

Iran volleyball chief shrugs off VNL struggles, throws support behind Piazza

Sports Desk

Iran Volleyball Federation president Milad Taqavi has downplayed the national team's disappointing Volleyball Nations League (VNL) campaign, insisting the competition has never been the federation's primary target while firmly rejecting speculation over the future of Italian head coach Roberto Piazza.

Piazza's side endured an underwhelming preliminary phase at the annual global showpiece, suffering nine defeats in 12 matches to finish 14th in the 18-team standings and miss out on the VNL Finals for a fourth successive year. However, speaking to Iranian state television on Friday, Taqavi said the VNL should be viewed as part of Iran's long-term development rather than a benchmark for success.

"The Volleyball Nations League has never been our ultimate goal in any year," Taqavi said. "It has always been a pathway toward achieving bigger objectives."

Responding to criticism that Iran entered the tournament with limited preparation, Taqavi defended the team's schedule, noting that many of the world's top teams also had minimal warm-up matches before the VNL.

"Some people ask why the national team did not play more friendlies. We played one warm-up match against Brazil. Japan, which won all 12 of its matches, did not play any friendlies.



Iranian opposite Ali Hajipour hits a spike during a Volleyball Nations League game against France in Orléans, France, on June 24, 2026.
● PAYAM SANI/volleyball.ir

Apart from Poland and Ukraine, almost every team, like us, only played one or two preparation matches," he said.

Taqavi nevertheless acknowledged the need to assess the team's performance and revealed that the federation would hold an expert review session next week with analysts and media representatives to examine the reasons be-

hind Iran's disappointing results.

The federation president also sought to end speculation surrounding Piazza's future after reports suggested the Italian could be replaced by a domestic coach ahead of the Asian Men's Volleyball Championship, which will kick off on September 4 in Fukuoka.

Taqavi ruled out any change to the

coaching staff before the continental tournament, stressing that Iran would compete under Piazza's guidance.

"I want to be completely clear on this matter," he said. "There are less than two months until the Asian Championship, and naturally we cannot bring in another foreign coach in such a short period. The process of negotiating and

signing a new head coach is simply not possible within this timeframe."

Taqavi said Piazza's current contract runs until the end of the 2026 season and that the federation would evaluate his performance after the Asian Championship before making a final decision on the next phase of the partnership.

"Our plan is to continue working with Piazza through 2028," he said.

He also dismissed calls to appoint an Iranian coach, arguing that changing the coaching staff so close to a major tournament would only create unnecessary instability.

"What is the point of replacing the head coach less than two months before the Asian Championship, when the team needs calm and should stay away from crisis?" Taqavi said. "I can say with certainty that Iran's national team will not compete at the event under an Iranian head coach."

As if Iran needed any extra motivation to chase a third Asian title in four editions and avenge its defeat to Japan in the 2023 final on home soil, an Olympic quota place will also be at stake in Fukuoka, with the champion securing direct qualification for the Los Angeles 2028 Games.

Asian Youth Chess Championships:

Iranians round off with eight medals

Sports Desk

Iran enjoyed a prolific campaign at the 28th Asian Youth Chess Championships, collecting eight medals across different events in Shenzhen, China.

Young prodigy Ramtin Kavand spearheaded Iran's medal haul in the 11-day tournament by claiming gold in the boys' under-14 standard event.

A gold medalist at last December's FIDE U9-U17 Rapid & Blitz Chess Championships, the FIDE Master shared the spoils with Sri Lankan Candidate Master

Vinuka Dihain Wijerathna in his final-round match to finish atop the standings with 6.5 points.

Elsewhere in the standard competition, Candidate Master Arshia Alaqehmand settled for silver in the boys' under-16 event after finishing level on seven points with Russian FIDE Master Semyon Puzyrevsky, who edged the Iranian on tie-breaks.

Asal Ebrahimi Rashti and Mahsa Alavi also contributed to Iran's haul by winning two silver medals apiece in the girls' competitions.

Ebrahimi finished run-

ner-up to China's Tong Yi in the under-16 standard event after both players concluded with 7.5 points. She then collected the blitz silver with seven points, finishing behind Russia's Alisa Genrietta Yunker (7.5).

Alavi, meanwhile, claimed silver in the girls' under-18 standard event with 6.5 points before repeating the feat in the rapid competition.

Erfan Ahmadi and Bentia Garoosi added two bronze medals to Iran's tally in the boys' under-18 standard and girls' under-10 blitz events, respectively.

Ahmadi finished third in a tightly contested standard event, where the top four players all scored 6.5 points after nine rounds. Garoosi, meanwhile, posted seven points in the blitz competition to finish behind China's Du Mingcheng and Vietnam's Nguyen Vu Bao Chau, who both collected eight points after nine rounds.



Iranian players pose with their medals at the 28th Asian Youth Chess Championships in Shenzhen, China, on July 25, 2026.
● ISNA



Iran looking to retain Greco-Roman dominance at U17 Worlds

Sports Desk

Iran will chase a fifth successive Greco-Roman team title when the U17 Wrestling World Championships get underway in Baku, Azerbaijan, on Sunday.

Armin Esmaili and Ali Esmaili Leivesi will represent the country in the 45kg and 48kg weight classes, respectively, entering the competition on the back of their gold medal-winning campaigns at May's U17 Asian Championships in Da Nang, Vietnam.

Ahmad Badraddini, who missed out on a podium finish at the Asian event, will look to deliver an improved performance in the 51kg division, while Vahid Ashiri will be among the favorites in the 55kg class after also claiming gold in Da Nang.

Amirreza Tahmasbpour (60kg), Amirreza Mehri (92kg), and Ali-Akbar Akou (110kg) are the

other Asian champions in the Iranian squad, with Armin Qoli Galeh (65kg), Asian silver medalist Esmail Zaherdoust (71kg), and Alireza Rezaei (80kg) completing the 10-man roster in the

Azerbaijani capital.

Speaking to the Iran Wrestling Federation's media office ahead of the team's departure, head coach Mohsen Sourian said the squad was traveling to Azerbai-

jan with the sole objective of defending its world title, adding that both the coaching staff and wrestlers had made the most of the last four training camps despite several preparation

programs being canceled due to the wartime conditions in the country.

"We have stood on the top podium for the past four years, and this year our goal remains the same – to defend those titles," said Sourian, who is in his fifth year at the helm of the Iranian squad.

The coach, however, acknowledged the difficulties encountered during the buildup to the tournament.

"Unfortunately, this year, due to the war, we lost a couple of warm-up events, including the Victory Cup in Turkey, as well as a number of training camps," Sourian said. "Nevertheless, our results at the Asian Championships showed that the national team members are in good form."

"After the Asian Championships, we held four camps at the national team training complex.

The conditions were excellent across the board – nutrition, welfare facilities, and all other provisions were fully covered. We did everything in our power to bring the boys as close to full readiness as possible."

Sourian also cautioned that this year's World Championships would be more competitive than previous editions, citing the host nation's pedigree and the return of formidable opponents.

"This year's tournament is tougher, not only because of Azerbaijan's history of world titles but also due to the presence of Russia and Belarus, whose points will count toward the team standings," he said.

Despite the challenges, the head coach expressed unwavering confidence in his squad.

"We are the world champion team, and the best possible conditions have been provided for the boys," the Iranian said.

