

AVC Women's Volleyball Continental Championship:

Iran fights back to stun Chinese Taipei in opener

Sports Desk

Iran got off to a flying start at the AVC Women's Volleyball Continental Championship in Tianjin, China, rallying from behind to stun Chinese Taipei 3-1 (16-25, 27-25, 25-19, 25-14) in Pool A on Friday. Iranian opposite Elaheh Poursaleh chipped in a game-high 25 points, while outside hitter Fati-meh Khalili added 17. Teenage outside hitter Ayda Valinejad and middle blocker Zahra Karimi also reached double figures for Iran, scoring 13 and 10 points, respectively. Tsai Yu-Chun topped the scoring for Chinese Taipei with 14 points, with opposite Chang Yi-Chi finishing on 13. Entering the championship on the back of a runner-up finish at the AVC Women's Volleyball Cup in June, Chinese Taipei was tipped for a comfortable win against Iran, which had finished seventh in June's tournament, and appeared to be on its way to doing so when it eased to victory in the first set.

However, Poursaleh's 13-point contribution, coupled with the introduction of Karimi, turned the contest on its head in the second set, as Iran edged out its opponent in a thrilling finale before coming out on top in the next two sets by commanding margins. With host and record 13-time champion China the overwhelming favorite to top the group, the victory gave Iran a massive boost in its bid for a top-two finish in the pool standings and a place in the quarterfinals. The impressive win also saw Iran surpass the 100-point mark in the FIVB Women's World Ranking for the first time, moving up to 41st with 104.47 points. Dedicating the historic victory to all Iranian women, head coach Alireza Toloukian was full of praise for his players, who "put in a great deal of effort and hard work" to achieve the milestone. "We were much more organized today. It was a truly demanding contest, but the jinx was broken," said the Iranian coach. "I



have always told the national team players that Iran's main rivals in the continent are South Korea, Vietnam, Kazakhstan and Chinese Taipei, and today's

result has opened the way for us to shine further in the tournament." Toloukian still urged his players not to get carried away by the

opening-day triumph and to remain realistic about their prospects against the continent's traditional powerhouses. "We do not want to get ahead of

Iranian players and coaching staff pose after beating Chinese Taipei at the AVC Women's Volleyball Continental Championship in Tianjin, China, on August 21, 2026. ● FIVB

ourselves. Beating China, Japan and Thailand, teams with experience of competing at the World Championship and in the Volleyball Nations League, is not possible for us at the moment. But we have to focus on beating our other rivals," he said. "I was thrilled to see the players manage to overcome the tactical and mental crisis after losing the first set, as they became more comfortable and coordinated as the game wore on," Toloukian said. "From the second set onward, we won the match through our defense and the way we designed our attacks," added the Iranian coach, whose team will next take on China on Monday before concluding the preliminary stage against debutant Iraq the following day at Tianjin Olympic Center Gymnasium.

WT President's Cup:

Iran rounds off kyorugi contests with 16 medals

Sports Desk

Iran enjoyed a prolific kyorugi campaign at the World Taekwondo President's Cup – Asia 2026, collecting 16 medals across the men's and women's competitions to win the team title in Lahore, Pakistan. Danial Bozorgi brought the curtain down on a glorious three days of action for the country by claiming the top prize in the men's -68kg category on Thursday. Having beaten reigning Asian champion Mun Jin-ho of South Korea in straight rounds in the semifinals, Bozorgi went on to defeat Uzbekistan's Shokhijakhon Akhmedov 2-1 (6-0, 7-9, 5-0) in the final to add the seventh gold medal to Iran's haul. The event, however, was one to forget for Olympic silver medalist and Asian

champion Nahid Kiani, who had to settle for a bronze in the women's -57kg class after suffering a 2-1 defeat to familiar foe Kim Yu-jin of South Korea – who had beaten Kiani in the Paris Olympic final – in the semifinals. Elsewhere, Saina Karimi (-46kg) and Sara Soufi (-73kg) won bronze in their respective women's events, while Mohammad-Hossein Yazdani finished joint third in the men's -87kg division. Reigning world and Asian champion Abolfazl Zandi (-58kg), Mahdi Hajimousaei (-63kg), Radin Zeinali (-74kg) and Olympic champion Arian Salimi (+87kg) had won gold in their respective men's events over the previous two days, while Nastaran Valizadeh (-63kg) and two-time world junior champion Hana Zarrinkamar (+73kg) finished atop the podium in the women's competition. Shaparak Najafi was the sole Ira-

nian silver medalist in the event after losing to Thailand's Chutikan Jongkolrat-nawattana in the women's -53kg final. Yalda Valinejad (-63kg), Saghar Mordai (-67kg), Fati-meh Ahmadi (+73kg) and Amir-sina Bakhtiari (-74kg) contributed four bronze medals, as Iran beat South Korea to claim the team crown in the G-3 tournament. South Korea bagged five golds, four silvers and six bronzes, while Kazakhstan stood third in the medal table with two golds and three silvers. Earlier in Lahore, Iranian athletes had collected seven medals, including one gold, in the poomsae competition. Yasaman Limouchi headlined the medal haul with gold in the recognized category and silver in freestyle in the women's competition, while Mobina Sharifimaher, Yassin Akbari and Morteza Zendedel added three silver and three bronze medals.

Olympic champion Arian Salimi (red) was among the Iranian gold medalists at the WT President's Cup – Asia 2026 in Lahore, Pakistan. ● MNA

AFC Women's Champions League:

Didar leaves it late as Khatoon salvages point against Al Nassr

Sports Desk

Iranian top-flight champion Bam Khatoon had a last-gasp equalizer to thank for a 1-1 draw against Al Nassr in their second Group E game in the AFC Women's Champions League 2026/27 preliminary stage in Hisor, Tajikistan, on Thursday. Iranian international striker Sara Didar found the net for Khatoon six minutes into stoppage time to cancel out Clara Luvanga's 84th-minute opener for the Saudi champion. Khatoon, which had beaten CSKA Dushanbe 3-0 in its opener, recovered from a slow start against Al Nassr to come close to breaking the deadlock in the 21st minute, only for Fatemah Shaban to fire tamely at goalkeeper Mona Alowais in a one-on-one encounter. Luvanga, who was also on the scoresheet in the 2-2 draw against Etihad



● AFC

Club, led the Saudi outfit's attack on numerous occasions but saw her efforts fall short at the final hurdle. Both sides ended the first half with Al Nassr having made four attempts at goal compared with Bam Khatoon's two, but neither side had anything to show for its efforts. The four-time Saudi Women's Premier League champion picked up the pace after the break, with Hessa Ali-

sa's lob from inside the penalty area in the 53rd minute skimming over the bar, while Luvanga's long-distance effort moments later was comfortably handled by Iranian goalkeeper Raha Yazdani. With the match seemingly headed for a stalemate, Al Nassr was handed a lifeline when Yasna Jafarnia brought down Shuruq Alhsawi in the 84th minute, with Luvanga stepping up to the penalty spot and

coolly sweeping the ball past a rooted Yazdani. Didar then came to Bam Khatoon's rescue in the dying seconds when she picked up a cross from Shaban on the left and toed the ball past Alowais from the center of the area to earn her side a share of the points. The result left Khatoon second in the group with four points, trailing Jordan's Etihad Club on goal difference. The result means the Iranian outfit must win when the two sides go head-to-head on the final day of the preliminaries on Sunday, as only one team will advance to the group stage of the continent's elite club competition. Iraqi international Shokhan Salihi scored a hat-trick, with Leen Al-Btoush adding a double, to steer Etihad Club to a 5-1 hammering of CSKA Dushanbe later on Thursday.

In-form Sayyadmanesh scores in Lech Poznan's rout of Thun

Sports Desk

Iranian winger Allahyar Sayyadmanesh continued his impressive start to life at Lech Poznan, scoring a goal and providing an assist as the Polish champions routed Swiss club FC Thun 7-0

in the first leg of their UEFA Europa League qualifying tie at home on Thursday. The 25-year-old Iranian set up Swedish winger Patrik Wålemark for the first of his two goals in the 10th minute before finding the net in a one-on-one

situation 10 minutes later. Having joined from Belgian top-flight side KVC Westerlo as a free agent earlier this summer, Sayyadmanesh has contributed four goals and two assists in eight appearances across all competitions.