze medal. Azimi, meanwhile, won the title at last October's U23 World Championships before dominating the 92kg event at the Asian Championships, where he reached the top of the podium without conceding a single point.

The 74kg race will feature Amir-Mohammad Yazdani and Younes Emami, both of whom have struggled with consistency throughout their careers. The Asian Championships were barely a campaign to remember for two-time world silver medalist Yazdani, who had to recover from a quarterfinal loss to world champion Yoshinosuke Aoyagi of Japan to finish with a consolation bronze.

Emami already has two world bronze medals to his name but left last year's World Championships empty-handed, following a quarterfinal defeat to eventual gold medalist Kota Takahashi of Japan and a loss to Slovakia's Tajmuraz Salkazanov in the bronze-medal match.

A gold medal at the Takhti Cup, even without facing Yazdani, will be enough for Azarpira to punch his ticket to the world event.

Bulgarian star Nikolov set to join Foolad ahead of AVC Champions



● CEV

Sports Desk

Bulgarian volleyball star Aleksandar Nikolov has reached an agreement with Foolad Sirjan to join the Iranian club as a supporting player for the upcoming AVC Men's Champions League – starting May 13 in Pontianak, Indonesia.

The 26th edition of the elite clubs' competition also serves as the continental qualification path for the FIVB Men's Club World Championship, with the two finalists booking their place in the global showpiece. Under the Asian tournament regulations, participating teams are required to field at least two international stars. In compliance with that rule, Foolad Sirjan has brought in Nikolov, a world-class outside hitter playing for Volley Lube in the Italian top flight, who won the silver medal with his country at last year's World Championship in the Philippines.

In addition to Nikolov, Iranian international outside hitter Pouria Hosseinkhanzadeh, who finished the club season with Al Arabi in the Qatari Volleyball League, is also set for a reunion with his former club as a supplementary player for the Asian event.

Foolad is a two-time champion in the continental event, lifting the trophy in 2021 and 2024, but missed out on the podium at the 2025 showpiece in Japan after a straight-set defeat against the hosts, Suntory Sunbirds, in the third-place match. A bronze winner at the 2024 World Club Championship, Foolad led the Iranian Premier League table with 16 wins from 18 games in the regular season before the domestic top flight is on the verge of being declared null and void by the Iranian federation amid the country's military conflict with the United States and Israel.