

AVC Women's Volleyball Continental Championship: Iran makes quick work of Iraq to progress to knockouts

Sports Desk

Iran returned to winning ways at the AVC Women's Volleyball Continental Championship in Tianjin, China, crushing Iraq in straight sets on Tuesday to advance to the quarterfinals.

Less than 18 hours after suffering an expected 3-0 defeat against the formidable hosts – a record 13-time champion at the competition and No. 7 in the FIVB World Rankings – the Iranian girls bounced back to outclass Iraq 25-4, 25-7, 25-5 in a match that lasted just over an hour at Tianjin Olympic Center Gymnasium.

Outside hitter Fatemeh Khalili topped the scoring for Iran with 14 points, while middle blocker Reihaneh Karimi contributed 13. Opposite spiker Elaheh Poursaleh also reached double figures, chipping in 12 points, while middle blocker Zahra Karimi delivered yet another impressive performance with eight points, including two blocks and an ace. The result lifted Iran to two wins in three outings, securing second

place in the Pool A standings. The Iranian girls got their campaign off to a flying start, fighting back for a 3-1 victory over Chinese Taipei – the runner-up at June's AVC Women's Volleyball Cup, where Iran had settled for seventh place.

Iran head coach Alireza Toloukian praised his players' "full concentration" throughout the victory, adding: "We did not want to make even one mistake, and that is what happened."

"Matches against weaker teams can sometimes prove even trickier, as the players need to have the right mindset rather than simply focusing on the tactical aspects of the game," Toloukian said.

"I really wanted to give the younger players an opportunity, but as every single point counts toward our position in the knockout draw, I had to use the key players," he said.

Iran is yet to learn which team it will face in the next round, as the quarterfinal lineup will be determined through a combined ranking system after the conclusion of

the group stage on Wednesday. South Korea, Hong Kong, Indonesia and Australia were all scheduled to play after Iran, with the results determining Iran's next opponent on Thursday or Friday. Toloukian, however, predicted that his team would finish fifth in the overall standings and potentially face Indonesia in the next round.

"We are waiting for the results and will begin the necessary planning as soon as our opponent is determined," he said.

This year's championship marks Iran's ninth appearance at the continental showpiece, with its best result coming in the 2019 edition, when it finished seventh.

Toloukian said the team, which finished 10th in the previous edition in 2023, is aiming to achieve its best-ever result in Tianjin.

"Our goal this year is to set a new milestone," he said. "If we can reach the final four or achieve a good position in the classification matches, that would be a significant achievement."



Iranian players celebrate a point during their straight-set victory over Iraq at the AVC Women's Volleyball Continental Championship in Tianjin, China, on Aug. 25, 2026.
● VOLLEYBALL WORLD

Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games:

Iranian athletics faces race against the clock to deliver on 10-medal goal

Sports Desk

When former Olympic silver medalist Ehsan Haddadi embarked on his term at the helm of the Iranian Athletics Federation two years ago, he vowed that Iran would win a 10-medal haul at the upcoming Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games.

However, with less than a month until the athletics competition kicks off at the multi-sport event, recent performances suggest that Iran faces a difficult challenge to turn that ambitious goal into reality.

Iran has still produced encouraging signs, particularly in the women's events, while several of its leading men remain within striking distance of the Asian Games podium. At the same time, comparisons with the continent's latest rankings and results show that substantial improvements will be required in a number of disciplines.

The latest indication came from a training camp and preparatory competition in Belarus, where 14 Iranian athletes competed in different events. The meeting was not on the World Athletics calendar, meaning its performances do not count as official marks, but it provided a useful assessment of the athletes' form.

Among the most notable performances was that of Zahra Zarei, who twice broke Iranian records. She clocked 51.05 seconds in the 400 meters, improving on the national record she had set earlier this year, before running 23.00 in the 200m to erase Maryam Tousi's seven-year-old mark.

Zarei's progress has made her one of the more credible medal hopes in the women's team.

Her official 400m best before the Belarus race was 52.71, placing her 19th on the Asian list, although her latest 51.05 indicates considerable improvement.



Long jumper Reyhaneh Mobini, pictured at the 2025 Asian Athletics Championships, will be among Iran's medal hopefuls at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games.
● ASIAN ATHLETICS

Reyhaneh Mobini is another prominent prospect in the women's team. The long jumper, who won a historic gold at the 2025 Asian Athletics Championships with a 6.40m effort, has a national best of 6.47m and has continued to show progress in domestic and international competitions. In Belarus, she jumped 6.43m-6.44m. Yet with the leading Asian performers reaching between 6.75m and 6.88m, Mobini will need another significant improvement to challenge for the podium.

A gold medalist at last year's Islamic Solidarity Games, Fatemeh Mohitizadeh, meanwhile, remains Iran's principal hope in the heptathlon. She improved her 100m hurdles mark in Belarus and cleared 1.70m in the high jump, although Iranian

officials stressed that her performance still needs further assessment.

The men's team has perhaps its clearest medal candidate in Mohammadreza Tayyebi in the



shot put. His official 20.75m national record places him third on the Asian list, behind India's Tajinderpal Singh Toor (21.03m) and China's Xing Jialiang (20.95m). Tayyebi also won gold at the 2025 Asian Athletics Championships with 20.32m, beating Xing to the top spot, strengthening the case that he can contend for another major continental medal.

Elsewhere, Iran's sprinters and middle-distance runners face a steeper climb. Hassan Taftian's 10.26-second 100m best places him well outside the leading Asian contenders, while Islamic Solidarity Games champion Ali Amirian's 1:47.23 in the 800m puts him 23rd on the continental list. Arsalan Hamidi is 33rd with 1:47.66.

Those rankings underline the gap Iran must close. At the 2022 Asian

Games, Taftian finished fourth in the 100m with 10.14, demonstrating how even a performance close to his best can leave him just outside the medals.

Iran's broader Asian Games history, however, shows that athletics remains one of the country's established medal-producing sports, with 39 medals – 13 gold, 16 silver and 10 bronze – across different editions. Haddadi accounts for five of those medals, having won four golds and one silver in the discus throw throughout his illustrious career. At the 2025 Islamic Solidarity Games, Iranian athletics produced four medals, including two golds.

The federation's leadership therefore faces a delicate balancing act. Vice president Parisa Behzadi said a second Asian Games medal for Iranian women, following Leila Rajabi's shot put silver in 2018, is within reach but stressed that the athletes must raise their marks further.

The remaining weeks will offer few opportunities for experimentation. Iran's athletes are scheduled to travel to Japan on Sept. 20, with the Asian Games athletics competition approaching rapidly. The national championships in Shiraz will provide another important opportunity to assess their form before departure.

The 10-medal target may ultimately prove optimistic, particularly given the strength of Asian athletics. But the recent progress of Zarei, Mobini and Mohitizadeh, combined with Tayyebi's established continental credentials, gives Iran a foundation on which to build. In Nagoya, however, personal-best performances rather than expectations will determine whether the ambitious target becomes reality.

Asian Men's Youth Handball Championship:

Iran beats Kuwait, secures last-eight spot

Sports Desk

Iran celebrated its second victory in three outings at the Asian Men's Youth Handball Championship in Amman, Jordan, defeating Kuwait 21-18 in Group B on Monday.

Having suffered a narrow 24-22 loss to two-time champion Qatar the previous day, the Iranian boys bounced back in style to beat another traditional powerhouse in Asian handball, securing a runner-up finish in the group and a place in the quarterfinals.

Mohammad-Taha Ebrahim Khanlari led the scoring for Iran with five goals, as the team took a commanding 13-9 lead at halftime. Captain Mahdi Ahmadifar contributed four goals and was named Man of the Match.

Mohsen Hadizadeh, Mohammad Keshavarz, and Farshad Norouzpour also played key roles in the vital victory, each netting three goals.

Iran, which opened its campaign with an impressive 28-20 win over Saudi Arabia—a semifinalist in the previous two editions—will conclude the group phase in a dead rubber against Syria today. Syria sits at the bottom of the five-team group with three losses in as many matches, including a 42-29 rout at the hands of Qatar earlier on Monday.

Iran will next face either host Jordan or Uzbekistan in the knockout phase on Friday.

The battle for third place in Group A will be decided when Jordan and Uzbekistan meet today at Princess Sumaya Hall. Both sides are level on two points, with the hosts holding a slight advantage on goal difference.

Bahrain and South Korea – the most decorated team in the competition with three titles – have already secured a top-two finish in Group A, thanks to a clean sweep of three victories each, ahead of their crucial clash for the top spot today.

