

Team Melli must return to 'Queiroz philosophy' against Belgium: Nosrati

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INTERVIEW

Former Iran international center-back Mohammad Nosrati believes Team Melli should revert to the defensive blueprint established by former head coach Carlos Queiroz when it faces Belgium in a crucial FIFA World Cup group-stage clash.

Having played to a frustrating 2-2 draw in its Group G opener, Iran will take on Belgium, which also shared the spoils with Egypt in a 1-1 stalemate, at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles on Sunday.

Speaking to Iran Daily, Nosrati said the defensive structure built during Queiroz's long tenure remains deeply embedded in Iranian football and could prove vital against the European powerhouse. "One encouraging aspect is that the influence of Carlos Queiroz is still visible in Iranian football," Nosrati said. "The impact he had was so significant that you can still see traces of it in the way our players perform. In many ways, this Iranian team resembles the Queiroz era, both in terms of personnel and tactical structure."

According to Nosrati, the Portuguese tactician, who was in charge of the Iranian national team at the previous three World Cups, established a defensive organization that has become ingrained in Iranian football and remains one of the national team's greatest strengths.

"That defensive structure can help us in difficult matches, especially against Belgium," he said. "I expect Iran to adopt a more defensive approach, close down the opponent's routes to goal, and



Iranian players celebrate their first goal during a 2-2 draw against New Zealand in a FIFA World Cup Group G match at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles, California, on June 15, 2026.
● MATTHEW CHILDS/REUTERS

look to hurt them through counterattacks, pacey players, and set pieces.

"Every player must maintain maximum focus, mark intelligently, and fulfill their defensive responsibilities throughout the game." The former defender acknowledged that Iran's task has become more complicated following the draw against New Zealand, a result he described as a missed opportunity.

"We dropped two very valuable points against New Zealand, points that could have taken us much closer to qualification," Nosrati said. "Belgium has also dropped points, which makes this match even more important and difficult."

"Belgium will dominate possession and control much of the game," he said. "Their style is

completely different from New Zealand's."

Reflecting on Iran's opening match, Nosrati felt the team struggled from the outset, possibly due to inadequate preparation or distractions surrounding the squad. "We started nervously and did not play well early on," he said. "Ironically, after conceding the first goal, the pressure seemed to come off the players. We gained control, found an equalizer, and could even have scored a second goal with better decision-making in attack."

"Our defensive organization was not at its best," he said. "The center-backs and, to some extent, the left-back shared responsibility for the first goal. For the second goal, both the central defenders and goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand could have reacted better."

He added that Beiranvand may have committed himself too early. "I think he went to ground too quickly. Had he stayed on his feet longer, he might have been able to save the shot."

"New Zealand was relatively unfamiliar to us, but from a technical standpoint, the gap between the two teams was significant enough for Iran to win the match," he said.

Praise for Rezaeian

Nosrati singled out veteran full-back Ramin Rezaeian for special praise after his standout performance, which included a goal and an assist for Mohammad Mohebbi for Iran's second equalizer.

"In my opinion, Ramin Rezaeian should be a role model for other players, especially younger footballers," he said. "Everyone saw how much effort he put in to se-

cure his place at the World Cup." Nosrati highlighted Rezaeian's determination after losing his place at Esteghlal, his move to Foolad Khuzestan midway through the Iranian top-flight season, and his strong performances that earned him a national-team recall.

"He worked tirelessly to keep his World Cup dream alive. He excelled at Foolad, returned to the national team, performed well in the friendlies, scored against Gambia, and was outstanding in Iran's opening World Cup match, where he deservedly earned Man of the Match honors."

By contrast, Nosrati felt several attacking players failed to meet expectations.

"Mehdi Taremi and Saman Qodoudous did not produce the level of performance many expected from them," he said. "Some peo-

ple point to the difficult circumstances back home as a factor, but if that were the case, why was Rezaeian able to perform so well?" Nosrati also questioned the limited playing time given to Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh, who impressed after coming off the bench.

"Considering the excellent two seasons he has had in the Iranian league and the AFC Champions League, I expected him to get more minutes," he said. "Even in a short appearance, he performed well." While Mohebbi scored, Nosrati felt the winger was below his usual standards, particularly in the first half, while Mehdi Qayedi also failed to make the expected impact after entering the game as a substitute.

Despite the setback against New Zealand, Nosrati has not given up hope of seeing Iran progress from the group.

"Losing those two points has made our path much more difficult because we now face two strong teams in Belgium and Egypt," he said.

"If we had won the opening match, I would have been confident of qualification, especially with eight third-placed teams also advancing. But football is unpredictable. We have seen teams produce surprises against stronger opponents in this tournament. "With hard work, concentration, and discipline, Iran can still earn points and even victories against Belgium and Egypt."

Asian Karate Championships:

Iran bags double bronze on Day 2, Nemati into final in men's kumite

Sports Desk

The second day of the AKF Asian Karate Championships in Bali, Indonesia, saw Iranians collect two bronze medals in the women's competition on Friday, while Morteza Nemati secured a place in the men's kumite -75kg final.

Nemati, a silver medalist in Tashkent last year, began his campaign with a 12-2 victory over Uzbekistan's Mamayusuf Mukimjonov before defeating Kuwait's Omar Al-Jenaie 8-3 to advance to the semifinals.

The Iranian then outclassed Japan's Sakiyama Yusei 9-2 to set up a final showdown with defending champion Nurkanat Azhikanov on Sunday. Nemati will be looking to make amends for last year's defeat against the Kazakhstani karateka, who is chasing a third title in four continental championships.

In the women's kumite contests, Iran's Mehrnegar Ahmadi bounced back from a 4-0 loss to last year's bronze medalist, Sarara Shimada of Japan, to defeat Vietnam's Nguyen Thi Man 6-1 and claim a consolation bronze in the -61kg class. She shared the third podium place with China's Gong Li. Elsewhere in the kumite com-



petitions, Hadi Kiani suffered an early exit in the men's -67kg division after back-to-back defeats to Kazakhstan's Olzhas Altynbek (3-1) and Kyrgyzstan's Erlan Akylbek Uulu (3-0).

Masoumeh Mohsenian, meanwhile, was unlucky to miss out on bronze in the women's -55kg class after a 3-0 loss to Vietnam's Hoang Thi My Tam in the third-place bout.

In the kata contests, the Iranian trio of Fatemeh Sadeqi, Sepideh Amini, and Zeinab Hosseini settled for bronze in the women's team event, recovering from a 7-0 defeat to Japan in the semi-

finals to beat Hong Kong 5-2 in the third-place playoff. It was Sadeqi's second bronze medal in Bali after she had defeated China's Tao Yiwei 6-1 to secure a joint third-place finish alongside the Philippines' Sakura Alforte in the women's individual kata on the opening day - the Iranian's fifth bronze medal in the history of the competition.

The Iranian team of Mahdi Shahin, Matin Farimand, Mobin Jabbari, and Sahand Eslami, meanwhile, saw their men's kata campaign end in the first round following a 5-2 defeat to Chinese Taipei.

Friday's results came after Ali Zand had opened Iran's account with a bronze medal in the men's individual kata on the previous day, courtesy of a 7-0 victory over China's Zheng Qianqu.

The opening day of the kumite competitions, however, was one to forget for the Iranians, as both contestants finished empty-handed in their respective categories.

In the men's -55kg division, Behnam Dehqanzadeh, the 2023 Asian champion, fell to an 8-3 semifinal defeat against reigning champion Zholaman Bigabyl of Kazakhstan before losing 3-2 to Thailand's Natthakrit Ingloy in the bronze-medal bout.

The biggest upset of the day for Iran came in the women's -50kg category, where Sara Bahmanyar - a two-time world bronze medalist and gold medalist at the 2025 World Games - suffered a shock 3-1 loss to Indonesia's Gusti Rahadian and crashed out in the second round.

Sitting Volleyball World Ch'ships:

LA 2028 spots on offer as Iran men, women learn draw

Sports Desk

Iran's men's and women's teams will be chasing qualification spots for the LA 2028 Paralympics when they begin their campaigns at the upcoming Sitting Volleyball World Championships, which start on July 10 in Hangzhou, China.

The draw for the 14th edition of the global showpiece took place this week, with 16 teams divided into four groups in both the men's and women's tournaments.

Reigning world and Paralympic champion Iran will be the clear favorite in the men's competition, beginning its bid for a record-extending ninth title against Poland in Pool D. A second-day clash between familiar foes Iran and Bosnia & Herzegovina will bring together the finalists from both the Paris 2024 Paralympics and the previous World Championships in 2022.

Iran will conclude the group stage against Japan on July 12.

In the other men's groups, host China has been pitted

against two-time silver medalist Germany, Canada, and Thailand in Pool A, while Egypt, the United States, Ukraine, and Rwanda make up Pool B.

Brazil, bronze medalist at the previous two editions, is joined by Kazakhstan, Croatia, and Iraq in Pool C.

In the women's competition, Iran will open its Pool A campaign against Rwanda on the opening day before taking on Kenya and China - the silver medalist at Paris 2024 - on the following days, respectively.

Paralympic champion United States, Germany, Ukraine, and the Netherlands are in Pool B, while Paralympic bronze medalist Canada, Slovenia, Japan, and Hungary will battle for knockout-stage places in Pool C.

Brazil will begin its title defense in Pool D against European champion Italy, France, and Thailand.

The men's and women's champions in Hangzhou will secure their places at the Paralympic Games in Los Angeles in 2028.