

Asian Boys' U18 Volleyball Championship: 'Exceptional' Iran beats Japan to win first title in 12 years

Sports Desk

Iran came from behind to defeat Japan 3-1 (23-25, 25-22, 25-17, 25-22) in the final and claim a record-extending eighth Asian Boys' U18 Volleyball Championship title in Haikou, China, on Saturday.

Iranian prodigy Abolfazl Pasha-Amiri capped off his remarkable campaign with 26 points before picking up the Most Valuable Player and Best Opposite awards at the closing ceremony.

Outside hitter Nima Piri and middle blocker Milad Salari-Toumaj also reached double figures, contributing 11 points apiece, as Iran lifted the trophy for the first time since 2014 after finishing runner-up to Japan and China in the 2022 and 2024 editions, respectively.

Japanese opposite and captain Hikaru Tanaka led all scorers with 28 points, though it was not enough to help his team claim a fourth title in six editions. Japan opened the final with confidence, edging a tightly contested first set through disciplined defense and precise attacking. Iran responded immediately, raising its level in the second set to level the match.

From there, Iran took control of the contest. The eventual champions dominated the third set 25-17 before holding off a determined Japanese fightback in the fourth, closing it out 25-22 to complete the four-set victory.

The triumph marked another memorable achievement for Iran's rising stars, whose resilience, teamwork, and



Iranian players celebrate on the podium after winning the Asian Boys' U18 Volleyball Championship title in Haikou, China, on July 18, 2026.

consistency carried them through the week-long tournament.

There was further joy for the Iranians as Pedram Heidari Sefat was named

joint Best Middle Blocker alongside Japan's Haru Sawano, while Amir-Ali Shams received the Best Setter award. "My players were outstanding. They

produced an exceptional performance against Japan today," Iran head coach Abdolreza Alizadeh said after the match.

"They devoted themselves to the team for three months and showed honor, determination, discipline, and exemplary behavior throughout the campaign."

"We were better than Japan from a technical point of view. We performed better in first-ball attacks and transition play, defended very well, and also had the edge in serve reception. Japan was only better in serving, where they scored three more points than us. Overall, we deserved the 3-1 victory, and I am delighted to have won the championship," said the former Iran international setter.

"I dedicate this sweet victory and the Asian title to the people of Iran, as well as to Volleyball Federation president Milad Taqavi for his confidence in us and to the coaches' committee for entrusting this young coaching staff with the team," Alizadeh said.

He also paid tribute to his assistants, who worked tirelessly throughout the team's preparations.

"My coaching staff worked around the clock for three months. The team trained four sessions a day as we selected the final squad," he said.

Iran completed a clean sweep of Pool B, defeating the Philippines and India in straight sets on either side of a 3-1 victory over Bahrain to advance to the quarterfinals.

Alizadeh's side then defeated South Korea 3-1 (25-19, 25-19, 11-25, 25-18) in the quarterfinals before edging host nation and defending champion China in a five-set thriller on Friday to book a final showdown with Japan.

The tournament also served as the qualification pathway for the FIVB Boys' U19 World Championship, with Iran, Japan, China, and Chinese Taipei securing places at next year's event by reaching the semifinals.

Iran will be looking to add to its two world titles, won in 2007 and 2017, after finishing fourth at the previous edition in Tashkent in 2025.

Asian Men's Junior Handball Championship: Iran edges Qatar to get back to winning ways



Iran's Saleh Abbasi celebrates a goal during a victory over Qatar at the Asian Men's Junior Handball Championship in Chuzhou, China, on July 19, 2026.

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Iran edged five-time champion Qatar 26-25 in Group B on Sunday to remain on course for a quarterfinal berth at the Asian Men's Junior Handball Championship in Chuzhou, China. Omid Enayati-joo led Iran with eight goals and was named Player of the Match, while Mahdi Teimouri and Amirhossein Karami added six and five goals, respectively.

The two sides traded blows throughout a closely contested encounter, with Iran's youngsters repeatedly taking the lead against one of the tournament favorites.

Qatar, which has long relied on naturalized players to bolster its squad,

struggled to cope with Iran's disciplined tactics and energetic play. Iran goalkeeper Hossein Khojasteh produced a string of crucial saves in the closing stages to frustrate the Qataris and preserve his team's narrow advantage. The victory, Iran's second in four matches, lifted the team to second in the Group B standings with five points, level with the United Arab Emirates but behind on goal difference. Iran began its campaign with an impressive 29-27 victory over Kuwait—the most decorated team in the tournament's history alongside Qatar—but suffered a 29-28 defeat to South Korea, the runner-up in the previous edition, before sharing the

spoils with the UAE in a 25-25 draw on Friday.

Iran will return to action today against two-time defending champion Japan before concluding the preliminary round against India on Tuesday.

The top four teams from each of the two groups will advance to the quarterfinals. Iran finished fifth in the 2024 edition, while its best-ever result came in 2008, when it claimed the silver medal after losing to Kuwait in the final.

The championship also serves as Asia's qualifier for the 2027 IHF Men's Junior (U21) World Championship in North Macedonia, with the four semi-finalists securing places at the global showcase.

Davis Cup Asia/Oceania Group III: Iran beats Jordan to complete unbeaten campaign

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Iran defeated Jordan 2-0 in the final on Monday to complete an unbeaten run and win the Davis Cup Asia/Oceania Group III title in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Having already secured a maiden promotion to the World Group II Play-offs, Iran capped off its campaign by overcoming Jordan in both singles rubbers. Samyar Elyasi gave Iran the early advantage, rallying from a set down to defeat Mousa Alkotop 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 in the opening singles rubber.

Play was then suspended for several hours because of heavy rain before action



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resumed after conditions improved.

Ali Yazdani sealed the title for Iran in the second singles rubber, also recovering from a set down to beat Mohammad Alkotop 4-6, 6-4,

6-1 and hand his team an unassailable 2-0 lead.

Coached by Hamid Naddaf, Iran completed the tournament without defeat, having also beaten host Malaysia, Vietnam, and

Saudi Arabia during the group stage.

The Asia/Oceania Group III competition featured eight teams split into two groups. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Vietnam competed in Group B, while Uzbekistan, the Philippines, Jordan, and Singapore made up Group A.

The top three finishers earned promotion to the 2027 Davis Cup World Group II Play-offs, with Iran booking its place by reaching the final before going on to lift the championship trophy.

Saudi Arabia defeated Singapore 2-0 earlier in the day to join Iran and Jordan in securing promotion.

Iranian striker Moghanlou joins Tractor SC

Sports Desk

Iran international striker Shahriar Moghanlou has joined Tractor SC as a free agent following the expiration of his contract with Ittihad Kalba, the Persian Gulf Pro League club announced on Sunday, ending weeks of speculation over his future. The 31-year-old scored 17 goals and provided eight assists in 52 appearances across all competitions for Kalba after joining the Emirati top-flight side two

seasons ago. A two-time Persian Gulf Pro League Golden Boot winner with Sepahan, Moghanlou is expected to replace Croatian forward Domagoj Droždek in Tractor's attack. Moghanlou, who won the Iranian league title with Persepolis in 2021, was part of Iran's squad at the 2026 FIFA World Cup in North America.

He started Iran's opening Group G match, a 2-2 draw against New Zealand, before making substitute ap-

pearances in the goalless draw with Belgium and the 1-1 draw against Egypt, as Iran finished third in the group and failed to advance to the knockout stage. Moghanlou becomes Tractor's fourth major signing of the summer after Hadi Habibinejad, Mohammad Daneshgar, and Parsa Jafari, as the Tabriz club strengthens its squad ahead of its Persian Gulf Pro League title defense and AFC Champions League Elite campaign.

