

VNL, Asian events to decide Piazza's fate as Iran's Olympic path gets underway

Sports Desk

With the start of a hectic 2026 international season right around the corner, a significant clause in head coach Roberto Piazza's contract with the Iranian men's national volleyball team has officially been activated.

When Piazza was appointed to the job midway through 2024, the Iranian Volleyball Federation signed a 2+2-year contract with the Italian, meaning his team's results and performance in the first two years of his tenure would determine the future of his spell with the Asian powerhouse.

Piazza enjoyed a promising first year in charge, as Iran – having finished in the bottom three of the 18-team table in the two previous editions – staged a late surge in the 2025 Volleyball Nations League (VNL) preliminaries to place eighth with six wins from 12 matches.

Piazza's rejuvenated team, playing without the so-called 'Golden Generation' of Iranian volleyball, ultimately missed out on a first quarterfinal spot in three attempts, as China's host status secured the Asian team a place in the VNL Finals despite finishing second from bottom.



● FIVB

Iran still built on the impressive VNL run to deliver a decent campaign at the World Championship in the Philippines later in the year, progressing to the last eight before falling in four sets to the surprise package of the tournament, Czechia.

And now, Piazza – who brought the curtain down on his seven-year tenure at Power Volley

Milano in his home country – gears up for the 2026 season, which features two decisive tournaments that will not only shape Iran's status in the FIVB World Rankings but also impact the team's path to the Olympic Games, the national governing body's main objective when the Italian was hired.

Iran's first serious test will be

the upcoming Volleyball Nations League – a competition of particular importance due to its impact on world ranking points. Iran urgently needs to secure points to improve its ranking, which, should the team fail to qualify directly for the Olympics, would keep alive the team's hopes of earning a spot through ranking criteria.

The Asian heavyweight will get its VNL campaign underway with a daunting task against Brazil in Brasília on June 10 – a rematch of last year's opening day in the Brazilian capital, which the South American powerhouse won in straight sets.

Tricky games will come thick and fast in Week 1 of the preliminaries for Piazza's men, who will take on Bulgaria – a World Championship finalist – on June 11, before facing Argentina and Belgium later in the week at the Nilson Nelson Gymnasium.

Iran will then visit Orléans, France, for the second week of action, starting with a mammoth task against the host and reigning Olympic champion France at the CO'Met Arena on June 24. This will be followed by matches against the United States (June 25), Japan (June 26), and Cuba (June 28).

The third and final week of the preliminaries will see the Iranian men go head-to-head with Ukraine in Belgrade on July 15, with further outings against Germany (July 16), Slovenia (July 17), and Türkiye (July 19).

Even more important than the VNL will be the following Asian Championship, starting September 4 in Fukuoka, Japan, where Iran will be chasing a fifth ti-

tle in eight editions, looking to make amends for a final setback against Japan on home soil in 2023 in a possible showdown between the two continental giants.

This year's tournament carries double significance, as for the first time, the Asian champion earns a direct slot for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics, allowing for long-term planning and preparation for the sporting extravaganza in two years' time. Another potential meeting between Iran and Japan could follow at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games, which begin on September 19, where Piazza's side will look to secure a fourth consecutive men's gold medal. While the Iranian Volleyball Federation retains the right to part ways with Piazza if the team's performance does not meet expectations, strong results could trigger a two-year extension, helping the Italian achieve his ultimate goal of "a constant place among the top eight teams in the world" for Iran, as he insisted in his first interview after taking the job.

All eyes are now on the national team to see if they can rise to the occasion – or if major changes await Iran's bench.

Asian U18 Beach Volleyball Championships: Iranian pair beats Japan to secure world spot



● AVC

Sports Desk

The Iranian pair of Amirreza Jamshidi and Amin Vakili secured qualification for the FIVB U18 World Beach Volleyball Championships in The Hague, Netherlands, later this year, thanks to a straight-set victory over Japan at the Asian U18 Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on Sunday.

Iranian Team A emerged victorious 21-18, 21-16 against Japan's Rikuho Kashiwaki and Sota Sugiura in the men's fifth-place playoff at the Uzbek capital's Olympic Village to book the continent's fourth berth for the world showpiece.

With two Australian teams advancing to the semifinals, and in line with FIVB regulations – which prohibit two teams from the same country participating in the World Championships – the Iranian team was given a second chance to qualify, despite relinquishing a one-set lead to lose 2-1 (18-21, 21-11, 15-10) to Kazakhstan's Orazali Sagynsh and Agabek Alikhan in the quarterfinals. That defeat was

a repeat of the setback the Iranian team suffered when the two sides met in the CAVA U18 Championship final in the Uzbek capital last week.

The victory over Japan helped Iran secure its place in the main draw of the World Championships, while the Japanese team will feature in the qualifying bracket.

The Iranian duo had topped Pool C in Tashkent with maximum points before defeating Kazakhstan's Ilya Pavlov and Vladislav Shelekhov 2-0 (21-16, 21-11) in the round of 16.

Sina Al-e Yassin and Vahab Ownaq – bronze medalists at the CAVA event – represented the other Iranian pair in Tashkent, falling in back-to-back sets to Qatar's Moussa Alkheer and Mubarak Musa in the round of 16.

The Australian team of Ryan Edgar and Thomas Turner defeated Sagynsh and Alikhan 2-0 (21-16, 21-13) in the final, with Alkheer and Musa settling for bronze courtesy of a straight-set win (21-19, 24-22) against Australia's Lincoln Mowen and Hudson Symes earlier on Sunday.

Rezazadeh tips young Iranian weightlifters for senior success after world junior glory

Sports Desk

Legendary Hossein Rezazadeh has tipped the young Iranian weightlifters to build on their recent title-winning campaign at the IWF World Junior Championships for further glory at major senior competitions in the coming years.

An impressive haul of six golds, seven silvers, and one bronze medal saw the Iranian eight-man squad stand atop the team table with 520 points in Ismailia, Egypt, on Friday – a tremendous achievement that came against the backdrop of complications the team had struggled with in the buildup to the event.

While the team's preparation had been massively hampered by the wartime situation in the country, the Iranian weightlifters – coached by former world and Olympic champion Sohrab Moradi – only arrived in Ismailia last Tuesday after a visa delay had threatened to derail their title defense.

Hamidreza Mohammadi-Tanha capped off Iran's emphatic run on the final day by completing a clean sweep of three golds in the +110kg weight class, with his compatriot Taha Nemati settling for three silvers.

It was also an Iranian one-two in the 110kg division earlier in the day, with Abolfazl Zare hitting the 400kg mark in total for three gold medals, while Farhad Qolizadeh finished second in each of the three categories.

Hamidreza Zarei had opened Iran's account by collecting

the clean & jerk silver and total bronze medal in the 94kg event on the penultimate day of the competition.

Amir-Mohammad Rahmati and Mohammad-Amin Davand were the first Iranians on the platform in Ismailia, finishing empty-handed in the 88kg division on Wednesday.



● ISNA

Speaking to ISNA following the team's triumph, Rezazadeh praised the federation's long-term planning and the technical staff's dedication. "Over the past several years, significant work has been done in youth and junior weightlifting," Rezazadeh – the most decorated Iranian weightlifter in Olympic history with two golds – told ISNA. "Fortunately, with the federation's planning and the technical staff's efforts, well-organized training camps have been held, and now we are seeing the results," added the vice chairman of the federation. Rezazadeh, also a winner of 10 world golds, emphasized that

the junior team represents a dependable reservoir of talent for Iran's senior squad.

"Out of the eight athletes who competed in Egypt, at least five have the potential to be integrated into the senior national team," he said. "These young lifters can very well shape the future of Iranian weightlifting."

the clock, maintain professional and ethical conduct, and push themselves twice as hard to reach the summit of success in the years to come." He added that the ultimate goals for these athletes should be clear: success at the Olympic Games, Senior World Championships, and Asian Championships.

Rezazadeh also had warm words for Moradi, who has now led Iran's junior team to back-to-back world titles.

"Sohrab once again showed excellent performance," Rezazadeh said. "He is a world and Olympic champion, and with the federation's backing and regular training camps, he managed to deliver outstanding results."

"The team traveled under very difficult conditions and overcame problems related to the conflict situation," Rezazadeh explained. "Both the Iranian federation and the International Weightlifting Federation helped us secure visas. The situation in the country was different at that time, and extraordinary efforts were made to ensure the team could depart. In the end, they shone and set good records."

Rezazadeh concluded by calling for continued support and consistent training camps for the young team, with an eye on future major tournaments. "These athletes must maintain good training routines and continue their path under the technical staff's guidance," he said. "If they do, they will reach higher levels in the coming years and shine at the Asian Games and the Olympic Games."