

Volleyball Nations League:

Esmaeilnejad among four Iranians omitted for Week 1



L-R: Abdolreza Abdolhamidi, Esmail Mosafer, Amin Esmaeilnejad, and Ehsan Daneshdoust have been crossed out of Iran's squad by head coach Roberto Piazza for Week 1 of FIVB Men's Volleyball Nations League.

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Sports Desk

Amin Esmaeilnejad is among four players omitted from Iran's squad by head coach Roberto Piazza for Week 1 of the upcoming FIVB Men's Volleyball Nations League. Outside hitters Ehsan Daneshdoust, Esmail Mosafer, and Abdolreza Abdolhamidi will also miss the trip to Brasilia, where Iran opens its campaign with a daunting matchup against volleyball powerhouse Brazil on June 10. Esmaeilnejad's omission comes as a surprise. The prolific 29-year-old was Piazza's first choice for the opposite role in last year's VNL campaign before an ankle injury on the eve of September's World Championship ruled him out of the tournament in the Philippines. He was Iran's top scorer, logging 158 points in 10 matches, as the Asian powerhouse finished eighth in the 18-team prelim-

inary table with six wins in 12 games. However, Iran ultimately missed out on the VNL Finals; China, despite finishing second from last, secured a quarterfinal spot as the host nation. The Iranian Volleyball Federation confirmed that all four players remain in contention for selection during the remaining two weeks of the preliminary phase. With Esmaeilnejad sidelined, Foolad Sirjan's Ali Hajipour – who joins the national team's training camp today after a silver-medal campaign at the AVC Men's Champions League – and Bardia Sa'adat are expected to lead the race for a starting spot. Hajipour emerged as Piazza's top choice during the world event, where Iran reached the quarterfinals before being knocked out by Czechia. Tricky tests will come thick and fast in Week 1 for Piazza's men. They will face Bulgaria – a World Championship finalist – on June 11, before taking on

Argentina and Belgium later in the week at the Nilson Nelson Gymnasium. Iran will then travel to Orleans, France, for Week 2, starting with a mammoth task against the host and reigning Olympic champion France at the CO'Met Arena on June 24. That match will be followed by games against the United States (June 25), Japan (June 26), and Cuba (June 28). The third and final week of the preliminaries will see Iran face Ukraine in Belgrade on July 15, with further tests against Germany (July 16), Slovenia (July 17), and Türkiye (July 19). The top eight teams in the standings will advance to the VNL Finals, which begin July 29 in Ningbo Beilun, China. China is again guaranteed a quarterfinal spot as the host. Iran will aim to build on a promising first year under Piazza by securing its first quarterfinal berth in four years at the prestigious tournament.

Wushu great Mohammadseifi confirms retirement after injury heartbreak

Sports Desk

Iranian wushu veteran Mohsen Mohammadseifi has called time on his illustrious career after an injury setback during national team trials ruled him out of September's Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games. The five-time world sanda champion was hoping for a fitting finale by securing a third Asian Games gold. However, he was forced into a premature retirement following a ligament injury sustained against reigning world champion Erfan Mo-

harrami in the first bout of their best-of-three series in the 70kg weight class on Saturday. "On the verge of turning 37, I was in the best physical, mental, and emotional condition of my life," Mohammadseifi wrote in an emotional social media post on Monday. "Every calorie I consumed was calculated. Every training session was carried out with absolute precision. I fought for every second in pursuit of my goal. "I was standing in the best version of myself when something happened that had never even

crossed my mind. And the final chapter of my life as an athlete – in the sport to which I had devoted my youth – was taken away from me. "Continuing would have meant putting my health at risk. And so, between relentlessly pushing on – something that had become part of my daily life for many years – and protecting what I had spent a lifetime building, I chose the latter. "From the outside, it may look like a bitter ending. But for me, this decision is about preserving and honoring all the years

shaped by love, pain, tears, pressure, and fighting with every cell in my body." Mohammadseifi first tasted Asian Games glory at Guangzhou 2010, then repeated the feat in Incheon 2014 and Jakarta-Palembang 2018, before settling for silver at Hangzhou 2022. Along with his five world gold medals, Mohammadseifi also has two world silvers to his name from the 2009 and 2025 editions. The Iranian also holds an 8-2 record – including four knockouts – since embarking on a mixed



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martial arts career in 2019, winning the 2024 PFL MENA Lightweight Tournament in Riyadh. His last bout as a professional

fighter was a decision loss to Mohammad Fahmi at the PFL MENA 3 event last September in the Saudi capital.

Trampoline Gymnastics Asian Championship: Iranian duo wins historic women's silver

Sports Desk

Yalda Hassan-Shokati and Shaqayeq Cheraghi etched their names into Iranian sports history by winning the country's first women's medal at the Trampoline Gymnastics Asian Championship in Hong Kong. The Iranian duo advanced to Sunday's senior synchronized final and finished with a precious silver medal. Hassan-Shokati also reached the final of the women's individual event but settled for fourth place, while her Iranian teammate Fateh-meh Tavassoli finished fifth. There was further team success for Iran in Hong Kong as Arya Akhavan and Emad Balanejad teamed up to win bronze in the men's junior event. Balanejad and Akhavan also finished fourth and sixth, respectively, in the boys' 15-16 age category,



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with Padra Pajarang in fifth place in the 13-14 category. Arya Mamabdollah and Sajjad Kargar, meanwhile, finished fourth in the men's senior pair final. "China, Japan, North Korea, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, India, and Tajikistan all arrived with full-strength squads, with every team aiming to achieve the best possible result as the event served as a

qualification pathway for September's Asian Games," said Vajiheh Naqavi, the caretaker of the Iranian Gymnastics Federation, highlighting the intense level of competition in Hong Kong. On the challenges Iran faced in sending its first women's team to an international tournament since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Naqavi said: "Our first challenge was the issue of women's attire. We had to design a uniform that would not

only receive approval from domestic authorities but also be accepted by the Asian Gymnastics Union and the International Gymnastics Federation." Naqavi added that several training camps had been organized for the women's team and praised the coaching staff and trampoline discipline officials for their efforts during nearly 10 preparation camps – both in-person and on-line – during a period of wartime constraints. "Our primary objective for the women's team was securing Asian Games qualification, while also targeting a possible medal in the synchronized event," Naqavi said. "Iranian girls delivered an impressive performance, reaching the final and winning a silver medal, which marks a significant achievement for Iranian gymnastics."

Iranian judokas bag three golds at Algiers African Open

Sports Desk

All three Iranian judokas finished on a high at the latest African Open event in Algiers, claiming gold medals in their respective men's divisions. Amirabbas Choopan brought the curtain down on a perfect run for the Iranian trio by defeating home favorite Sid Ali Benaboura in the -90kg showdown on Sunday – improving on his bronze medal

finish in Tunis in February. Former Asian junior silver medalist Elyas Parhizgar, meanwhile, defeated Canada's Olivier Ganons in the -81kg final to secure his third gold medal of this year's African Open series. Sobhan Hakimi opened Iran's account by grabbing gold in the cadet -81kg competition, thanks to a final victory over Algeria's Abdallah Djili. Hakimi had also tasted success earlier in this year's series, winning silver at

the Tunis Cadet African Cup. The three-gold haul saw Iran finish second to Algeria in the medals table, with Russia in third place. The tournament was part of Iran's preparation for the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in September, after the country missed out on April's Asian Championships in Ordos City, China, as a result of the military conflict involving the United States and Israel.



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