

Sports Desk

Iran secured three kumite gold medals on the final day of the Asian Karate Championships in Bali, Indonesia, to finish runner-up in the medals table – the country's best result at the competition in seven years.

A haul of nine medals across the men's and women's events saw Iran finish behind Japan, which collected five golds, three silvers, and five bronze medals. Kazakhstan placed third with two golds, two silvers, and three bronzes.

Iranian brothers Morteza and Mahmoud Nemati claimed gold in their respective divisions, both at the expense of defending champions in the final.

The pinnacle of Iran's final-day success, however, came in the women's team kumite event, where head coach Pegah Zangeneh's quartet, having defeated Kazakhstan in the semifinals, beat Japan 2-0 in the final.

Hannaneh Salehi and Fatemeh-Zahra Saeidabadi emerged victorious in their bouts as the Iranian women's team – also featuring Sara Bahmanyar and Mobina Heidari – won the continental title for the

Asian Karate Championships:

Triple triumphs lift Iran to runner-up finish in Bali



⬆ L-R: Hannaneh Salehi, Fatemeh-Zahra Saeidabadi, Sara Bahmanyar, and Mobina Heidari formed the Iranian quartet that won the women's team kumite title at the Asian Karate Championships in Bali, Indonesia.
● IKF

first time since 2019. In the men's individual kumite competition, Morteza

Nemati defeated Nurkanat Azhikanov 3-2 in the -75kg final to make amends for last year's title-match defeat to the Kazakhstani karateka, who was chasing a third Asian title in four years.

Minutes later, Mahmoud Nemati added a second men's kumite gold to Iran's tally with a 4-0 victory over Saudi Arabia's Sanad

Sufyani in the +84kg final. Morteza Nemati, however, missed out on a second gold medal later on Sunday, as he was part of the Iranian squad that suffered a 3-0 defeat to Jordan in the men's team final.

Saleh Abazari, Esmaeil Motamedi, and Mahdi Ashouri all fell short in their bouts as Iran had to settle for silver behind Jor-

dan for the second consecutive year.

A place in the final had already secured both Iranian men's and women's teams qualification for the Team World Cup in Hangzhou, China, in November.

Sunday's medals came after Iran had collected five bronze medals earlier in the tournament.

Former world bronze med-



⬆ Iranian brothers Morteza (L) and Mahmoud Nemati won gold medals in their respective men's kumite divisions at the Asian Karate Championships in Bali, Indonesia.
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alist Aliasghar Asiabari recovered from a semifinal defeat to Jordan's Mohammad Al-Jafari – who went on to retain his title – to

beat India's Chetan Bhatt 16-7 and claim bronze in the men's -84kg category.

Mehrnegar Ahmadi also secured a kumite bronze medal courtesy of a 6-1 victory over Vietnam's Nguyen Thi Man in the women's -61kg division, while the Iranian trio of Fatemeh Sadeqi, Sepideh Amini, and Zeinab Hosseini defeated Hong Kong 5-2 in the bronze-medal play-off of the women's team kata event.

It was Sadeqi's second bronze medal in Bali after she had defeated China's Tao Yiwei 6-1 to secure third place in the individual kata competition on the opening day – the Iranian's fifth bronze medal in the history of the championships.

Ali Zand had opened Iran's account with a bronze medal in the men's individual kata on Thursday, defeating China's Zheng Qianqu 7-0 in the third-place match.

Iran coach Piazza prioritizes LA 2028 goal over VNL results

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Iran head coach Roberto Piazza shrugged off his team's slow start to the FIVB Men's Volleyball Nations League, outlining a long-term vision centered on qualification for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games.

Iran began the preliminary phase in Brasilia with successive defeats against South American powerhouse Brazil (3-1) and Bulgaria (3-0), before bouncing back to defeat Argentina in straight sets.

Piazza's side then fell to Belgium in a five-set thriller, after which the Italian regretted his team's excessive number of service errors in the decisive set,

as Iran finished Week 1 in 15th place in the 18-team preliminary standings.

"We have started another Volleyball Nations League campaign and changed many players, but the biggest change that must happen is in our minds," Piazza said. "We need to accept some mistakes and refuse to repeat others," added the Italian, whose team is in Belgrade for a training camp ahead of Week 2.

Despite his team's difficult run in the Brazilian capital, the Italian coach reiterated that he is not focused on short-term results, emphasizing that every match and training session is part of a broader project leading to the Olympics in two years.

"As I said a long time ago, I am not thinking about the final results," Piazza stated. "My final result is the goal that I want to achieve; LA 2028. That is the ultimate goal. So, each moment is a good moment for being a little bit better, and if we manage to do that, results will be around the corner."

Assessing Iran's performances in the Brazilian capital, Piazza said his team is "among the top six or seven teams in the competition" in side-out situations.

"It means our setter is able to set. I know a lot of people in Iran don't like him. I know that all of them are amazing in understanding volleyball, but he is

currently one of the best setters in the world when it comes to side-out situations," the Italian said of his first-choice setter, Arshia Behnejad, while identifying the team's major struggle in transition and recycled-ball situations, a weakness that applies to "the team as a whole."

The coach pointed to Iran's recent match against a full-strength Brazilian side as evidence of the team's growing competitiveness.

"I am disappointed because my feeling was that we could beat at their home. They were so afraid. We lost the first and fourth sets, and on both occasions, we gave away a four-point advantage."

Asking for Iranian fans' con-



● PAYAM SANI/volleyball.ir

tinued patience and confidence in the team's long-term progress, Piazza said: "We need your support, for sure, and we feel your support. In the end, we will try to do our best. I know that trying is enough; we need to

do something special, but I trust these guys."

Iran will resume action on Wednesday with a daunting test against reigning Olympic champion France, which will also be looking to improve on a disap-

pointing 1-3 record, in the French city of Orléans. Iran will also take on the United States and Japan, which is unbeaten in the preliminary phase, before wrapping up Week 2 against Cuba next Sunday.

Chasing a first VNL Finals appearance in four years, Iran will return to the Serbian capital for the third and final week of the preliminary phase, which will feature a match against Ukraine on July 15, followed by encounters with Germany (July 16), Slovenia (July 17) and Turkey (July 19).

As far as a place at the Olympic Games is concerned, the best opportunity for Iran will come at September's Asian Championship in Fukuoka, Japan, where the champion will also secure early qualification for the multi-sport event.

World Boxing Cup 2026:

Habibinejad bags bronze to end Iran's 30-year drought



Iran's Ali Habibinejad (R) won a bronze medal in the Elite Men's 65kg category at the World Boxing Cup in Guiyang, China.
● IRANAIBA



Sports Desk

Iran's Ali Habibinejad settled for bronze at the World Boxing Cup in Guiyang, China, on Saturday, ending the country's 30-year wait for a medal at the prestigious event.

Habibinejad suffered a semifinal defeat to American Marcus Luther to finish joint-third alongside Frenchman Hugo Grau, who withdrew from his last-four bout against Moldovan Alexandru Paraschiv, in the Elite Men's 65kg division.

The Iranian started on the front foot in the opening round, but the American bounced back to claim a unanimous 5-0 decision. Iran had last won medals at the competition through Kourosh Molaei and Seyyed Ebrahim Mousavi, who both

claimed bronze medals.

After receiving a first-round bye, Habibinejad began his campaign with a victory over Mexico's Hugo Barron after the referee stopped the contest midway through the bout. He then overcame England's Patris Mughalzai by a 3-2 decision to advance to the semifinals. Habibinejad was the sole medalist in Iran's seven-athlete squad, which included two female boxers, at the event, which featured around 300 fighters from 40 countries.

Asian Gymnastics Championships: Olfati wins vault bronze

Sports Desk

Iran's Mahdi Olfati won the bronze medal in the men's senior vault event at the AGU Asian Championships in Zunyi, China.

Olfati, who made history last year by winning Iran's maiden gold medal at the championships, scored 14.8 points with his first vault in Sunday's final before posting 13.8 with his second to finish third with an average score of 14.3.

Japan's Wataru Tan-

igawa won gold in the discipline, while South Korea's Im Jae-ho settled for silver. Olfati's medal came a day after fellow Iranian Mahdi Ahmadvani also claimed bronze

in the men's rings event.

A two-time silver medalist in the 2023 FIG World Cup series, Ahmadvani scored 14.1 points in the final, marking his return to the international stage



● ISNA

after serving a two-year suspension for an anti-doping whereabouts violation.

China's Yang Haonan and Zhang Boheng, who were also part of the country's gold medal-winning team in the all-around competition, took gold and silver respectively in the rings event.

The two bronze medals saw Iran finish seventh in the medal table. China edged Japan to the top of the standings, with the number of silver medals (seven to four) separating the two nations after both collected six gold medals.