

## AVC Men's Champions League:

## Foolad crushes JTEKT Stings to advance to final, secures world spot



## Sports Desk

Iran's Foolad Sirjan progressed to the final showpiece of the AVC Men's Champions League in emphatic fashion, routing JTEKT Stings Aichi of Japan in straight sets (25-22, 25-19, 25-20) in Pontianak, Indonesia, on Saturday. Iranian outside hitter Pouria Hosseinkhanzadeh picked up where he left off in Thursday's 3-0 win against Indonesian outfit Jakarta Garuda Jaya, chipping in a joint game-high 16 points – alongside international opposite

teammate Ali Hajipour. Bulgarian world-class outside hitter Aleksandar Nikolov – who joined the club on a short-term contract for the showpiece – added 14 for Foolad, which remained on course for a third title in six editions. Middle blocker Amirhossein Toukhteh also played his part in the massive win with an eight-point performance. The victory also saw the Iranian top-flight champion make amends for last year's setbacks against Japanese opposition, after former Iran coach Behrouz Ataei's men had fallen to a four-set defeat against Osaka Bluteon in the semifinals in Kyoto and then were beaten by Suntory Sunbirds Osaka in three sets to miss out on the bronze medal. French opposite Stephen Boyer topped the scoring chart for JTEKT with 15 points, while

Brazilian star Ricardo Lucarelli was thoroughly kept at bay, limited to eight points. Japanese international middle blocker Kentaro Takahashi and American outside hitter Torey DeFalco, meanwhile, contributed seven points apiece for the Japanese club.

Saturday's triumph meant Foolad will be part of the draw at the FIVB Club World Championship later this year, returning to the competition after a bronze-winning campaign at the 2024 edition in Uberlândia, Brazil, where the Iranian club defeated Italian powerhouse Volley Lube in a five-set thriller in the third-place playoff.

Standing between Foolad and the Asian title in today's showdown at the Terpadu Gymnasium are either Jakarta Bhayangkara Presisi or South Korea's Hyundai Capital Skywalkers.



Foolad Sirjan middle blocker Amirhossein Toukhteh (5) hits a spike during a 3-0 victory over JTEKT Stings Aichi of Japan in the AVC Men's Champions League semifinals in Pontianak, Indonesia, on May 16, 2026.

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## Asian Taekwondo Championships:

## Iran aims for continental glory as Saei retains helm

## Sports Desk

The Iranian men's and women's taekwondo squads left the country for Ulaanbaatar on Friday ahead of taking part in the upcoming Asian Taekwondo Championships – starting Tuesday in the Mongolian capital – in what will be the first major event of Hadi Saei's second term as president of the Iranian Taekwondo Federation.

Saei, who was recently appointed as the vice chairman of the Technical Committee at the Asian Taekwondo Union (ATU), claimed 39 of the 53 votes during last week's election to retain the helm of the national governing body for another four years.

The most decorated Iranian in Olympic history, with two golds and one bronze medal, the 49-year-old Saei drew on his illustrious career to restore the glory days of Iranian taekwondo in his first term. He was credited with numerous achievements – including a clean sweep of

four medals at the Paris 2024 Olympics; a historic women's gold at the World Championships by Nahid Kiani; a maiden women's team title at the Asian Championships in his first year in charge; as well as the men's crown at the inaugural U21 World Championships last December in Nairobi.

Given that impressive track record and with September's Asian Games and the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics on the horizon, expectations are high for Saei's new term to match or even surpass past successes – starting with the men's kyorugi team title defense at the Asian showpiece.

Former world silver medalist Ali Tajik, meanwhile, will look to prove his credentials in Ulaanbaatar after replacing Majid Aflaki – under whom he worked as the number two – as the head coach of the men's team last week.

Olympic champion Arian Salimi will headline the eight-man kyorugi roster, aiming to make

up for a below-par World Championships campaign last year in Wuxi, China – where he suffered a last-16 exit in the +87kg weight class – by defending his continental title.

Abolfazl Zandi – Asian bronze medalist in 2024 – will be the favorite for the top prize in the -58kg division this year, stepping into the competition as the reigning senior and under-21 world champion, while Mahdi Haji-Mousaei (-63kg) will also be among the Iranians to watch after winning a silver medal at the world showpiece.

Joining the trio in the Iranian team are Yassin Valizadeh (-54kg), Amir-Abbas Rahnama (-68kg), world U21 champion Radin Zeinali (-74kg), Amirreza Sadeqian (-80kg), and Mohammad-Hossein Yazdani (-87kg) – a gold medalist in the previous edition – across different weight categories.

World bronze medalists Amir-Sina Bakhtiari (-74kg), Mohammad-Hassan Palangafkan (-68kg), Ali Ahmadi (-87kg), and Mahdi



Hadi Saei, the president of the Iranian Taekwondo Federation, reacts during the taekwondo contests at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in November 2025.

● VARZESH3

Mahla Mo'menzadeh, who will vie for glory in the -49kg event. Yalda Valinejad, meanwhile, will step into the -62kg contest on the back of a silver medal at last November's Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh.

Ma'soumeh Ranjbar (-46kg), Fereshteh Fat'hi (-67kg), Baran Ne'mati (-73kg), and Fatemeh Ahmadi (+73kg) complete the Iranian women's team, which is coached by Mahrouz Saei, the younger sister of the Iranian federation's chairman.

Iran will also be represented by four contestants in the poomsae contests, with Yasaman Limouchi and two-time world silver medalist Marjan Salahshouri competing in the women's category, while Yassin Akbari and Yassin Zandi will be part of the men's draw.

## Asian U15 &amp; U17 Boxing Championships:

## Iranian boys cap off with seven medals

## Sports Desk

Iranian boys enjoyed an impressive campaign at the Asian U15 & U17 Boxing Championships, collecting seven medals across the two age categories in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Matin Chamipa spearheaded Iran's medal hunt in the under-17 division by grabbing gold in the 57kg class, thanks to a final victory over Jordan's Hasan Salem via a 4-1 points decision on Friday. Farzan Ahmadi was the other Iranian in final action but had to settle for silver in the 70kg category following a 4-1 setback against Uzbeki-



Iran's Matin Chamipa (R) won the 57kg gold in the boys' under-17 event at the Asian U15 & U17 Boxing Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

● IRANAIBA

stan's Abduvohid Abdu-majidov.

The other showdown featuring Uzbek and Iranian boxers in Friday's under-17 finals saw Mohammad-Yassin Ziar fall short against the host's Sabyrzhhan Sagym after the referee stopped the bout midway through the

contest. Abolfazl Maleki, meanwhile, finished his campaign with a joint bronze in the 52kg after suffering a semifinal defeat against Oybek Alimdjonov of Uzbekistan.

Mehrshad Sherafatmand and Pouyan Norouzi were the other two Ira-

nians in the under-17 contests, finishing empty-handed in the 80kg and 54kg divisions, respectively.

In the under-15 event, Abolfazl Pishevar defeated Kazakhstan's Zhaksylyk Yermekuly via a unanimous 5-0 points decision to claim the top prize in the 35kg weight class.

Amir-Mahdi Shad (52kg) and Ariya Mousavi (58kg) added two bronze medals to Iran's haul.

## Asian Women's U16 Handball Championship:

## Iranian girls defeat Kyrgyzstan to progress to last four

## Sports Desk

Iran secured a last-four place at the inaugural Asian Women's U16 Handball Championship courtesy of an emphatic 44-16 victory over Kyrgyzstan on the final day of the league phase in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Hasti Mirakhorli topped the scoring for the Iranian girls with eight goals, with Fatemeh Shafiei and Tamana Aram adding six apiece, as Iran claimed a second victory in five outings to finish fourth in the table. Featuring six teams, the tournament is held in a round-robin format, with the top four progressing to the semifinals. Iran will face China in today's semifinal in a rematch of the

league stage, which the East Asian team won 41-21. Iran got off to a flying start in the competition, defeating Hong Kong 33-29, before suffering successive setbacks against Kazakhstan (38-33), Uzbekistan (48-31), and China. The other last-four clash will see Kazakhstan and Uzbeki-

stan go head-to-head today. The tournament also serves as the qualification pathway for the 1st IHF Women's U16 World Championship, with the two finalists securing a place at the global showpiece, scheduled to take place from October 15 to 24.



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