

FIVB Volleyball Boys' U17 World Championship:

Iran crowned champion as youth program continues to pay off

Sports Desk

Iran defeated France 3-1 (25-18, 25-15, 22-25, 25-12) in the final on Saturday to lift the trophy at the FIVB Volleyball Boys' U17 World Championship in Doha.

For all the senior national team's struggles to match up with the global powerhouses in the game, the triumph was yet another testament to Iran's successful youth program, as it marked a fifth world title for the country across different age groups since 2017.

The victory rounded out a dominant run for the Iranian boys, who had to deliver a much-improved performance after finishing runners-up at last year's Asian U16 Championship to win the world title, dropping only two sets in six games on their way to the final. Pakistan was the only team other than France to win a set against Iran – in a five-set thriller in the quarterfinals – though head coach Arash Sadeqiani's team still avenged the two setbacks against its Asian foe at the continental event by beating Pakistan twice in Doha, including a straight-set win in the pool phase.

Having missed out on the semifinals at the inaugural edition two years ago, Iran established early momentum in the final, taking the



Iranian players and coaching staff celebrate with the trophy at the FIVB Volleyball Boys' U17 World Championship in Doha, Qatar, on Aug. 29, 2026.

● AMIRMAHDI AKHOUNDI/IRIVF

opening set 25-18 before extending its lead with a 25-15 win in the second. Setter Akam Ebrahimnejad distributed the ball across several attacking options, with Sina Hazrati, Arash Ashrafi and Azhvan Namazi giving France different threats to contain as Iran moved two sets ahead.

That variety in attack was reinforced from the service line. Iran finished with a remarkable 10 aces, including three each from Hazrati and Ashrafi and two from Ebrahimnejad, using their serves to put pressure on France and cre-

ate more opportunities through blocking and defense.

France managed to bounce back in the third set. Antonin Bonnard remained the main attacking option, while Jaden Ebagne Yon and Enzo Savalli helped the French stay in front through the closing stages. Ebagne Yon put away the attack that completed the 25-22 set, cutting Iran's lead to 2-1.

Iran, however, stayed calm and composed in the fourth set. An 8-4 lead grew to 16-8 as Namazi made his presence felt at the net and Iran continued to turn defensive plays

into attacking opportunities. The gap continued to grow through the latter stages, putting Iran in position to close out the championship. Hazrati led Iran with 19 points from 16 attacks and three aces, while Ashrafi finished with 17 from 14 attacks and three aces. Namazi contributed 16 points, including a match-high four blocks, while Amirreza Faramarzi added nine points and Monib Sheikh seven.

France continued to have a reliable source of points in Bonnard, who led all scorers with 22, all in attack.

Ebagne Yon added 12 points and Savalli nine as the silver medalists finished with 43 attack points and seven blocks against an Iranian side that produced 56 points in attack. "We worked very hard for this title, and winning it is the result of everything the team has put into this tournament," Hazrati, who converted the championship point, said after the match. "We prepared very well for France and knew we had to put pressure on them with our serve, block and defense and create opportunities from our digging.

"I am also very thankful to our fans for the energy they gave us and especially to my family. Without their support, I would not be here, so this championship means a lot to all of us," added the 16-year-old captain.

There was further glory for the Iranian talisman, who was named Most Valuable Player of the tournament, while he was joined by two teammates in the Dream Team.

Hazrati also received the Best Opposite award, completing a stand-out campaign in which he was a consistent scoring presence for Iran from the pool stage through the knockout rounds.

"Being named MVP means a lot to me because I worked very hard for it, but volleyball is a team sport and I could not have achieved this alone," Hazrati said. "Every member of the team gave their best, and my teammates helped me throughout the tournament. Even the consistency I had in scoring came from the work we did together, so I see this award as a result for the whole team, not just for me."

Ebrahimnejad, meanwhile, was named Best Setter after directing the offense during Iran's emphatic run, while Sheikh earned one of the two Best Middle Blocker honors.

AVC Women's Continental Championship:

Iran misses out on podium but promises bright future in women's volleyball

Sports Desk

Iran was beaten in straight sets (25-21, 25-16, 26-24) by Japan to miss out on the bronze medal at the AVC Women's Continental Championship in Tianjin, China, as well as a place in next year's FIVB World Cup in the United States and Canada.

Apart from the second set, the Iranian girls, who had already made history by securing a maiden last-four spot in nine appearances in the competition, went neck and neck with No. 6 in the FIVB World Rankings and even took commanding leads at two stages in the third set before falling short by the narrowest margin. Despite suffering straight-set defeats against two world-class sides in their final two outings, including a semifinal loss to China, which also reached the last four at July's Volleyball Nations League (VNL), the Iranian team will still have every reason to be proud of its six-game run in Tianjin.

Sunday's defeat saw Iran drop one spot to 38th in the World Rankings, though it will still go down as 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.

Iranian opposite Elaheh Poursaleh, the leading scorer in the tournament prior to the final-day action, delivered yet another impressive performance with 15 points, while outside hitters Fatemeh Khalili and Ayda Valinejad contributed 11 and 10, respectively.



Iranian players celebrate a point during a 3-0 loss to Japan at the AVC Women's Continental Championship in Tianjin, China, on Aug. 30, 2026.

● VOLLEYBALL WORLD

Japanese outside hitter Yuki Wada finished with a game-high 19 points, with middle blocker Haruyo Shimamura (14), captain Mayu Ishikawa (11) and outside hitter Yoshino Sato (10) also reaching double figures for Japan, which found a bit of consolation after a 3-1 loss to Thailand on the preceding day had denied it a shot at the

single Olympic berth up for grabs in the final.

With the VNL's Asian trio of China, Thailand and Japan proving to be in a league of their own on the continental stage, it was always going to be a race between the likes of South Korea, Chinese Taipei, Indonesia, Vietnam and Kazakhstan for the one remaining semifinal spot on offer.

Iran, meanwhile, was fancied by few fans and experts after enduring a below-par campaign at the AVC Women's Volleyball Cup in June, settling for seventh place in the continent's second-tier tournament.

The Iranian girls, however, had other ideas as they got off to a flying start in Pool A, fighting back to beat Chinese

Taipei – runner-up at June's event – 3-1 (16-25, 27-25, 25-19, 25-14) in their opening game. Iran fell to an expected defeat against China – the most decorated team in the competition with 13 titles – in three sets (25-14, 25-23, 25-14) in its second outing but recovered to crush Iraq 3-0 (25-4, 25-7, 25-5) in a game that lasted just over one hour at Tianjin Olympic Center Gymnasium to secure a runner-up finish in the group.

The pinnacle of Iran's campaign was yet to come, as head coach Alireza Toloukian's team again produced a remarkable fightback to defeat Indonesia 3-1 (19-25, 25-16, 25-12, 25-17) – avenging the four-set loss to the Southeast Asian side at the Women's Volleyball Cup – and achieve a historic feat.

The final outcome in Tianjin was 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 was seventh place in 2019.

With established stars such as Poursaleh and Khalili, as well as middle-blocker duo Reihaneh and Zahra Karimi, all continuing to flourish, and teen talents such as Valinejad, opposite Setayesh Hosseini and outstanding libero Negar Hashemi entering the fray, the recent campaign could only set the stage for further success for Iran's women's volleyball in the future.

World Taekwondo

Women's Open Championships:

Zarrinkamar provides silver lining in Iran's dire run



Iran's Hana Zarrinkamar (blue) is in action against Lauren Williams of Great Britain in the +73kg final at the World Taekwondo Women's Open Championships in Taiyuan, China, on Aug. 28, 2026.

● WORLD TAEKWONDO

Sports Desk

Teenage sensation Hana Zarrinkamar saved Iran's campaign at the World Taekwondo Women's Open Championships in Taiyuan, China, by winning silver in the +73kg class. Zarrinkamar's medal was the sole success in a dire campaign for head coach Mahrouz Saei's squad, which entered the tournament on the back of a medal-laden campaign at last week's WT President's Cup in Lahore, but saw its six other members finish empty-handed in their respective categories.

Reigning two-time world champion Zarrinkamar picked up where she had left off in her gold-winning run in Lahore, conceding just one round in four victories on her way to the final, including a win over former world bronze medalist Zhou Zeqi of China. In the final, however, the 16-year-old prodigy fell short against her high-profile British opponent, Lauren Williams – an Olympic silver medalist at Tokyo 2020 – losing 11-5 and 16-5 in straight rounds. Despite the final setback, Zarrinkamar still collected 24 valuable ranking points at the G4 tournament, boosting her bid to secure a place at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics.

Fatemeh Ahmadi was the other Iranian in the +73kg category, crashing out after a straight-round defeat to Croatian rising star Magdalena Matic in her first bout.

Elsewhere, Olympic silver medalist Nahid Kiani had a campaign to forget in the -57kg class in Taiyuan. An Asian champion in May, Kiani suffered an early exit after losing to American former world champion Makayla Greenwood in her first outing.

Hasti Mohammadi, meanwhile, was also knocked out in the -57kg class, losing in back-to-back rounds to the host's Zhang Chuling.

In -46kg, Saina Karimi suffered a quarterfinal defeat to China's Ye Xiaoting, while Yalda Valinejad's -62kg run ended after a single bout following a 2-0 defeat to Morocco's Nada Laaraj.

Nastaran Valizadeh made up for her compatriot's setback against the Moroccan practitioner, winning in straight rounds before suffering a 2-0 defeat to the host's Wu Shan-shan in the quarterfinals.

Saghar Moradi got off to a winning start in the -67kg event by beating Russia's Daria Maslii but was beaten in successive rounds by China's Xing Jiani.