

## Sports Desk

Legendary Iranian wrestler Abdollah Movahed has passed away at the age of 86 in Virginia, the United States, his wife announced. He suffered a heart attack while driving on Thursday. Widely regarded as Iran's greatest freestyle wrestler of all time, Movahed was a central figure in the country's wrestling glory years during the 1960s and was part of the squad when Iran claimed the team title at the 1965 World Championships in Manchester.

A winner of six world and Olympic gold medals throughout his career, Movahed was the most decorated Iranian in the history of the sport for decades – until Greco-Roman great Hamid Sourian surpassed that feat with a seventh major gold at the 2014 World Championships.

Movahed's first appearance at the World Championships came in Sofia in 1963, where he finished sixth after losing to Türkiye's Mahmut Atalay. At the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, he placed fifth without suffering a single defeat.

His dominance in the lightweight class began at the 1965 World Championships, where he clinched gold in

# Legendary Movahed, Iranian wrestling icon, dies at 86



● MAHMOUD AREFI/jamran.ir

the 70kg category, finishing ahead of Atalay and Soviet wrestler Zarbeg Beriashvili. He remained the dominant force in the weight class for five years – undefeated in all international competitions – securing four more world golds, one Olympic

gold medal, as well as the top prize at the Asian Games in 1966 and 1970.

At the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, he won four bouts by fall and three by decision. In 1971, he finished fourth at the World Championships in Sofia,

and at the 1972 Munich Olympics – which marked his final appearance on the global stage – he was forced to withdraw due to injury. Iranian Sports Minister Ahmad Donyamali led the tributes, praising Movahed as “an enduring symbol of

the genius and prestige of dear Iran,” whose illustrious career was “filled with medals, honor, and pride for this land.”

“He was the very embodiment of a patriotic champion – a legend whose authentic Iranian identity

remained steadfast and brilliant even during the years he lived away from home, with his heart always beating for the glory of Iran,” Donyamali said.

“His world and Olympic gold medals may have been surpassed in number by

other sons of this land, but his elevated status as one of the pioneers of greatness and expertise will forever be etched in the history books of Iranian sport.”

Movahed is one of six Iranian wrestlers – alongside Gholamreza Takhti, Emam-Ali Habibi, Ebrahim Javadi, Mansour Mahdizadeh, and Rasoul Khadem – to have been inducted into the United World Wrestling Hall of Fame, receiving the honor in 2004.

The National Olympic Committee of Iran offered its condolences on the passing of Movahed, who “dedicated his illustrious life to elevating the name of Iran on the international sporting stage.”

Best remembered for his patriotism and devotion to his homeland, Movahed turned down an offer to coach the U.S. national wrestling team after immigrating to the United States, saying he never wanted to compete against his own country.

“To be honest, I really wanted to go and work in Iran, not in America. I didn't want to teach what I knew to someone who would then go and defeat Iranians. That's just the way I was,” Movahed said in a recent interview.

## Infantino tells FIFA Congress Iran will play at World Cup as planned

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FIFA President Gianni Infantino has repeated his belief that Iran will take part in the World Cup this summer despite the Iranian federation failing to attend the international governing body's annual congress in Vancouver. Iran's delegation was the only absentee from the 211-member congress as Thursday's meeting got under way after a clash with Canadian border officials earlier this week.

Officials from the Iranian Football Federation (FFIRI) abruptly left Canada after landing in Toronto, abandoning their onward trip to Vancouver. FIFA sources described the matter as a “regrettable situation” but insisted that Iran had been invited to attend congress and that responsibility for deciding who enters the country lay with the Canadian authorities.

Iranian media said FFIRI President Mahdi Taj – a former member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) – and two colleagues flew home after being “insulted” by Canadian immigration officers.

The three-man delegation “was granted visas by the host country of the congress and faced no issues entering Canadian soil,” the official website of the FFIRI said in a statement on Thursday.

“However, the host's misconduct toward the federation's delegation, along with vile and offensive insults directed at the country's proud armed forces led the president of the Football Federation to decisively refrain from answering the divisive and suspicious questions posed by the Canadian officers.

“Emphasizing his commitment to the pillars and principles of the sacred system of the Islamic Republic, taking pride in the nation's powerful defense forces,



▲ FIFA President Gianni Infantino speaks during the 76th FIFA Congress in Vancouver, Canada, on April 30, 2026.  
● JENNIFER GAUTHIER/REUTERS

and relying on national unity, he chose to withdraw from attending a country that had broken its promises just 42 days before the World Cup,” added the statement. Iran's World Cup participation has been the subject of uncertainty since the US and Israel launched airstrikes on the country in February, but Infantino insisted they will fulfil fixtures against New Zealand, Belgium and Egypt.

“Let me start at the outset by confirming straight away, for those who maybe want to say something else or write something else, that of course Iran will be participating at the FIFA World Cup 2026,” Infantino said at the congress. “And of course, Iran will play in the United States of America. The reason for that is simple, because we have to unite. We have to bring people together. “There are enough problems around the world. There are enough people who try to divide all over the world. If nobody tries to unite, what will happen to our world? We have to do it, and we have this opportunity.” Iran will begin their World Cup against New Zealand in Los Angeles on 15 June, where they are also due to play Belgium on 21 June, before finishing Group G against Egypt in Seattle.

US President Donald Trump, meanwhile, has told reporters that “I'm OK” with Iran playing in the upcoming showpiece, which will be co-hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada from June 11.

“If Gianni said it, I'm OK,” Trump told reporters in the Oval Office. “You know what? Let them play.” Despite Infantino's confidence there remain concerns that Iran could experience immigration problems this summer. The US secretary of state, Marco Rubio, said last week that Iran's players will be welcome, but indicated that some members of their federation, who “have ties to the IRGC” may experience difficulties. The Canadian government had issued Taj with a temporary resident permit (TRP) allowing him to enter Canada to attend congress, but it appears to have been revoked. “My understanding is that there is a revocation of the permission,” Canada's foreign affairs minister, Anita Anand, said.

*The Guardian and Al Jazeera contributed to this report.*

## Asian Beach Games:

## Iran coach Qashqaeirad hails ‘courage, dedication’ after handball glory



● IRIHF

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Iran beach handball head coach Mahdi Qashqaeirad was full of praise for his players' “courage and dedication” after a shootout victory over three-time champion Qatar in the men's final at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China. Stepping into Wednesday's showdown on the back of six wins in as many games, Iran dominated the first period, winning 18-10, before Qatar bounced back with a 15-10 victory in the second to force the contest into a decisive shootout. The Iranians converted all their attempts, while goalkeeper Ali Heidarian saved Qatar's third effort, as Qashqaeirad's men secured the country's ninth gold medal at

the multi-sport event.

“The match was of exceptional intensity – it truly felt like playing in an Olympic or Asian Games final,” Qashqaeirad said after the game.

“Qatar entered the Games with extensive support and immense pressure, but I sincerely thank my players for their courage and dedication. They did a great job of managing the game and proceeded in a composed manner,” the Iranian coach added. “Fortunately, we had planned for this situation in advance and practiced it thoroughly,” Qashqaeirad said.

A haul of nine golds and one silver saw Iran – represented by 57 athletes across 10 sports – finish third in the medal table of the sixth edition of the Games. Host China

topped the standings with 24 golds, with Thailand finishing runner-up with 10.

The penultimate day of action saw Iran also taste glory with four gold medals in beach wrestling, as well as the top prize in beach soccer and water polo.

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

The country's only silver medal came in the men's beach volleyball event after the pair of Abolhassan Khakizadeh and Amirali Qalenoee suffered a straight-set loss (21-15, 21-12) to the high-profile Qatari duo of Cherif Samba and Ahmed Janako in the final.