

Sports Desk

Iranian national teams learned their opponents for the upcoming Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games after the draw ceremony for several team sports was held on Thursday.

The 20th edition of the continental multi-sport event will open at Paloma Mizuho Stadium in Nagoya, Japan, on September 19.

In the men's volleyball tournament, which will feature 16 teams, Iran will begin its bid for a fourth successive gold medal in Pool B against Indonesia, Thailand, and Kyrgyzstan from September 27.

With the men's competition kicking off only two weeks after the conclusion of the Asian Championship – where the continent's lone berth at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics will also be at stake – Iran and fellow Asian powerhouse Japan may opt to field second-string squads for the Games.

Tough football fate

New Iran U23 head coach Hossein Abdi will face a daunting task in his debut campaign after his team was drawn in a tough Group B alongside China, North Korea, and the United Arab Emirates.

China will look to build on its impressive runner-up finish at the U23 Asian Cup in January, while North

Iranian teams discover Asian Games opponents



● VARZESH3

Korea will also fancy its chances as a traditional heavyweight in Asian age-group football.

The UAE may attract less attention than China or North Korea, but its significant progress in academy development and talent identification programs in recent years cannot be overlooked, and it could well emerge as one of the teams capable of upsetting the balance in the group.

The runner-up in the group could face overwhelming

favorite Japan in the first knockout round.

The 16-team men's football tournament will get underway on September 14.

A difficult group stage also awaits Iran's men's handball team.

Also under a new head coach, Croatian Nenad Kljaić, Iran has been pitted against reigning Asian champion Bahrain, Kuwait – bronze medalist at January's Asian Championship – record nine-time continental champion South Korea,

and Kazakhstan in Group B. The handball tournament will begin on September 20, with Qatar, Japan, China, and Hong Kong making up Group A.

Kabaddi hopefuls

Iran's men's and women's teams will be among the favorites, alongside India and Chinese Taipei, in the kabaddi competition, having collected three medals between them over the past two editions, including a clean sweep of the men's



● PAYAM SANI/volleyball.ir

and women's gold medals in 2018.

Beaten by India in the 2022 final, Iran is in Group B of the men's tournament alongside Nepal, Thailand, Pakistan, and Malaysia. India, Japan, Chinese Taipei, South Korea, and Bangladesh are in Group A.

Iran's women's team, which was unfortunate to miss out on the podium at Hangzhou 2022 after losing to Nepal in the bronze-medal match, has been drawn against Japan, Bangladesh, and India

in Group A, with Sri Lanka, Thailand, Chinese Taipei, and Nepal in Group B.

The kabaddi competition will begin on September 21. In the men's water polo tournament, Iran will open its campaign in Group B against 2022 silver medalist China, Singapore, and South Korea from September 26 at Nippon Gaishi Hall.

Iran won bronze – its first medal since claiming gold on home soil in 1974 – in 2018, but lost to Kazakhstan in a shootout in the

bronze-medal match at Hangzhou 2022.

Kazakhstan, Japan, Thailand, and Hong Kong make up the other group in the eight-team competition.

Named "Angels of Minab" in memory of the 168 victims, including 120 schoolchildren, killed in a U.S.-Israeli airstrike on Shajareh Tayyeb Elementary School in Minab, southern Iran, on February 28, the Iranian delegation will comprise 214 male and 94 female athletes competing across 36 sports at this year's Asian Games.

Reigning world karate champion Atousa Golshadnejad and men's national kabaddi captain Fazel At-rachali have been named Iran's flag bearers for the opening ceremony.

At Hangzhou 2022, Iran fielded 289 athletes and finished seventh in the medal standings with 13 gold, 21 silver, and 20 bronze medals—its lowest placing in the past five editions of the Games.

Iran's most successful Asian Games campaign came in Tehran in 1974, where it won a record 81 medals, including an all-time high of 36 golds, to finish second behind Japan in the overall standings.

In more recent editions, Iran's best performance came at Guangzhou 2010, where it finished fourth with a haul of 20 gold, 15 silver, and 24 bronze medals.

Asian Men's Junior Handball Championship:

Iran beaten by Bahrain, misses out on world spot

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Iran suffered a 31-24 defeat to Bahrain in the quarterfinals of the Asian Men's Junior Handball Championship in Chuzhou, China.

Failing to reach the last four also meant Keyvan Sadeqi's men missed out on a continental berth at the 2027 IHF Men's Junior (U21) World Champion-

ship in North Macedonia. Ahmed Eid led Bahrain – winner of two bronze medals in the previous three editions – with eight goals, while Ali Abbas added seven. Amirhossein Karami was Iran's top scorer with seven goals, followed by Omid Enayatijoo with four.

The defeat came as a bitter blow for the Iranian

team, which had produced impressive performances to advance from a daunting Group B featuring two-time defending champion Japan, 2024 runner-up South Korea, five-time champion Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and India. Iran got off to a flying start by defeating Kuwait 29-27 before suffering a narrow 29-28 defeat to

South Korea and sharing the spoils with the UAE in a 25-25 draw. Iran then returned to winning ways with a 26-25 victory over Qatar but suffered another heartbreaking defeat, losing 28-27 to Japan, before concluding the group stage with a commanding 63-14 victory over India on Tuesday.

Iran will now look to em-

ulate its fifth-place finish from the 2024 edition, beginning with a 5th-8th classification match against the loser of the quarterfinal between South Korea and Chinese Taipei later on Friday at Chuzhou International Handball Hall.

In the other quarterfinal on Friday, Group B winner the UAE defeated China 37-28 to advance.



● IRIHF

ISSF World Cup 2026 Hangzhou:

Rostamian wins bronze in 10m air pistol

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Iranian shooter Hanieh Rostamian won the bronze medal in the women's 10m air pistol event at the latest ISSF World Cup stop of the 2026 season in Hangzhou, China, on Friday.

The Iranian Olympian shot 579-25x to finish eighth in qualification in the morning session before scoring 221.0 points in the final later in the day, securing the fourth World Cup medal of her career.

China's Yao Qianxun produced a composed performance under immense pressure to claim the title, edging India's Sainyam by the narrowest of margins in one of the closest finals of the season.

The home favorite and the Indian rising star were level after the first two stages of the final, both posting 101.6 points to set the stage for a thrilling battle for gold. The pair remained neck and neck throughout the elimination stages before Yao found just enough with her closing shots to finish on 243.6, edging Sainyam by 0.2 points.

Zeinab Toumari and Samieh Yasi were the other Iranians in the event but missed out on the eight-shooter final after scoring 574 and 566 points, respectively, in qualification.

● MMA



Asian Hockey5s Championship:

Iran defeats Iraq, Saudi Arabia to progress to knockouts

Sports Desk

Iran's U18 men's team secured its place in the knockout stage of the Asian Youth Hockey5s Championship in Muscat, Oman, after defeating Iraq and Saudi Arabia on Friday. Iran produced another impressive display in the return leg of the

group stage, opening the day with a 4-1 victory over Iraq. Mahdi Golestan, who was named Player of the Match, was on target alongside Mohammad Pouya, Kamyar Mohammadnejad, and Amirhossein Rajabi. In its second match of the day, Iran delivered a dominant attacking

performance to thrash Saudi Arabia 7-0. Pouya was named Player of the Match after another standout display, while Parsa Rajabi and Ashkan Zolfagharkhanian each scored twice. Mohammad Taha Abbasi, Pouya, and Golestan also found the net. The victories saw Iran finish comfortably atop

the Men's Challenger bracket and book a place in the knockout stage, where it will face the fourth-placed team from the Elite bracket on Saturday for a place in the semifinals.

The championship also serves as the qualifying tournament for the FIH Hockey5s World Cup later this year.

Iran had made a flying start to the tournament in Muscat on Monday, securing back-to-back victories over Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Competing in its first international tournament, Iran opened its Men's Challenger campaign with a 5-0 victory over Iraq before hammering Saudi Arabia 9-0 to underline its title ambitions.



● AIFH