

Former Iran coach Ataei warns against 'excessive scrutiny' of national volleyball team

Sports Desk

Former Iran men's volleyball head coach Behrouz Ataei has praised the national team's progress under Italian Roberto Piazza, warning that excessive scrutiny from the media and pundits could undermine the players' performances by creating unnecessary pressure.

Iran will resume its Volleyball Nations League (VNL) campaign against Ukraine in Belgrade on Wednesday before taking on Germany, Slovenia and Turkey in the third and final week of the preliminary phase.

The young Iranian side has managed just two wins from its first eight matches, sitting 14th in the 18-team standings, but Ataei believes its long-term objectives extend beyond immediate results in the annual competition.

"Iranian volleyball is going through a very challenging year and an extremely complex process," Ataei said.

"Our goal is not limited to achieving results in the Volleyball Nations League. Maintaining our readiness for the Asian Championship and improving our position in the FIVB world rankings are our main priorities."

Ataei last guided Iran to the VNL



● FIVB

Finals in 2022, a year after leading the country to its most recent Asian title.

As if Iran needed extra motivation to pursue a fifth Asian crown in eight editions when the championship begins on September 4 in Fukuoka, Japan, the winner will secure direct qualification for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games—a prize Ataei described as "strategically im-

portant for both the Ministry of Sport and the National Olympic Committee."

Assessing Iran's performances in the opening weeks of the VNL, Ataei acknowledged that the results had not always matched expectations but insisted the team's overall trajectory has been encouraging.

"The team's preparation was good, the conditions were ac-

ceptable, and every effort was made to provide the tools for success," he said.

"Although the results may not have matched what the coaching staff and fans hoped for, the team has shown positive progress since the opening week."

"In the second week, despite facing stronger and better-prepared opponents, the team produced improved performances, which

shows that it is moving in the right direction."

Iran suffered five-set defeats to Olympic champion France and unbeaten Japan, either side of a straight-sets loss to second-placed United States in Orléans, France, but bounced back with a four-set victory over Cuba.

Ataei also pointed to the lack of adequate warm-up matches before the VNL as one of the structural challenges facing the national side.

"Because we do not have enough warm-up matches before the tournament, we usually do not produce our best performances in the opening week of the Nations League," he said.

"As the players gain more match experience, the team's performances naturally improve."

The former coach criticized what he described as excessive attention surrounding the national team, arguing that constant public debate over technical matters has become counterproductive.

"Our national team is under far too much scrutiny, and too many people are commenting on every detail," Ataei said.

"Coaches, analysts and the media are discussing issues that should remain within the team. This level of interference only creates anxiety and concern for both the

players and the coaching staff." He added that the psychological burden is affecting the team's performances.

"Our players are constantly worried about results, and that stress only increases the pressure," Ataei said.

"A team that is always thinking about the outcome cannot perform as freely as it would in a calm environment. The national team needs genuine peace of mind so the players can play with patience and confidence."

Ataei expressed confidence in Piazza and the current squad, saying any existing shortcomings can be addressed.

"I have complete faith in these players and their abilities," he said.

"With the wisdom of the coaching staff, the road ahead will improve our overall quality. Everything is in place for success, and any weaknesses can be corrected," added the Foolad Sirjan head coach.

"Our strategy for the Asian Championship is extremely important because qualifying for the Olympics will make our future path much smoother," Ataei said.

"I hope the team can deliver outstanding performances and bring joy to the people of Iran and the country's volleyball family."

Taipei Asian Open 2026: Iranian judokas bag silver, bronze in men's event



Iran's Elyas Parhizgar (white, pictured at May's Algiers African Open, won the men's -81kg silver medal at Taipei Asian Open 2026 event.

● AJU

Sports Desk

Iranian judokas won one silver and one bronze medal at the 2026 Taipei Asian Open in Chinese Taipei.

Elyas Parhizgar claimed silver in the men's -81kg class on Sunday, while Abolfazl Mahmoudi secured a shared bronze in the -66kg event.

Parhizgar, who has collected three gold medals on this year's African Open circuit, opened his campaign with a victory over South Korea's Kang Ryongku before defeating Lithuania's Algirdas Zulus to reach the semifinals.

The former Asian junior silver medalist then beat South Korea's Ko Jae Kyo-

ung to book his place in the final, where he fell to another South Korean, Park Heewon, in the gold-medal contest.

Mahmoudi, meanwhile, bounced back from a semifinal defeat to South Korea's Ryu Seunghwan by beating Jeon Seungbeom to earn a shared bronze alongside Kazakhstan's Nursultan Zaizagaliyev.

Elsewhere, another Iran-South Korea clash saw Amirabbas Choopan lose to Lim Seong in the round of 16 of the men's -90kg event.

In the women's competition, Iran's Maryam Barbat narrowly missed out on a medal in the -78kg category after los-

ing to South Korea's Lee Jeongyun.

The two-day tournament formed part of Iran's preparations for September's Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games, although the country has yet to confirm its men's and women's squads for the continental multi-sport event.

Iranian Judo Federation president Arash Miresmaeili said in June that the country had been allocated six quota places for the Asian Games. However, Azerbaijani head coach Rashad Mammadov will have the final say on the selection of Iran's representatives, with medal prospects taking precedence over filling all available quota spots.

Asian Boys' U18 Volleyball Championship: Iran beats India to maintain perfect start

Sports Desk

Iran continued its perfect start to the AVC Boys' U18 Volleyball Championship in Haikou, China, with a 3-1 victory (29-27, 22-25, 25-17, 25-22) over India on Monday.

The most successful team in the tournament's history, Iran opened its bid for a record-extending eighth title with a comfortable straight-sets win (25-17, 25-20, 25-13) over the Philippines a day earlier.

Monday's victory kept Iran atop the Pool B standings ahead of its final preliminary-round match against Bahrain on Tuesday. Bahrain has suffered back-to-back 3-1 defeats to India and the Philippines.

Iran head coach Abdolreza Alizadeh said his side outperformed India "in every aspect of the game" despite

being pushed hard in the second set.

"We had a very tough match today. We didn't expect India to perform at that level. They served very well and executed their first-ball attacks effectively in the second set, but as the match went on, we gradually took control and eventually won," Alizadeh said.



main top of Pool C, while Thailand swept Kyrgyzstan 3-0 (25-11, 25-16, 25-16).

In Pool D, South Korea maintained its perfect record with a 3-0 (25-21, 25-18, 25-13) victory over Saudi Arabia, while Chinese Taipei defeated Indonesia in straight sets (26-24, 25-16, 32-30) in Pool A.

The top two teams from each of the four pools will advance to the quarterfinals.

The four semifinalists will qualify for the 2027 FIVB Boys' U19 World Championship.



Iranian players celebrate a point during a 3-1 victory over India in the AVC Boys' U18 Volleyball Championship in Haikou, China, on July 13, 2026.

● RASOUL SHIRDEL/VOLLEYBALL.IR

WT World Cup Team Championships:

Iran to face Thailand in men's opener

Sports Desk

Iran's men's team will kick off the defense of its World Taekwondo World Cup Team Championships title against Thailand in Chuncheon, South Korea, today.

The draw for the men's event was held on Monday, with the eight participating teams learning their path to the title in the 14th edition of the

competition, which features 84 male and female athletes from nine countries.

A victory over Thailand would see six-time champion Iran face either China or India in the semifinals.

On the other side of the bracket, Morocco and Kazakhstan will square off for a place in the last four, while top seed South Korea will meet the winner

of the clash between Russia and Indonesia in the other quarterfinal.

Iran has named a strong squad for the three-day showpiece, which will be followed by the Korea Open G1 tournament in the South Korean city.

Reigning world and Asian champion Abolfazl Zandi headlines the star-studded roster, which also includes Olympic silver medalist Mehran Bark-

hordari, Asian champions Mahdi Hajimousaei and Amirina 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.