

Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games:

Reduced quotas, new rules raise stakes for Iran weightlifters

Sports Desk

Iran's weightlifting team faces a far more demanding task at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games as reduced athlete quotas, new competition regulations, and stronger regional rivals threaten the country's hopes of a prolific campaign.

Weightlifting has traditionally been one of Iran's richest sources of Asian Games gold medals alongside wrestling, but the sport heads into Nagoya under a significantly different format.

The most notable change is the introduction of the "total-only" medal system, with medals to be awarded solely based on combined lifts rather than separate snatch and clean and jerk results. In addition, each nation will be allowed to enter only one athlete in each weight category, making team selection more challenging for countries with multiple medal contenders.

Iran has secured eight quota places for the Games, comprising five men and three women, two fewer than it had at the previous edition in Hangzhou. The men's team will compete in the 75kg, 85kg, 95kg, 110kg and +110kg categories, while the women's representatives will contest the 69kg, 77kg and 86kg divisions. The national men's team's preparations began last week at Tehran's Azadi Sports Complex, with 12 lifters taking part in the



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training camp under head coach Behdad Salimi. The squad resumed training immediately after a training camp and performance trials in Chalous, Mazandaran, as it gears up for the Asian Championships, World Championships and ultimately the Asian Games. The final squad has yet to be con-

firmed. Two more selection trials are scheduled for August 11 and early September, the latter to coincide with the opening week of the domestic Premier League season. Although the names of the preliminary candidates have already been submitted to Iran's National

Olympic Committee, Salimi said the final lineup will depend on performances in the remaining trials.

"We started our preparations on April 8 with a high-altitude training camp in Ardabil before moving to Chalous for sea-level training," the 2012 Olympic

champion said.

"In the first selection trials, the athletes produced world-class lifts. One or two of them even unofficially surpassed world records."

Salimi highlighted several stand-out performances, revealing that Ali Alipour unofficially exceeded the world clean and jerk record, while 18-year-old Hamidreza Zarei lifted just two kilograms below the senior world record and unofficially bettered the world junior mark by two kilograms.

"We have healthy competition in every weight category, and I hope it helps us select the strongest possible team," he said.

Salimi added that the World Championships in China, scheduled one month after the final selection trials, will carry added significance as the first qualifying event for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

"We have a busy year ahead with several Olympic qualifying competitions and the Asian Indoor Games. Our priority is not only to prepare the athletes physically but also to keep them healthy so we can send a strong and balanced team," he said.

The head coach expects Iran to send four or five lifters to the Asian Games, while an eight-member squad is planned for the World Championships. Competition for places remains fierce across the squad. Mohammad Javad Beiranvand and Reza

Baghi are battling for the 75kg berth, while former world champion Mostafa Javadi is competing with Abdollah Beiranvand in the 85kg division after returning from a lengthy back injury.

The 95kg category features a three-way contest between Zarei, Alipour, and Alireza Moeini, while Alireza Nasiri and Farhad Qolizadeh are vying for selection in the 110kg class.

Iran is looking to bounce back from its disappointing campaign at the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games, where it claimed just one medal – Ali Davoudi's silver – despite fielding 10 athletes. It was the country's poorest weightlifting performance in the history of the Games.

Weightlifting Federation president Sajjad Anoushiravani has previously said Iran's best gold medal prospects lie in the three heaviest men's categories.

However, the revised competition format, reduced quotas, and the growing strength of traditional and emerging Asian powers such as China, Uzbekistan, Bahrain, India, Thailand, Qatar and South Korea are expected to make the race for medals considerably tougher.

Many of Asia's leading lifters are also expected to use the Games to earn valuable ranking points on the road to the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics, further raising the standard of competition in Nagoya.

Iranian GM Tabatabaei climbs to world No. 20 in latest FIDE rankings

Sports Desk

Iranian grandmaster Seyyed Mohammad-Amin Tabatabaei climbed four places to a career-high 20th in the men's standard category of the latest FIDE world rankings released for August.

Tabatabaei gained four positions after reaching a rating of 2726, extending his run as Iran's highest-ranked player to four consecutive months. He remains ahead of compatriot Parham Maqsoodlou, who moved up one place to 30th in the world with a rating of 2705.

Norway's Magnus Carlsen retained the world No. 1 spot with a rating of 2823, while Americans Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura occupied second and third places, respectively, both on 2792.

In the women's rankings, China's Hou Yifan remained the world No. 1 with a rating of 2596, ahead of compatriots Lei Tingjie (2561) and Ju Wenjun (2553).

Iran's Melika Mohammadi is ranked 98th in the women's world standings with a rating of 2342.

In the world junior rankings, Sina Movahed slipped one place

to 10th with a rating of 2595, while Bardia Daneshvar remained 23rd on 2572.

Reza Mahdavi dropped five places to 80th, Radin Yadegar is ranked 91st, and Artin Ashraf also fell five positions to 101st.

In the girls' junior rankings, Mohammadi dropped two places to 15th with a rating of 2342, while Sara Davari slipped one spot to 42nd on 2250. Dorsa Sadat Khalafvand is ranked 71st.

Tabatabaei continues to lead Iran's domestic men's rankings ahead of Maqsoodlou, followed by Pouya Idani, Movahed, Daneshvar, Mahdi Gholami, Amirre-

za Pourramazani, Mahdavi, Seyyed Khalil Mousavi, Arash Tahbaz, Yadegar and Ashraf.

In the national women's rankings, Mohammadi remains Iran's top-ranked female player, followed by Mobina Alinasab, Davari, Sadat Khalafvand, Anahita Zahedifar, Anoosha Mahdian, Mitra Asgharzadeh, Rosha Akbari, Dorsa Mohammad Ebrahimkhan, Asal Ebrahim, Maryam Mohammadi and Tannaz Azali.

Iran retained 17th place in FIDE's national team rankings with an average rating of 2573, unchanged from the previous month.



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Asian Women's Volleyball Championship:

Iran determined to learn from past setbacks, says captain Alikhani

Sports Desk

Iran captain Shabnam Alikhani says the national women's team has learned from previous setbacks and is determined to produce a stronger showing at the upcoming Asian Women's Volleyball Championship.

Iran has been drawn alongside host China, Chinese Taipei and Iraq in Pool A of the continental event, which will get underway on August 21 in Tianjin, China.

The tournament marks the third major event in what has been a congested international season for the Iranian team.

Iran retained its CAVA Championship title in June with a final victory over Kazakhstan before enduring a disappointing campaign at the AVC Women's Nations Cup, where it finished seventh in the 12-team tournament in Candon, Philippines.

"We've been in camp for about 20 days and, thankfully, everything is going well," Alikhani said after a training session on Friday.

"The players are fully focused and following the coaching staff's program to prepare for the competition ahead," added the Iranian setter.

Reflecting on Iran's recent campaigns, Alikhani admitted the team struggled to cope

with the physical and mental demands of a packed schedule. "In our previous tournaments, we had a long and demanding trip. Playing in three consecutive tournaments put a lot of pressure on the players," she said.

"In the Nations Cup, which mattered most to us, the psychological pressure and the overall atmosphere affected the team's concentration, and we couldn't achieve the result we wanted."

The captain said those experiences have helped the squad grow as it targets an improved performance at the Asian Championship.

"Those tournaments are behind us now, and we've learned

from them," Alikhani said.

"We've returned to training with complete focus and determination, hoping to reach the level that Iran's women's volleyball deserves."

Alikhani acknowledged the challenge awaiting her team, noting that China will benefit from home support while Chinese Taipei arrives fresh off the runner-up finish at the Nations Cup.

"Despite the tough group, we will give everything on the court and try to deliver our best performance against every opponent," she said.

This year's tournament will mark Iran's ninth appearance. The team finished 10th at the previous edition in Thailand

in 2023, with its best-ever result coming in 2019, when it placed seventh.

With the champion securing direct qualification for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games, China – runner-up in 2023 – will be eager to claim a record-extending 14th continental title and its first since 2015 on home soil.

Chinese Taipei, meanwhile, will look to improve on its ninth-place finish in 2023, while Iraq is set to make its tournament debut.

The top two teams from each of the three pools will advance to the quarterfinals, while the remaining two knockout berths will go to the best two third-placed teams.