

U23 World Championships: Iran demands UWW action over US visa complications

Sports Desk

Alireza Dabir, the chairman of the Iranian Wrestling Federation (IAWFIR), has called on United World Wrestling (UWW) to ensure smooth participation for his country at the upcoming U23 World Championships – starting October 12 in Las Vegas, Nevada, United States.

In a phone conversation with UWW President Nenad Lalović on Tuesday, Dabir urged the sport's international governing body to show "special oversight" on the matter amid an ongoing visa controversy for Iranian athletes.

With Iran and the United States engaged in a military conflict since February 28, potential entry denial for Iranians – who have completed their military service in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) – at sporting events has been a major focus of media coverage in recent weeks. This issue has been most significant regarding the FIFA World Cup, which will be co-hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada in June and July.

While U.S. President Donald Trump said in March that he considers it not "appropriate" for Iranian



Iranian freestyle wrestler Sina Khalili (blue) is seen in action at the U23 World Championships in Novi Sad, Serbia, on October 26, 2025.

● IAWFIR

players to visit his country "for their own life and safety," U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said last week that Iran's players will be welcome, but indicated that some members of the Iranian Football Federation who "have ties to the IRGC" may experience difficulties.

"Iran is the world champion in different age-group categories in both freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling, and a global powerhouse with a passionate wrestling public," the IAWFIR quoted Dabir as saying in his conversation with the UWW's Serbian chief.

"If the United States creates visa problems for our team, we – along with other wrestling nations – will demand a review of the country's bid to host the Senior World Championships in 2027," added the former world champion.

Iran bagged a total of 12

medals – including five golds – to claim the Greco-Roman team title, while finishing runner-up to Team USA in the freestyle event at the U23 Worlds last year in Novi Sad, Serbia.

Elsewhere in the hour-long conversation, Dabir delivered a stark report on

war-inflicted damage to the national teams' training facilities. "Heavy damage has been done, but reconstruction is proceeding at full speed," Dabir said, adding that 29 wrestlers unfortunately were killed during five-and-a-half weeks of U.S.-Israeli airstrikes.

Guarantees required

Meanwhile, Mehdi Taj, the chief of the Iranian Football Federation (FFIRI), says the country's preparations for the World Cup remain on track, but its participation will depend on a guarantee of respect for the Iranian armed forces by tournament co-hosts the United States. The FFIRI will seek reassurance from FIFA that the U.S. will not insult the IRGC during the World Cup, Taj said on Tuesday.

"[The] Americans, if they guarantee not to insult our military institutions and the IRGC, we'll go," Taj told state broadcaster IRIB.

"If they give such a guarantee that an incident like Canada doesn't happen and they definitely assure it, we will go," he added.

Taj – a former IRGC member – was referring to an incident that took place at Toronto's Pearson Airport last week, when he and two of

his colleagues at the federation abruptly left Canada, abandoning their onward trip to Vancouver for Friday's FIFA Congress.

While several reports suggested that the Iranian officials were denied entry despite holding valid visas, the FFIRI said in a statement that it was the three-man delegation's own decision to "return to Türkiye due to the first available flight due to the unacceptable behavior of immigration officials at the airport and the insult to one of the most honorable organs of the Iranian nation's armed forces."

Upon arrival in Tehran, Taj said he will seek answers regarding certain issues about Iran's World Cup participation in a meeting with FIFA officials in Zurich later this month.

Blaming the international governing body for "being intimidated by the United States," Taj urged the organization to show "clarity" over the uncertain situation surrounding the national team. Iran is set to begin its Group G campaign at the global showpiece against New Zealand in Los Angeles on June 15, where it is also due to play Belgium six days later, before taking on Egypt in Seattle on June 26.

In-form Sayyadmanesh remains in hunt for World Cup ticket

Sports Desk

Allahyar Sayyadmanesh will hope his run of impressive performances in the Belgian top flight convinces national team head coach Amir Qalenoeei to name the striker in the Team Melli roster for the upcoming FIFA World Cup, which starts June 11 in North America.

The 24-year-old striker has produced some of the best football of his career for KVC Westerlo this season, bagging seven goals and five assists in 29 appearances in the Jupiler Pro League. He delivered a two-goal contribution last week as Westerlo overcame a three-goal deficit to play to a 3-3 draw at home against OH Leuven in the league's European playoffs, remaining in contention for a place in continental club competition next season.

Playing as a left-sided wingback in a 3-4-3 system – a testament to his tactical flexibility – Sayyadmanesh earned a match-high rating of 8.6 and a place in the league's Team of the Week for the third time this season. His numbers have trans-

lated to a direct goal contribution roughly every 207 minutes – an impressive figure for the Iranian, who struggled with consistency over past campaigns with Fenerbahçe, Istanbulspor, Zorya Luhansk, and Hull City since leaving Esteghlal in 2019 to embark on the next chapter of his career in European club football.



● KVC WESTERLO

Discovered during the 2017 U-17 World Cup in India, where he scored against Guinea, Mexico, and Germany during his team's run to the quarterfinals, Sayyadmanesh went on to become Iran's youngest-ever goalscorer. He netted against Syria under then-Belgian head coach Marc Wilmots at just 17 years, 11 months,

and eight days in his senior international debut in June 2019.

That goal has remained the sole strike of his senior international career, which includes just nine caps – the last one coming in a cameo appearance in a friendly against Tanzania in September 2025.

However, with Qalenoeei facing significant ques-

tions about his squad selection for the global showpiece, Sayyadmanesh's recent club form has reignited discussions about his potential.

While players in Iran's domestic league have been without competitive action since February amid the country's military conflict with the

United States and Israel, the head coach will likely have to build his team around overseas players. Recent setbacks, however, have added further blows to his preparation program – beyond ongoing issues related to securing friendly matches and visa approvals for players who completed their military service in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – with less than 40 days until the Group G opener against New Zealand in Los Angeles.

Lech Poznań's winger Ali Gholizadeh has been ruled out of the World Cup after suffering a ligament injury in the Polish league last week, while captain Alireza Jahanbakhsh faces a race against time to be fit for the showpiece. Prolific striker Sardar Azmoun, meanwhile, is unlikely to be part of the squad due to his recent off-field issues.

With all the shortcomings in Qalenoeei's way, the versatile Sayyadmanesh – who has proven capable of playing on the flanks – has definitely made a case for being a surprise inclusion in the Team Melli roster for the World Cup.

AVC Men's Volleyball Champions League:

Foolad to chase third continental glory despite wartime challenges

Sports Desk

Despite Iranian sport grappling with wartime circumstances in the country, Foolad Sirjan will chase a third title in six editions at the upcoming AVC Men's Volleyball Champions League when it begins its campaign against Jakarta Garuda Jaya in Pontianak, Indonesia, next Thursday.

According to the tournament regulations, the pool phase will be played in a do-or-die knockout format. A victory over the host nation's favorite will see the Iranian champion take on the winner of the game between the other Indonesian outfit in the tournament, Jakarta Bhayangkara Presisi, or the Japanese S.V. League representative – which is yet to be confirmed – in the semifinals two days later.

Coached by former national team head coach Behrouz Ataei, Foolad Sirjan is set to leave Istanbul, where the club held its training camp in recent weeks, for Indonesia later today.

Ali Ramezani, Ashkan Haqdoost, Mohammad Valizadeh, Amirhossein Tokhteh,



● volleyball.ir

Ali Shafiei, Mahdi Marandi, Rasoul Shahsavari, Pouria Hosseinkhanzadeh, Amirhossein Khajeh-Khalili, Esmail Mosafer, Amirhossein Saadati, and Ali Hajipour are the members of the Iranian club at the Asian showpiece.

Bulgarian world-class outside hitter Aleksandar Nikolov has joined Foolad on a short-term loan contract for the tournament and is set to join up with his new teammates in Indonesia after completing his commitments with Italian Volley Lube in the European club season.

A semifinalist last year in Japan, Foolad Sirjan enters the

Asian competition as one of the favorites, carrying the weight of Iran's strong volleyball reputation. With a mix of experienced national team players and the firepower of Nikolov to come, Ataei will be confident his squad can navigate the pool stage and challenge for continental glory.

The winner of the tournament will earn a spot at the FIVB Club World Championship later this year.

Foolad made it to the last four at the global showpiece in 2024, before ultimately settling for bronze thanks to a victory over Volley Lube in the third-place playoff in Uberlândia, Brazil.