

AVC Women's Volleyball Continental Championship:

Iran coach Toloukian rues Asian Games snub after historic run

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Alireza Toloukian believes his team's performance at the AVC Women's Volleyball Continental Championship was "worthy of winning the title itself," while lamenting the team's absence from the country's delegation for the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games later this month.

Iran was beaten in straight sets by Japan on Sunday to miss out on the bronze medal at the continental showpiece in Tianjin, China.

Despite suffering back-to-back defeats against two world-class sides in their final two outings, including a semifinal loss to China, the young Iranian team will still have every reason to be proud of its six-game run, having already made history by securing a maiden last-four spot in nine appearances at the competition. With the formidable trio of Thailand, China and Japan proving to be in a league of their own, 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, entered the tournament as an underdog after enduring a below-par campaign at June's AVC Women's Volleyball Cup in Candon, Philippines, settling for seventh place in the continent's second-tier tournament. Iranian girls, however, beat the odds in Tianjin, fighting back to defeat Chinese Taipei – the runner-up at June's event – in four sets in their Pool A opener, before claiming a historic quarterfinal victory over Indonesia in similar fashion, avenging their four-set loss to the Southeast Asian side at the Women's Volleyball Cup. The poor result in Candon, nonetheless, had already done the damage, as it convinced the Iranian sports authorities to leave the team out of the equation for the Asian Games, a decision in line with the country's medal-focused policy for the multi-sport event and much to the frustration of Toloukian, who argued that regular international exposure is essential if the team is to close the gap with the continent's leading sides.

"With my 22 years of coaching experience, I believe we cannot



● IRIVF

afford to wait until a team has a realistic chance of winning a medal before sending it to the Asian Games," he said. "The Ministry of Sport and the National Olympic Committee need to provide the conditions for the women's national team to participate in different competitions so that the players can improve both the mental and

technical aspects of their game." "The Asian Games are not even on the FIVB calendar, so teams do not participate at full strength. Even countries such as Afghanistan and Nepal compete at the Asian Games, making it more attainable to win a medal than at the Asian Championship."

On his team's display against Japan, the Iranian coach said:

"We played well in the first set against a team with a great history in women's volleyball. We were within touching distance of winning the third set, but Japan was lucky to have a late video challenge [after Iran had converted the set point] go in its favor."

"In future competitions, our players will step onto the court against these teams looking to

win. They realized that they are not inferior to the East Asian teams and that they can compete with them," added the Iranian.

Having previously served as the team's technical director, Toloukian took over from South Korean head coach Lee Do-hee, who parted ways with the senior national team for unknown reasons only weeks before the Asian showpiece got underway, with many believing his different tactical approach ultimately played a part in the historic feat. The coach stressed that Iran should not attempt to replicate the playing style of China, Japan or South Korea.

"Our style of play is different from the likes of China, Japan or South Korea; it is closer to the European teams, and we play our own volleyball."

Despite the disappointment of missing the Asian Games, Toloukian believes the result in Tianjin marked an encouraging start to a long-term project.

"The federation's vision for this team extends through 2028 or 2029. Hopefully, by participating in different competitions, they will be ready to win medals at major events."

Sports Desk

Iran's Saghar Moradi stole the show on the final day of the World Taekwondo Women's Open Championships in Taiyuan, China, marching to the gold medal in the -67kg class without conceding a single round across six bouts.

Entering the tournament fresh off a bronze-winning run at the WT President's Cup in Lahore a fortnight ago, the Iranian rounded out her emphatic campaign with a victory over European champion Styliani Marentaki of Greece. Moradi defeated Daria

World Taekwondo Women's Open Championships: Moradi cruises to gold in -67kg

Maslii in her first bout before beating the host's Xing Jiani and American Chloe Chua to progress to the quarterfinals.

A victory over Croatia's Doris Pole saw Moradi set up a last-four clash with high-profile Serbian Aleksandra Perisic – a silver medalist at the Paris 2024 Olympics – who was also outmuscled in back-to-back rounds by the Iranian.

With the G4 event serving as part of the qualification

pathway for the Los Angeles Olympics, Sunday's triumph helped Moradi collect 40 ranking points in her bid to book a berth at the sporting extravaganza in two years. Moradi's gold took Iran's haul to two medals across three days of action, following Hana Zarrinkamar's silver in the +73kg class on the opening day.

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 formidable British opponent, Lauren Williams – a silver medalist at Tokyo 2020 – losing 11-5 and 16-5 in straight rounds to earn 24 ranking points.

The tournament, however,

proved one to forget for five other members of the Iranian squad, including Olympic silver medalist Nahid Kiani, after they all finished empty-handed in their respective categories. An Asian champion in May, Kiani fell to American former world champion Makayla Greenwood in her first outing in the -57kg contest.

Fatemeh Ahmadi (+73kg), Saina Karimi (-46kg), Hasti Mohammadi (-57kg) and Yalda Valinejad (-62kg) suffered



Iran's Saghar Moradi (c) celebrates after winning the gold medal in the -67kg class at the WT Women's Open Championships in Taiyuan, China, on Aug. 30, 2026.
● WORLD TAEKWONDO

early exits, while Nastaran Valizadeh was beaten by

the host's Wu Shanshan in the -62kg quarterfinals.

FIBA World Cup Asian qualifiers:

Manolopoulos urges Iran to rediscover form after Philippines defeat

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Sotiris Manolopoulos has called on his players to regain the form that saw them go 5-1 in the previous group phase of the FIBA World Cup 2027 Asian qualifiers after suffering a 68-56 defeat to the Philippines.

Sunday's defeat in a packed Mall of Asia Arena in Manila summed up Iran's dreadful start to its second-round Group E campaign, following a narrow 93-91 setback against New Zealand on Friday.

Congratulating the Philippines on "a deserved victory," the Greek head coach expressed frustration with his team's defensive shortcomings and poor shooting in the closely contested encounter.

"This was a bitter and bad



Iran head coach Sotiris Manolopoulos (c) is pictured during a timeout in a game against the Philippines at the FIBA World Cup 2027 Asian qualifiers in Manila, Philippines, on Aug. 30, 2026.
● FIBA

defeat for us, and now we have to find the strength to rebuild the team and get back on track," Manolopoulos said. The coach highlighted the stark disparity in fouls and free-throw attempts, saying Iran's defensive

performance needed significant improvement.

"Despite scoring 56 points, our main problem was on defense," he said. "The Philippines had 23 free throws in the first half alone, while we had only two. By the end of the

game, they had 27 free throws compared with six for us. This shows that we need to significantly improve our concentration and the quality of our defensive play."

Manolopoulos also criticized Iran's inability to capitalize on open scoring opportunities, particularly from beyond the arc.

"We had no problem creating opportunities and getting open shots, but we failed to take advantage of them," he said. "We have excellent shooters on our roster, but making only eight of 31 three-point attempts is simply unacceptable. With those numbers from the free-throw line and from three-point range, it is impossible to succeed in a tight game." The defeat left Iran third in

the six-team group standings, level on 13 points with fourth-place Jordan, ahead of a crunch double-header against Australia and the Philippines in November.

Looking ahead to the remaining qualifying windows, Manolopoulos said Iran must quickly rediscover the style that helped it put together its five-game winning streak in the previous round.

"We had a good performance against New Zealand, and if we had been a little luckier and avoided some mistakes, we could have won that game," he said. "But today, we were not good at all."

"We have to quickly change our style of play back to what it was before the start of this window – the style that brought us five consecutive victories in the previous round. If we want to remain in contention, there is no alternative but to return to that level of authority and confidence."

U17 Beach Wrestling World Championships: Iran, Azerbaijan dominate with six medals apiece

Sports Desk

Iran and host Azerbaijan each bagged six medals, including double gold, to jointly claim the men's team title at the U17 Beach Wrestling World Championships in Baku. Kiarash Torabi and Amir-saleh Javidani spearheaded Iran's medal haul by claiming the top prize in their respective events. Torabi edged out Hooman Kalhori 1-0 in an all-Iranian final in the 70kg division, while Javidani outmuscled the host's Elgun Karimli 3-0 in the 90kg showdown. Reza Jalalian, meanwhile,

settled for silver in the 80kg contest following a 3-0 setback against Azerbaijani wrestler Nihad Suleymani in the final, with Amirali Domirkolaei (60kg) and Amirali Amini (90kg) adding two bronzes to the haul.

Domirkolaei recovered from a 3-0 semifinal loss to Azerbaijan's Eljan Hasanov to beat his compatriot Mohammadali Ehsan Arezou in the third-place bout, while Amini – beaten by Javidani 3-0 in their last-four clash – defeated Senegal's Ablaye Diouf 3-0 to finish with a consolation prize.