

# Saei confident as Iran women's taekwondo faces packed calendar

## Sports Desk

Iran's women's taekwondo team is preparing for a hectic international calendar in the coming months, with head coach Mahrouz Saei expressing confidence that a youthful squad can rise to the challenge despite limited international experience and mixed results at recent world and Asian championships. The national team will begin its demanding schedule with a trip to Chuncheon, South Korea, where the World Cup Team Championships, starting next Tuesday, will be followed by the Korea Open. Saei believes the two events will provide crucial preparation for a series of major tournaments later this year. Iran will send two separate groups to South Korea. A four-member squad selected for the Team World Cup will also compete in the Korea Open, while a second group will only take part in the latter event. Ten athletes are currently training in the national camp, with teenage prospect Hanna Zarrinkamar, who secured a second successive world junior title in April, due to join the senior team before it departs for South Korea. Performances in South Korea will also play a decisive role in finalizing Iran's squad for the

Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in September. While two athletes have already secured their places, Saei said the remaining berths will be determined by results in South Korea. The Asian Games remain the centerpiece of Iran's campaign in 2026, with the coaching staff viewing the event as a key milestone on the road to the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. "Our main objective is to win gold medals at the Asian Games," Saei said, noting that strong performances would also earn valuable world ranking points and increase Iran's quota for future Grand Prix events. Currently, Olympic silver medalist Nahid Kiani is Iran's only regular representative at the Grand Prix level. Bronze medalist Mobina Nematzadeh, another of the country's top-ranked competitors, is sidelined after knee surgery and is not expected to return to competition for another seven to eight months. Saei said she remains in regular contact with Nematzadeh throughout her rehabilitation and is encouraged by the athlete's recovery, although she acknowledged the team will have to cope without one of its biggest stars for much of the season. Before the Asian Games, Iran



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will also compete at the World Women's Open Championships, scheduled for late August in Taiyuan, China. Saei indicated the event is likely to feature the same lineup intended for Nagoya, allowing the team to fine-tune its preparations approximately one month before the continental showpiece. The coaching staff is also seeking additional high-level preparation through an overseas training camp. Iran has ap-

proached several countries, including Turkey and Azerbaijan, with the preference being a 10- to 12-day joint camp with the reigning women's world champions from Turkey. Beyond immediate results, Saei emphasized that Iran's current strategy is focused on "long-term development." "We lowered the average age of the team because we're building for the future. We have confidence in these young athletes,

and I hope they seize this opportunity and show they belong at the highest level," Saei told the official website of the Iranian Taekwondo Federation. Several promising youngsters, including Baran Nemati, Fatemeh Ahmadi and Fereshteh Fathi, have recently been promoted to the senior squad after gaining only limited international exposure at the Asian Championships in Ulaanbaatar in May, where Iran managed just two

medals through Kiani's gold and Yalda Valinejad's bronze. Other emerging athletes, such as teenage sensations Saina Karimi and Hasti Mohammadi, who won gold and bronze, respectively, at the 2025 Islamic Solidarity Games, have also joined the national program within the past year, further lowering the average age of the team. While acknowledging the inexperience of many squad members, Saei said the coaching staff deliberately chose to invest in youth with an eye on future Olympic success. The younger athletes will be supported by experienced campaigners such as Kiani and Valinejad, both expected to play leadership roles on and off the mat as Iran attempts to blend emerging talent with proven medal contenders. Saei admitted that winning gold medals at the Asian Games will be far from straightforward, particularly after the competition adopted Olympic weight categories, increasing the level of competition in each division. Nevertheless, she believes success in Nagoya will be critical to improving Olympic rankings and laying the foundation for Iran's ultimate ambition: winning Olympic gold at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics.

## Iran adds 26 slots to Asian Games delegation



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## Sports Desk

Iran has added 26 slots to its delegation for the upcoming Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games, taking the country's contingent to 308 athletes across 36 sports. The 20th edition of the continental multi-sport event will open at Paloma Mizuho Stadium in Nagoya, Japan, on September 19. The Iranian National Olympic Committee (NOC) had initially confirmed the delegation last week following "a thorough technical review, an assessment of the national federations' performance, the athletes' state of preparedness, and their prospects for success."

However, additional quotas were approved after a late review by the Ministry of Sports and Youth, Mehr News Agency reported on Wednesday. The revised decision means the Iranian contingent - named "Angels of Minab" in memory of the 168 victims, including 120 schoolchildren, killed in a U.S.-Israeli airstrike on Shajareh Tayyebeh Elementary School in Minab, southern Iran, on February 28 - will comprise 214 men and 94 women competing at the Games. Of the additional slots, 16 have been allocated to the men's national handball team, which will

be led by new Croatian head coach Nenad Kljaić. Further quotas have been awarded in shooting, archery, equestrian, athletics, jiu-jitsu, gymnastics, boxing and table tennis. In recent years, Iranian sports authorities have emphasized a "quality over quantity" approach when selecting teams for the Olympics and Asian Games. Nevertheless, calls for a larger delegation emerged in recent days, with several federations seeking additional quotas. Sports Minister Ahmad Donyamali has also reportedly pushed for broader representation, insisting Iran should aim to send one of its largest-ever delegations to the Asian Games.

At the previous Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, Iran fielded 289 athletes - 211 men and 78 women - and finished seventh in the medal table with 13 gold, 21 silver and 20 bronze medals, its lowest placing in the past five editions of the Games. The country's most successful campaign came at Tehran 1974, where it won a record 81 medals, including an all-time high of 36 golds, to finish runner-up to Japan in the overall standings. In more recent editions of the Games, Iran's best finish came at Guangzhou 2010, where it placed fourth with a haul of 20 gold, 15 silver and 24 bronze medals.

## FIBA World Cup Asian Qualifiers: Iran's Group E opener moved to Philippines amid regional tensions

## Sports Desk

Iran's men's national basketball team will play its designated home fixture against New Zealand in Pasay, the Philippines, when the second round of the FIBA Basketball World Cup Asian Qualifiers gets underway on August 27. The decision came after the sport's international governing body, FIBA, ordered all first-window matches in Group E to be staged in the Filipino city due to regional security concerns following recent military tensions in the Middle East. Iran was also stripped of home-court advantage in the first round for the same reason, with its designated home games against Iraq, Jordan and Syria relocated to neutral venues in Zouk Mikael, Lebanon, and Amman, Jordan.

The opening window of the second round will also see Iran face the Philippines on August 31 as part of six Group E games to be played over five days in Pasay. Iran advanced to the second round after defeating Syria twice, either side of an emphatic 67-49 victory over West Asian rival Jordan last week, to finish top of Group C, and will carry over a 6-1 record into Group E, which also features reigning three-time Asia Cup champion Australia, Jordan, and Syria. Iran will conclude the qualifiers with an away game against Australia on February 28 next year. The top three teams from each of the two second-round groups, along with the best fourth-placed team, will qualify for the 2027 FIBA Basketball World Cup in Qatar.

## AVC Girls' U18 Volleyball Championship: 'Experience was priority': Iran coach shrugs off poor campaign

## Sports Desk

Head coach Akram Qahremani said her team prioritized gaining experience over results after Iran endured a disappointing campaign at the Asian Girls' U18 Volleyball Championship in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand. Iran suffered a 3-2 defeat (23-25, 25-19, 25-18, 16-25, 15-12) to Hong Kong on Tuesday to finish 12th in the 16-team tournament, its lowest-ever placing in nine appearances since making its debut in 2008. The result marked a significant step back for Iran, which had recorded its best-ever finish at the tournament in 2024 by placing sixth. "Our players made fewer mistakes on serve than in previous matches, and it was a very good

performance overall," Qahremani said after the match. "However, at certain stages, Hong Kong's experience made the difference, and our players were unable to manage the crucial moments." The head coach stressed that the primary objective of Iran's campaign was player development rather than immediate results. "Our approach throughout this tournament was to gain experience and develop players who can contribute to Iranian volleyball in the years ahead," she said. Qahremani added that the Iranian Volleyball Federation has adopted a long-term strategy for the girls' U18 national team, acknowledging that building a competitive squad will require patience.

"The federation has adopted a long-term strategy for the girls' U18 national team, so achieving success will naturally take time," she said. "I hope we can fulfill the federation's objectives in the coming years and that this team will produce better results overall." Iran began its campaign with a 3-1 loss to the Philippines before falling in straight sets to Indonesia and Japan to finish bottom of Pool C. The team then defeated Australia in four sets before losing 3-0 to Chinese Taipei and concluding its campaign with the five-set defeat to Hong Kong.



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