

'Major achievement': Iranian basketball chief hails World Cup qualifying campaign

Sports Desk

Iran Basketball Federation president Javad Davari has praised the national team's resilience after it topped its group in the first round of the 2027 FIBA World Cup Asian Qualifiers, describing the squad's three consecutive victories as "a major achievement" amid significant changes to the roster and difficult circumstances in the buildup to the final qualifying window in July. Iran defeated Syria twice, either side of a revenge victory over Jordan in Amman, to finish atop Group C with a 5-1 record. "The national team completed this stage despite being deprived of hosting rights because of the regional situation and FIBA's decisions," Davari told Mehr News Agency. "In the middle of the campaign, we were also affected by the Ramadan War, which had a significant impact on the team's progress." Davari recalled that Iran held a training camp in Qatar before traveling to Beirut for the second qualifying window in March, where it suffered its only defeat of the campaign against Jordan. He said the circumstances surrounding that game had affected the result, while the escalation of

the conflict afterward led to the postponement of Iran's second fixture of the window against Syria. Following the end of hostilities, Iran resumed preparations under Greek head coach Sotiris Manolopoulos despite having no opportunity to play warm-up matches. He described the 72-68 victory over Syria in the rescheduled game in late June as a turning point, saying it helped restore the players' confidence heading into the decisive double-header. "Syria has invested heavily in basketball and strengthened its squad with naturalized players," he said. "Jordan is also an experienced basketball nation with a naturalized player in its lineup and the advantage of hosting us, yet we still beat them. Considering the war, the lack of preparation matches and everything the team went through, the players' performance was completely satisfactory." Davari added that Iran's recent success was even more impressive because the national team had undergone two separate rebuilding phases. The first overhaul was part of a planned youth movement aimed at refreshing the squad, while the second came unexpectedly fol-



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lowing the departures of experienced players, including Behnam Yakhchali, Mohammad Amini and Sina Vahedi. "Those departures forced further changes to the squad, but the new group performed very well," he said. Iran has been drawn alongside Australia, New Zealand, the

Philippines, Jordan and Syria in second-round Group E, with its opening "home" game against New Zealand scheduled to be played in Pasay after FIBA moved all Group E fixtures in the August window to the Philippine city. Davari said no decision had yet been made regarding hosting rights for the fifth and sixth qual-

ifying windows and expressed hope that Iran would be allowed to stage those games on home soil. He confirmed that the national team would reconvene after a short break, with preparations beginning under Iranian assistant coaches before Manolopoulos returns from the FIBA U18 Asia Cup

qualifiers, where he is currently overseeing Iran's junior team. The Greek coach is then expected to take a two-week vacation before rejoining the senior squad. Davari also stressed the importance of arranging international friendlies ahead of the second round after previous attempts to organize warm-up matches fell through. "We made serious efforts to secure friendly games before the last three qualifiers, but negotiations with several countries did not produce results," he said. "This time we will pursue the matter much more strongly because every game in the next stage will be crucial to qualifying for the World Cup." The federation chief also revealed that Iran is continuing to identify players of Iranian heritage living abroad following the successful inclusion of Iranian-American Ryan Salehi in the recent qualifiers. "We are monitoring players with Iranian roots, whether both parents are Iranian or one parent is Iranian," Davari said. "If they are eligible and willing to represent Iran, they will be introduced to the head coach for technical evaluation. Strengthening the squad remains one of our priorities."

Behnejad gives Iran injury scare ahead of VNL Week 3



Iranian setter Arshia Behnejad (15) is seen in action during a 3-1 victory over Cuba in the FIVB Men's Volleyball Nations League Week 2 in Orléans, France, on June 28, 2026.

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Iranian setter Arshia Behnejad faces a race against time to be fit for Week 3 of the FIVB Men's Volleyball Nations League after suffering a knee injury during a training session on Friday. The Iranian squad is in Kladovo, Serbia, ahead of the final week of the preliminary round, which begins on Thursday in Belgrade. Iran will open its campaign in the Serbian capital with a daunting clash against surprise package Ukraine, which sits fifth in the standings with a 5-3 record. Head coach Roberto Piazza's men will then face Germany and Slovenia before wrapping up the pre-

liminary phase against Turkey on July 19. Behnejad has been Piazza's first-choice setter, and his absence would be a major blow for the Italian coach, who is eager to see his team continue its recent improvement after a difficult start to the tournament. Iran defeated Cuba 3-1 last time out to snap a four-match losing streak and climb to 14th in the 18-team standings, having won just two of its first eight matches.

Pleased with progress

Piazza, meanwhile, said he has been encouraged by the significant progress his team made in Week 2 despite losing three of its four

matches, adding that the training camp in Serbia had provided an ideal opportunity to reflect on the team's performances and build momentum for the upcoming fixtures. "Although we had only one victory in the first week, we made significant progress against major teams such as France, the United States, Japan and Cuba in the second week," Piazza said. "That had a huge impact on the players' confidence." "The most important thing is that the players now believe success is completely in their own hands," he added. "From the very first day, I tried to create that mentality within the team, and now I can

see that they truly believe it. For me, that was the greatest achievement of our camp in Serbia." "This week could be a defining moment for us," Piazza said. "Our first match is against Ukraine, and I'm sure they will be looking to avenge last season's defeat. Both teams will be fully prepared." "It will be a very difficult week, but at the same time it is a great opportunity to prove, just as we did against Japan, France and the United States, that we belong among the world's top teams," he said. "In the end, the outcome of these matches may come down to just one or two points."

FIBA U18 Asia Cup 2026 WABA Qualifiers: Iran edges host Jordan to advance

Sports Desk

Iran defeated host Jordan 80-77 in Amman on Friday to secure a place at the FIBA U18 Asia Cup, which begins on August 13 in Ahmedabad, India. Mohammad Yashar Kamalkhaledi recorded 15 points, eight rebounds and three assists as Iran maintained its perfect record in the West Asia sub-zone qualifiers, sealing qualification with one game to spare ahead of its final fixture against Lebanon. Amirreza Azari added 13 points, while Mohammad Shamsi (12), Soheil Soleimannejad (10) and Mohammadsaleh Pakgohar (10) also scored in double figures. Tamer Anky led Jordan with a game-high 23 points and 13 assists for a double-double, while Mohammad Badwan also scored

23 points. Mutaz Swais and Laith Sahlieh chipped in with 14 points apiece. Iran opened its campaign with a 97-87 victory over Palestine on Tuesday before routing Iraq 96-29 and defeating Syria 82-61. The top three teams in the round-robin tournament will

qualify for the continental championship, which also serves as a qualifier for the 2027 FIBA Under-19 Basketball World Cup. The four semifinalists at the Asia Cup will earn berths at the global tournament, scheduled to be held in Pardubice, Czechia, in June next year.



● FIBA

Zandi leads taekwondo squads into Chuncheon double-header

Sports Desk

Iran's men's and women's taekwondo teams departed for Chuncheon on Friday ahead of two major events in the South Korean city. The three-day WT World Cup Team Championships will begin on Tuesday, followed by the Korea Open G1 tournament. Reigning world and Asian champion Abolfazl Zandi headlines Iran's star-studded men's squad, which also features Olympic silver medalist Mehran Barkhordari, Asian champions Mahdi Hajimousaei and Amir sina

Bakhtiari, Asian bronze medalist Amirreza Sadeqian, and Mohammad Hossein Yazdani. Payam Khanlarkhani will make his debut as Iran's head coach after replacing interim boss Amir Tajik, who guided the team to a runner-up finish behind South Korea at the Asian Championships in Ulaanbaatar in May. In the women's competition, Iran will be represented by Yalda Valinejad, who arrives fresh off a bronze-medal finish at the Asian Championships, while 20-year-old prospect Hasti Mohammadi will look to build on her



● WORLD TAEKWONDO

breakthrough campaign at last year's Islamic Solidarity Games, where she claimed bronze on her senior international debut. Baran Nemati and Fereshteh Ahmadi, meanwhile, will be eager to bounce back after missing out on the

podium at the Asian Championships. Head coach Mahrouz Saei recently said the two tournaments in Chuncheon would play a decisive role in finalizing Iran's women's squad for the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in September.