

# FIVB Men's Volleyball Nations League: Iran coach Piazza questions team's mindset after Belgium defeat

## Sports Desk

Head coach Roberto Piazza was left frustrated by Iran's error-ridden fifth set in a defeat to Belgium in Brasilia on Sunday, questioning whether his team has the right mindset for the Volleyball Nations League.

Piazza's side fought back from two sets down to force the contest into a decider, but eventually lost 3-2 (25-23, 25-22, 23-25, 17-25, 15-12) to finish the opening week of the preliminary round with a 1-3 record and four points, sitting 15th in the 18-team standings.

Iranian outside hitter Ali Haqqarast emerged as the match's top scorer with 27 points, including two aces and two blocks, while opposite Ali Hajipour (11 points) and outside hitter Pouria Hosseinkhanzadeh (10), who was forced off injured midway through the third set, also reached double figures.

Young opposite Ferre Reggers, meanwhile, led the scoring for Belgium with 24 points, while 22-year-old outside hitter Pierre Perin excelled from the service line with five aces to finish with 20 points.

The defining spell of the contest came in the fifth set, when Iran made several service errors to allow Belgium to open a four-point lead. The Europeans never looked back, improving to 2-2 and moving into 10th place in the standings with five points.

"We fell behind because they were able to finish everything in the first two sets and we lost our mindset, but then we were back in the game in the third and fourth sets," Piazza said after the defeat.

"In the fifth set, we made six mistakes on serve. That means you're still not used to playing in this tournament.

This is not a normal tournament; it's a particular one," added the Italian, whose team is the second-youngest in the competition with an average age of 23.

When asked what he told his players after a third defeat in four outings, Piazza said: "That will stay with the players. It certainly won't come from me. But I'm sure one of the players will talk about it - I'm 100 percent sure. In my opinion, everything should stay in the locker room, though I know that's not the case here and that that's a problem."

Hajipour, meanwhile, regretted the "childish mistakes" that repeatedly undermined Iran in the Brazilian capital. "I'd rather not talk right now about why we started the match the way we did," said Hajipour, who finished Week 1 as Iran's leading scorer with 61 points. "But we need to learn how to finish strongly even when we don't start well."

"There are some mistakes that really damage this team - childish mistakes," he said. "Serving is also a major issue. We make too many errors and keep paying the price for them. It happened against Brazil and it happened again in this match."

Hajipour was particularly critical of Iran's serving in the deciding set.

"When I think about the fifth set, we had already made six or seven service errors before the midway point," he said. "That simply cannot happen."

"In my opinion, when the opposing team is under pressure and we have a chance to beat them, all we need is a safe, routine serve. That should be enough to help us win the match.

"I hope that with more effort and more practice on these details, we can cor-



Iranian players react after losing a point during their 3-2 defeat to Belgium in the FIVB Men's Volleyball Nations League in Brasilia, Brazil, on June 14, 2026.

rect our small mistakes and be better prepared than ever for the coming weeks," Hajipour added. Iran began the preliminaries with a 3-1 loss to South American powerhouse Brazil before suffering a straight-sets defeat to Bulgaria. The team responded by sweeping Argentina 3-0 for its only victory of the opening week. Chasing a first VNL Finals appear-

ance in four years, Iran will travel to Orléans, France, for the second week of competition, opening against host nation and reigning Olympic champion France at the CO'Met Arena on June 24. That 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 prelimi-

nary phase will see Iran face Ukraine in Belgrade on July 15, followed by matches against Germany (July 16), Slovenia (July 17) and Türkiye (July 19).

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

## Golshadnejad ruled out as Iran women gear up for Asian Karate Championships



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Atousa Golshadnejad will be Iran's major absentee when the country's women's team gets its campaign underway at the Asian Karate Championships in Bali, Indonesia, on Friday.

Golshadnejad enjoyed a remarkable international season last year, winning the second Asian title of her career before claiming gold at the Islamic Solidarity Games and making history as the first Iranian female karateka to capture a kumite world title.

However, Golshadnejad, along with Fatemeh Sa'adati - last year's Asian silver medalist - suffered injuries during the Iranian national team trials and will miss the continental showpiece in Bali. In the duo's absence, Iran's roster will be headlined by two-time world bronze medalist Sara Bahmanyar, with Ma'soumeh Mohsenian, Mehrnegar Ahmadi, Mobina Heidari, Liela Borjali,

Fatemeh-Zahra Saeid-Abadi and Hananeh Salehi also competing across the women's kumite weight classes. Iran head coach Pegah Zanganeh shrugged off the absence of Golshadnejad and Sa'adati, insisting her team remains determined to deliver strong results in Bali.

"I do not consider this a crisis because the rest of the team has the potential to produce strong performances," Zanganeh told Mehr News Agency before departing for Indonesia on Sunday.

"The karatekas have faced many of their opponents in various tournaments and have a good understanding of them," she said. "That is why we are sending an experienced team. I recently presented a detailed analysis of these matchups and past results during a meeting attended by the sports minister. Even against some of the most decorated opponents, we have recorded more victories than defeats.

"We had a short period to prepare the team, but we have worked to bring the athletes to an acceptable level of fitness and hope they can achieve positive results," she added. "Our main objective at this event is to secure qualification for the Team World Cup later this year." Zanganeh also said the Asian Championships would play a key role in determining Iran's squad for September's Asian Games.

"Together with the federation, we have narrowed the pool of candidates for the Asian Games to the athletes included on our initial list," she said. "We still intend to evaluate a few competitors, and on the final day of the Asian Championships we will announce our representatives for the three available places."

Meanwhile, four-time Asian bronze medalist Fatemeh Sadeqi will be joined by Sepideh Amini and Zeinab Hosseini in the women's kata event, while Ali Zand, Mahdi Shahin, Matin Farimand, Mobin Jabbari and Sahand Eslami will compete in the men's kata draw.

In the men's kumite competition, Morteza Ne'mati will look to improve on his silver-medal performance in Tashkent last year. Reigning world silver medalist Saleh Abazari, Behnam Dehqanzadeh, Hadi Kiani, Seyyed Amir Hassani, Ali-Asghar Asiabari, Mahmoud Ne'mati, former world champion Bahman Asgari, Mahdi A'ashouri, Mahdi Shahgol and Mahdi Ganjzadeh complete the Iranian kumite squad, which will be led by former Olympic champion Sajjad Ganjzadeh.

## Iran women's volleyball out of Asian Games equation, NOC confirms

## Sports Desk

Iran's women's national volleyball team will not be part of the country's delegation to the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in September, Mahdi Alinejad, secretary general of the National Olympic Committee (NOC) of Iran, has confirmed.

The Iranian team had hoped to make its first appearance at the multi-sport showpiece since the 1974 edition in Tehran, but a disappointing campaign at the AVC Women's Nations Cup has convinced the country's sporting authorities to leave it out of the squad for the event in Japan.

Iran found some consolation by defeating host nation the Philippines in straight sets (25-21, 25-12, 25-21) in Candon on Sunday to finish seventh, its lowest placing in four appearances at the continental tournament despite an unprecedented build-up to the competition.

The team had left the country in April amid wartime conditions in the region to

continue preparations in East Asia for two major events over recent months.

Entering the Nations Cup fresh off a second successive CAVA Championship title a week earlier, Iran got off to a losing start in Pool B, falling 3-1 to Indonesia before suffering another defeat by the same scoreline against Kazakhstan - a team it had beaten twice at the CAVA event.

The Iranians bounced back with a comfortable victory over Lebanon but were swept aside in straight sets by defending champion Vietnam.

A 3-0 win over Hong Kong, China, saw Iran finish fourth in the six-team standings and advance to the seventh-place playoff.

Alinejad said Iran's delegation for the upcoming Asian Games would comprise between 300 and 310 athletes as the country seeks to improve on its performance at the previous edition in Hangzhou, China, where it collected 54 medals, including 13 golds, to finish seventh in the medal table.



Iran women's volleyball team celebrating on the court.