

AVC Women's Volleyball Continental Championship: Etched in history as Iran secures last-four spot

Sports Desk

History was made for Iranian women's volleyball on Friday as the country recovered from a first-set loss to beat Indonesia 3-1 (19-25, 25-16, 25-12, 25-17) and progress to the semifinals of the AVC Women's Volleyball Continental Championship in Tianjin, China. Star opposite Elaheh Poursaleh topped the scoring for Iran with a game-high 29 points, helping head coach Alireza Toloukian's team make amends for its four-set loss to the Southeast Asian side at June's AVC Women's Volleyball Cup, where Iran had settled for seventh place. Outside hitter Fatemeh Khalili and middle blocker Reihaneh Karimi also reached double figures for Toloukian's side, contributing 15 and 12 points, respectively. Iranian outside hitter Fate-

meh Manzouri and middle blocker Zahra Karimi, meanwhile, scored eight points apiece to make their mark in the historic triumph. Friday's win saw Iran climb three spots to 37th in the FIVB Women's World Ranking — a milestone for a team that was ranked as low as 80th two years ago and only won its maiden international gold medal — since the first national team program was launched in 1963 — by claiming the CAVA Championship, which featured four Central Asian countries, last year before successfully defending its title at the expanded tournament in May. The victory was also a clear indication of the significant progress made by the Iranian women in recent years. They finished 10th at the previous edition of the Asian Championship in

2023, while their best-ever result in their previous eight appearances was seventh place in 2019. Iranian girls began their fairy-tale run in Tianjin with a victory over Chinese Taipei — the runner-up at June's AVC Women's Volleyball Cup — producing a remarkable fightback to win 3-1 (16-25, 27-25, 25-19, 25-14). The formidable hosts — a record 13-time champion at the competition — still provided a mammoth test for Toloukian's side, which fell short in straight sets despite putting up a brave fight, particularly in the second set, before losing 25-22 to the world No. 7 on Monday. Iran bounced back in style less than 18 hours later, crushing Iraq 3-0 (25-4, 25-7, 25-5) in a match that lasted just over an hour at the Tianjin Olympic Center Gymnasium to secure a runner-up finish in Pool A.



Iranian players celebrate their historic quarterfinal victory over Indonesia at the AVC Women's Volleyball Continental Championship in Tianjin, China, on August 28, 2026.
● VOLLEYBALL WORLD

FIBA World Cup Asian qualifiers: Iran undone by New Zealand in overtime



Iran's Mohammad Jamshidi (13) shoots during a defeat against New Zealand at the FIBA World Cup Asian qualifiers in Pasay, Philippines, on August 28, 2026.
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Iran got off to a losing start in the second round of the 2027 FIBA World Cup Asian Qualifiers on Friday, suffering a narrow 93-91 setback against New Zealand in the Group E opener in Pasay, Philippines. Early foul trouble for Iran offered an indication of the kind of challenge on hand for Greek head coach Sotiris Manolopoulos, who entered the second round on the back of a 5-1 record in the preliminary stage. The contest played out exactly as advertised: hard, physical defense from both teams, leading to verbal tiffs and subsequent technical fouls. Clearly, it is a rivalry that has not needed decades to materialize. In their only previous tussle, the Asia Cup 2025 third-place game, Team Melli prevailed 79-73. In this repeat bout, the game was tied 14 times, with nine lead changes. New Zealand's biggest lead came in the second quarter; only for Iran to erase an 11-point deficit with a 14-0 run of its own.

The final 20 minutes remained a nip-and-tuck affair. With 54 seconds remaining in regulation, New Zealand's Sam Menenga fouled out, but his front-court namesake Sam Waardenburg stepped up in overtime. With New Zealand leading 93-91 and eight seconds left on the clock, Waardenburg denied Iran a chance to force a second extra period. Earlier, point guard Shea Ili started overtime with a bang, courtesy of a throwdown that came out of nowhere. Ili finished with 24 points and six rebounds. He was ably supported down the stretch by forward Reuben Rangi, who chipped in 13 points, six of them in the extra period. The win marked New Zealand's second overtime triumph in the 2027 World Cup Qualifiers, following a double-overtime victory over the Philippines earlier in July in the first round. Matin Aqajpour topped the scoring for Iran with 19 points, posting an efficiency rating of 15, while

Mohammad Amini, making his first international appearance since last year's FIBA Asia Cup, scored 16 points in 26:55 on the court. Seyyed Mahdi Jafari also reached double figures with 14 points, while veteran Mohammdd Jamshidi, whose most recent appearance for the national team came during the 2023 FIBA World Cup qualifiers, finished with 12. Iran will conclude the opening window of the second round against the Philippines on Sunday before heading to the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games, which start on September 19, where the country will chase a fourth medal in six editions after missing out on the semifinals in Hangzhou 2022. On returning to the World Cup qualifiers, Iran will face powerhouse Australia on November 27, followed by a rematch against the Philippines in the second window. The top four teams in the six-team group, also featuring Jordan and Syria, will qualify for next summer's World Cup in Qatar.

Iran unveils weightlifting roster for Asian Games

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Iran will be represented by six weightlifters, including two women, at the upcoming Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games. The weightlifting competition at the multi-sport event will open on September 23 at the Nagoya City Trade and Industry Centre. The men's lineup was confirmed following the opening day of the Iranian Premier League on Thursday in Tehran, where several unofficial world records were set. Former world and Olympic silver medalist Ali Davoudi will look to improve on his silver medal at Hangzhou 2022 when he gets his campaign underway in the men's +110kg division. A five-time world medalist, including a double gold medalist in 2023, Mirmostafa Javadi, who was sidelined for a lengthy spell with a back problem after missing out on the podium at the 2024 World Championships, will compete in the

men's 85kg class, while Ali Aalipour will be among the medal hopefuls in the 95kg division. Aalipour, who won a snatch silver medal at last year's World Championships, looked to be in top form on Thursday, dominating his event with an impressive 187kg-223kg-410kg performance. The young Iranian lifted six kilograms above the new snatch world standard announced by the International Weightlifting Federation in August, while his clean & jerk effort bettered the mark by three kilograms. A world junior record holder in the clean & jerk and total, Alireza Nasiri will fancy his chances in the 110kg contest after bagging double world silvers last year, though he will still need to post the required marks set by the coaching staff in the final trial before the Games. Meanwhile, Iran will hope for a historic campaign from Mahsa Beheshti and Reihaneh Karimi in the women's competition.

Teenage sensation Beheshti, 17, who will compete in the 86kg category, stole the headlines when she won clean & jerk gold on her international senior debut at last year's Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh before spearheading the country's women's medal hunt at the Asian Youth & Junior Championships in Tashkent by winning a clean sweep of six gold medals. Iran's 69kg representative Karimi also enjoyed a decent campaign in the Uzbek capital, winning bronze medals in the clean & jerk and total. Weightlifting has been Iran's second-most prolific sport — behind wrestling — since the country first took part in the Asian Games in New Delhi in 1951, yielding 33 golds, 31 silvers and 20 bronzes across 17 editions. However, Iran endured a dire run at the previous edition in Hangzhou, managing just a single silver medal, won by Davoudi in the men's superheavyweight division.



Former world champion Mirmostafa Javadi is seen in action in the men's 85kg event on the opening day of the Iranian Weightlifting Premier League in Tehran, Iran, on August 27, 2026.
● VARZESH3