

AVC Men's Volleyball Continental Championship: Piazza hails 'important step forward' after Iran beats India

Sports Desk

Italian head coach Roberto Piazza praised Iran's fighting spirit in the second set as "an important step forward" after his team defeated India 3-0 (25-20, 28-26, 25-18) at the AVC Men's Volleyball Continental Championship in Fukuoka, Japan, on Sunday.

Outside hitter Pouria Hosseinkhanzadeh contributed a game-high 20 points, with middle blocker Mohammad Valizadeh and opposite Ali Hajipour adding 11 apiece, as Iran tallied 47 points from attacks, 16 blocks and three service points, while benefiting from 12 Indian errors. A second straight-set victory in Pool B, following the opening-day win against New Zealand, saw Piazza's side secure a place in the quarterfinals and move ahead of Belgium and Canada to 17th in the FIVB Men's World Ranking. Indian outside hitter Yadav Chirag led his team with 11

points, while Jerome Vinith finished with 10, though their contributions could not prevent a second loss in Fukuoka, having fallen by the same scoreline against China.

The pivotal moment of the contest came in the second set when Iran trailed 22-19 but responded with a side-out and a block to turn the momentum around and eventually win the set.

"I'm happy today because in the second set we took an important step forward," Piazza said after the match. "We had good motivation and energy, and all the players believed we could do something special, even when we were three points behind," added the Italian. "India was really playing well, but Iran continued to fight, and I'm very happy about that."

Piazza still acknowledged that his team had room for further improvement, particularly in transition play. "There were moments



Iranian outside hitter Pouria Hosseinkhanzadeh (9) hits a spike during a 3-0 victory over India at the AVC Men's Volleyball Continental Championship in Fukuoka, Japan, on Sept. 6, 2026.

● AVC

"India have shown that they are one of the respectable teams in the competition." "The second set was very tight, but eventually Iran managed to get the crucial points and take the lead," Valizadeh said.

The top spot in the group will be up for grabs when Iran faces China on Wednesday, a significantly tougher test for Piazza's men and a rematch of the 2023 semi-finals, which Iran won in straight sets.

"It will be a difficult match because China are ranked higher than our previous two opponents, New Zealand and India. I hope Iran can put in a good performance and win the match to

advance to the next round as group leaders," said Valizadeh.

As if Iran needed extra motivation to chase a fifth continental title in eight editions and make up for the 2023 final setback at home against Japan in a likely showdown with the Asian powerhouse in Fukuoka, the champion will qualify for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics – a far more realistic shot at securing a place in the sporting extravaganza compared with next year's World Championship, where the top three will qualify, or the three remaining berths available through the FIVB World Rankings.

To that end, however, Piazza's side will have to make a significant improvement on its disappointing Volleyball Nations League campaign in June, when Iran suffered nine defeats – including a 3-2 loss to Japan – in 12 outings to finish 14th in the 18-team preliminary-round table.

FIBA West Asia Super League Final 8:

New-look Shahrddari to renew Sagesse rivalry in Group B

Sports Desk

Iranian club Shahrddari Gorgan has been drawn alongside Lebanese powerhouse Sagesse SC, Saudi Arabia's Al Ula Club and Qatar's Al Arabi SC in Group B of the upcoming FIBA West Asia Super League Final 8, which will kick off on Sept. 25 in Zouk Mikael, Lebanon. The draw for the regional

eight-team showpiece took place in Beirut on Saturday, with two-time defending champion Al Riyadi Beirut, Saudi Arabia's Ittihad Club, Kuwait SC and India's Indian Railways completing the cast in Group A. The teams will be involved in a round-robin group phase, after which the top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals.

Shahrddari will enter the Final 8 on the back of a third-place finish in Group A in the preliminary phase, winning three of its seven outings – including a 97-92 triumph over Sagesse in November. The Iranian club, however, will face a particularly difficult challenge this time around after undergoing major changes in recent months, with the club

losing virtually its entire original roster and making changes to its coaching staff ahead of the Final 8.

The Gorgan-based club will be without several of its key figures, including Iranian internationals Mobin Sheikhi and Peter Gregorian, as well as American duo Perry Petty and Jordan Hamilton, who have all left the club.

Mehran Hatami has taken over as head coach, leaving the club's new-look squad with limited time to prepare for the competition against some of the star-studded teams in West Asia. Shahrddari's best result in the previous three editions came in the 2023/24 season, when the Iranian club defeated Kuwait SC in the third-place playoff.



World Taekwondo Grand Prix Series:

Iranians' woes continue on Day 2 in Muju

Sports Desk

Iran endured yet another disappointing day at the World Taekwondo Grand Prix Series event at the iconic Taekwondowon venue in Muju, South Korea, after three Iranians – including Olympic silver medalists Nahid Kiani and Mehran Barkhordari – all finished empty-handed in their respective events.

Desperate to bounce back from a shock first-round defeat at the WT Women's Open Championships last week in Taiyuan, China, Kiani opened her women's -57kg campaign with a 2-0 victory over Poland's Niko Lisowska before suffering a straight-round loss to fifth-seeded Amina Dehhaoui – Kiani's second defeat against the young Moroccan following the Chuncheon Korea Open setback in July.



Iran's Mehran Barkhordari (blue) suffered a first-round exit in the men's -80kg division at the Muju Taekwondowon 2026 WT Grand Prix.

● WORLD TAEKWONDO

Barkhordari, meanwhile, bowed out early in the men's -80kg division, losing 2-1 to American Isaiah Young in his first bout. Barkhordari's compatriot Amirsina Bakhtiari – an Asian gold medalist in May – had a better run in the -80kg class, beating Spain's Juan Antonio Ca-

novas 2-0 and Jordanian Saleh El-Sharabaty – an Olympic silver medalist in Tokyo 2020 – 2-1, but was ultimately undone by Young in the quarterfinals.

Sunday's setbacks came after Iran's Abolfazl Zandi and Mahdi Razmian suffered second-round

exits in the men's -58kg category on the opening day of the competition. Reigning world and Olympic champion Zandi opened his campaign with a straight-round victory over Saudi Arabia's Riad Nasser Hamdi before losing 2-1 to two-time world champion Bae Jun-seo of South Korea. Razmian, meanwhile, defeated Chinese Taipei's Pan Kuei-en 2-1 in his first outing but fell short against Croatia's Josip Teskera by the same scoreline.

The G6 event in Muju serves as part of the qualification pathway for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics, with the gold medalists earning 60 Olympic ranking points. Olympic champion Arjan Salimi and Mohammad-Hossein Yazdani will represent Iran in the men's contests on the final day of the competition.

World Nomad Games 2026:

Taghani wins Pahlevani wrestling gold as Iran bags two medals

Sports Desk

Mostafa Taghani headlined Iran's two-medal haul on the fifth day of the World Nomad Games in Kyrgyzstan by grabbing gold in Kurash after defeating his Turkmen opponent 5-4 in the third-place playoff. The two medals took Iran's

by pin in the final of the +90kg class, with Mongolia's Bat-Orshikh Batsuuri settling for bronze. Taghani's compatriot Merasad Shokri, meanwhile, secured a bronze medal in Kurash after defeating his Turkmen opponent 5-4 in the third-place playoff.

The two medals took Iran's



● ISNA

tally to 15 – including four golds – at the sixth edition of the multi-sport event, which is dedicated to traditional ethnic sports practiced across Central Asia. Mostafa Najafi claimed the top prize in the men's +100kg Güleş event – a traditional Azerbaijani/Turkic form of belt wrestling – on Friday, thanks to a 6-1 victory over his Azerbaijani opponent.

Sajjad Soltaninejad won the Strongman title, finishing atop the standings after three days of grueling competition and successfully negotiating a series of demanding and heavy events. Meanwhile, Reza Qeitasi, Iran's flag bearer at the opening ceremony, won gold in the men's Tayak Tartysh on Wednesday, securing the first gold medal for the country's 130-athlete delegation.