

AVC Women's Nations Cup:

Iran's Poursaleh rues failure to execute game plan after 'bitter' opener



Sports Desk

Iran's Elaheh Poursaleh lamented her team's failure to follow the coaching staff's instructions after an opening-day defeat to Indonesia at the AVC Women's Nations Cup in Candon, Philippines, on Saturday.

The prolific opposite scored a joint match-high 20 points but could not prevent Iran, which arrived at the tournament fresh from winning last week's CAVA Championship title, from slipping to a 3-1 defeat (25-15, 21-25, 25-21, 25-22) in Pool B.

"It was a bitter loss. It wasn't our day," Poursaleh said after the match.

"For much of the match, we failed to do what we were asked to do by the coaching staff.

"We'll have to make up for this defeat in the next matches, and



Iranian opposite Elaheh Poursaleh (19) hits a spike during a 3-1 loss to Indonesia at the AVC Women's Nations Cup in Candon, Philippines, on June 6, 2026.

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that's exactly what we're determined to do."

Iran will return to action at Candon City Arena against Kazakhstan on Sunday in a repeat of the two meetings between the sides at the CAVA Championship in Kathmandu, including the final, both of which Iran won.

"We recently beat Kazakhstan twice, but we still have to remain fully focused against them. I just hope we can finish in the top two of the group and reach the semi-finals," added the 23-year-old.

Iran head coach Lee Do-hee, meanwhile, attributed the defeat to her players being "under a lot of stress throughout the match."

"Because of that stress, they were unable to move freely and show their true capabilities. We need to overcome this issue. The larger the venue, the more nervous the players seem to become, and this is something that requires more work to address," said the South Korean.

"Throughout the match, I kept reminding them that it was just a match and that they shouldn't

be nervous, but we were unable to change the situation.

"It's really unfortunate that we lost today. It was a match we absolutely should have won, but we let the result slip away and put ourselves in a difficult position. Now we must win our remaining matches."

Iran captain Shabnam Alikhani echoed her coach's assessment.

"The result was very important for us, and that created a great deal of psychological pressure on the players. I don't think we were prepared to deal with that challenge," she said.

The veteran setter nevertheless urged her teammates to bounce back and show their "true strength" as they pursue their "ambitious goal" at the tournament.

"Right now, we are not in a good place mentally, but we will try to regain our confidence and improve the team's psychological state so that we are ready for the upcoming matches," she said.

"We must win all of our remaining preliminary-round matches to advance to the semifinals as

the second-placed team in the group. It will be a very difficult task, but we are here with a very important and ambitious goal. I hope we can compete at full strength in the upcoming matches and once again show the true power of the Iranian team, just as we did in Nepal."

Iran will follow the Kazakhstan match with an encounter against Lebanon on Tuesday before taking on defending champion Vietnam on Thursday.

On the final day of the preliminary phase, Iran, which finished sixth in the previous edition, will face Hong Kong on Friday.

Elsewhere on the opening day of the tournament, Vietnam began its title defense with a comfortable straight-sets victory over Lebanon, while Kazakhstan came from behind to defeat Hong Kong in four sets.

In Pool A, the Philippines made a winning start on home soil with a straight-sets victory over Uzbekistan, with South Korea defeating Kyrgyzstan by the same score later on Saturday.

Ulaanbaatar Open Ranking Series:

Nokhodi wins 86kg freestyle gold, Rahmani bags bronze

Sports Desk

Iranian freestyle wrestler Mohammad Nokhodi looked comfortable in his new weight class, claiming the gold medal in the 86kg event at the Ulaanbaatar Open on Saturday.

Nokhodi, a five-time world medalist, including three silver medals, opened his campaign with a 10-0 victory over Mongolia's Byambadorj Bat Erdene. He followed that with another superiority win against India's Aryan Aryan before defeating Kyrgyzstan's Ma-

lik Shavaev 10-5 in an entertaining semifinal.

The Iranian was then awarded the gold medal after Bulgaria's reigning Olympic champion Magomed Ramazanov – best known to Iranian fans for his victory over Hassan Yazdani in the Paris 2024 final – withdrew from the championship bout due to injury.

The title marked Nokhodi's second Ranking Series gold medal of the year, following his triumph at February's Muhamet Malo Tournament in Tirana.

Ramazanov, meanwhile,

still enjoyed an impressive return to competition after more than a year on the sidelines, outscoring his opponents 23-2 on his way to the final.

Elsewhere on the opening day of the freestyle competition, Iran's Abolfazl Rahmani claimed a bronze medal in the 92kg division in only his second international appearance at the class.

The former Asian 86kg champion lost his opening bout to two-time world bronze medalist Azamat Dauletbekov of Kazakhstan on criteria after a 4-4 tie,

but bounced back to defeat Dauletbekov's compatriot Bekzat Amangali 8-6 in the repechage before beating India's Kumar Punit 4-0 in the bronze-medal match.

Saturday's results followed a strong Greco-Roman campaign for the Iranian squad in the Mongolian capital. Payam Ahmadi (55kg), Ali Ahmadi-Vafa (60kg) and Darnial Sohrabi (72kg) won gold medals in their respective weight classes, while Sohrabi's victory over compatriot Mohammad-Javad Rezaei in the final secured him a place on Iran's team for Oc-



Iranian freestyle wrestler Mohammad Nokhodi is seen in action against India's Aryan Aryan in an 86kg bout at the Ulaanbaatar Open in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on June 6, 2026.

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tober's World Championships in Astana, Kazakhstan. Mohammad-Mahdi Keshtkar (63kg) also booked his

ticket to the World Championships despite forfeiting his final bout with a groin injury, thanks to a 6-2 vic-

tory over Asian silver medalist Erfan Jarkani in an all-Iranian second-round contest.

Iran edged by Brazil in pre-VNL warm-up

Sports Desk

Iran surrendered a two-set lead to suffer a 3-2 defeat against Brazil in a warm-up friendly in Brasilia ahead of the upcoming Volleyball Nations League (VNL).

Italian head coach Roberto Piazza's men won the opening two sets 36-34 and 25-23, but the South American powerhouse rallied to take the next three, 25-23, 25-21 and 28-26.

The two sides will square off again on the opening day of the VNL preliminary phase in the Brazilian capital on Wednesday.

Despite the defeat, Piazza was pleased with his team's performance against one of the sport's global heavyweights.

"We agreed beforehand that the match would be played over five 25-point sets, and both teams used different lineups through-



Iranian players celebrate a point during a 3-2 defeat against Brazil in friendly in Brasilia, Brazil, on June 6, 2026.

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out the match," Piazza said. "I was a little disappointed with the fourth set because it was the only set that Brazil won by a wide margin. On the other hand, I'm pleased because we managed to play a normal level of volleyball against Brazil.

"Brazil is a very good team. We know they are ranked higher than us in

the world rankings. But we can improve – we can improve a lot.

"Right now, I feel good about where we are, but from tomorrow onward, we must focus entirely on the Volleyball Nations League," added the Italian. A demanding opening week awaits Piazza's men, who will face Bulgaria on Thursday before taking

on Argentina and Belgium later at the Nilson Nelson Gymnasium.

Iran will then travel to Orléans, France, for the second week of competition, beginning with a blockbuster clash against host nation and reigning Olympic champion France at the CO'Met Arena on June 24, followed by matches against the United States, Japan and Cuba.

The third and final week of the preliminary phase will see Iran take on Ukraine in Belgrade on July 15 before further encounters with Germany, Slovenia and Türkiye.

The top eight teams in the 18-team standings will advance to the VNL Finals, which will begin with the quarterfinals in Ningbo Beilun, China, on July 29. China has already secured a place in the Finals as host nation.

Asian Canoe Sprint Junior & U23 Championships:

Iranians cap off with 20 medals

Sports Desk

Iran enjoyed a successful campaign at the Asian Canoe Sprint Junior & U23 Championships, finishing with 20 medals, including four golds, across various categories in Turkistan, Kazakhstan.

The Iranian contingent also collected six silver and 10 bronze medals during the four-day competition.

On the final day of the championships, Iran added two gold medals through Shahla Behrouzrad and Eslam Jahedi in the paracanoe events.

Behrouzrad struck gold in the women's KL3 500m final, clocking 2:27.460 to finish ahead of Uzbekistan's Mirzaeva Shakhnoza.

Jahedi also topped the podium in the men's VL2 500m event, posting a winning time of 2:45.022.

Meanwhile, Iran narrowly missed out on another medal, as its men's U23 K4 500m crew of Abbas Hosseini, Amirreza Barzegar, Abolfazl Jannati and Amirreza Oladian finished fourth in 1:31.066.

Uzbekistan claimed gold in the event, with Kazakhstan and Singapore taking silver and bronze respectively.



Iran's Shahla Behrouzrad won the gold medal in the women's KL3 500m event at the Asian Canoe Sprint Junior & U23 Championships.

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