

Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games:

‘Composure, precision’ key to karate glory, Iran coach Zangeneh says

Sports Desk

Iran women's karate head coach Pegah Zangeneh believes her two kumite fighters will have to remain calm and make the most of their opportunities in pursuit of glory at the upcoming Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in Japan.

The karate competition at the multi-sport event will kick off on Sunday, with Iran represented by Atousa Golshadnejad and Fatemeh-Zahra Saeidabadi in the women's contests.

Golshadnejad will be among the favorites in the -68kg class, entering the competition on the back of a glorious 2025 season, in which the 23-year-old sensation claimed the world and Asian -61kg titles either side of a gold medal at the Islamic Solidarity Games.

Young Saeidabadi, meanwhile, will look to build on her kumite team gold at June's Asian Championships when getting her -55kg campaign underway at the Toyohashi Gymnasium.

"The results and performances over the past year at the World Championships, Islamic Solidarity Games and Asian Championships have definitely raised ex-

pectations of the women's duo," Zangeneh told IRNA ahead of departing Tehran for the Games on Tuesday.

"Of course, we also have high expectations of ourselves, and I'm confident that if we work hard and remain motivated as always, we can make our beloved Iran proud. I just hope the Iranian Karate Federation will reap the rewards of its hard work."

Zangeneh was particularly upbeat about Saeidabadi, saying the former world U21 champion is in excellent shape and highly motivated.

"She is in very good form and, like at the Asian Championships, is motivated. She is eager to win the top prize in the presence of other high-profile contenders in the -55kg division," Zangeneh said.

"Fatemeh-Zahra has sharp and scoring kicks, and I hope she can use her skills to her advantage when she is in action," added the Iranian coach.

Although Saeidabadi has limited experience with the senior national team, Zangeneh said the youngster has already gained valuable experience at major international competitions.



Iran women's head coach Pegah Zangeneh (c) is pictured alongside Atousa Golshadnejad (l) and Fatemeh-Zahra Saeidabadi during a training session in Tehran ahead of the Asian Games.

● RNA

avoid the need for her to lose weight. Her chances of winning a medal may even be slightly higher in this weight class," she said.

"Fortunately, she has adapted well to the new weight, and her injury has also completely healed. Several doctors, following multiple examinations, confirmed that her condition was completely normal and that she had reached full fitness."

Golshadnejad narrowly missed out on a medal at the previous Asian Games, falling short in the bronze-medal bout, and is now desperate to make the podium in Nagoya, Zangeneh added.

"Golshadnejad missed out on a medal by a narrow margin in Hangzhou and is now highly motivated to succeed this time around. The two athletes and I will do our best to repeat our performances of the past year on the Nagoya tatami."

"She may have less experience with the senior national team, but she has competed in the Karate 1-Series A, performed very well in the team kumite event at the Asian Championships and also won gold at the FISU World University Games in Russia, competing alongside senior-level athletes," she said.

"As someone who has extensive

experience at the Asian Games both as a competitor and a coach, I believe the atmosphere of this event is not particularly daunting and is no different from other competitions. There are even fewer competitors, and with composure and precision, the best outcome is well within reach for our representatives."

Zangeneh also explained the deci-

sion to move Golshadnejad, who made history by winning Iran's maiden women's gold at the World Championships last year but missed out on defending her continental title in June after suffering an untimely injury on the eve of the event, up to the -68kg division.

"We made this decision to prevent her injury from recurring and to

AFC Champions League Elite:

Bakhtiarizadeh urges 'flawless' Blues to build on Al Sadd rout

Sports Desk

Esteghlal head coach Sohrab Bakhtiarizadeh called on his players to "build on the momentum" after the Tehran Blues produced a clinical performance to comprehensively defeat Al Sadd 3-0 on the opening day of the new AFC Champions League season in Basra, Iraq, on Monday.

In-form Albanian winger Jasir Asani again stole the show with a goal and an assist for the Persian Gulf Premier League outfit, with Saeid Saharkhizan and substitute Esmail Qolizadeh adding second-half strikes to wrap up the massive victory at the Basra International Stadium, which served as the Iranian side's home venue for the day.



"I congratulate each and every one of Esteghlal's extraordinary players. They were flawless today and made the fewest mistakes throughout the game.

"I also congratulate the passionate fans of the club. I am very happy that we were able to play well and defeat a great team. I hope we can build on this momentum in the upcoming games in the competition," said the Iranian. Asani capitalized on a defensive error to fire Esteghlal ahead nine minutes into the contest, when a wayward pass by Claudinho gifted the ball to the Albanian, who rounded defender Boualem Khoukhi and lashed the ball beyond

Qatari international keeper Meshaal Barsham. Saharkhizan doubled the scoreline two minutes after the break, latching on to a through ball from Asani before evading a tackle from Paulo Otavio to drill the ball through Barsham's legs into the left corner. Iran U23 midfielder Qolizadeh put the match beyond Al Sadd's reach five minutes into stoppage time, slotting home Mohammadhossein Eslami's low cross.

Despite enjoying 75 percent of possession, the Qatari heavyweight barely created clear-cut chances against a well-organized Blues backline and even had Barsham to thank for pulling off a couple of superb saves to avoid further misery for his side.

"There isn't much to say; we played a very

We must address the errors that occurred so we can bounce back strongly in the upcoming matches," added the Romanian coach – a 2019 champion in the Asian elite club competition with Al Hilal. Esteghlal will resume the league stage with an away game against Al Gharafa of Qatar on October 12. With none of the four Saudi Pro League giants on the eight-game fixtures list, Esteghlal will look to build on the emphatic result in arguably one of its toughest tests in the West Zone to secure a second last-16 spot in three years.

Tractor off track

Unlike Esteghlal, fellow Iranian club Tractor endured a disappointing start to the competition, falling 1-0 to the UAE's Shabab Al Ahli in Dubai. Yuri Cesar's opportunistic 22nd-minute strike at the Rashid Stadium capped a well-rounded display by the Emirati side, which had two Iranian internationals in Sardar Azmoun and Saeid Ezzatollahi in the starting XI. Semifinalists last year, Shabab Al Ahli immediately edged possession, and their pressing seemed to have paid off in the seventh minute when Azmoun nodded home, only for his effort to be ruled offside.

Azmoun tried again in the 19th minute, charging down the right but finding no takers for his diagonal pass before Brazilian left back Rikelme rattled the bar a minute later from 35 yards out.

The home side eventually made the breakthrough midway through the first half, when Yuri Cesar, taking advantage of a fumble by Tractor captain Shoja Khalilsadeh, pounced on the loose ball on the left and steered his shot from just outside the six-yard box past keeper Parsa Jafari, who filled in for suspended Iranian international Alireza Beiranvand. While Tractor struggled to find its way into the opposing box, Mohammad Daneshgar came close to an equalizer for Javad Nekounam's side in the 79th minute, only to skim his header against the bar, while Mahdi Shiri saw his fiercely struck 25-yard shot two minutes later tipped over by Matheus Donelli. Next for Tractor is a home game against Qatar's Al Shamal, which will be staged at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat on Oct. 12.



Esteghlal players celebrate a goal during a 3-0 victory over Al Sadd at the AFC Champions League Elite in Basra, Iraq, on September 14, 2026.

● AFC

poor match and failed to deliver what was needed to secure a positive result," said Al Sadd head coach Razvan Lucescu, whose side managed just a single shot on target and had Roberto Firmino's 57th-minute strike ruled out by VAR for a handball in the buildup to the Brazilian's point-blank effort.

"We faced a team highly determined to win, while we lost control of the game and were unable to find a way to stage a comeback.

Legendary Nemati hails Rahimi for reclaiming recurve territory



Sports Desk

Iranian para-archery head coach Zahra Nemati has praised Somayeh Rahimi for winning the women's individual recurve gold medal at the 2026 World Archery Para Series event, reclaiming a title that had been dominated by the legendary coach for 16 years. Rahimi secured a convincing 6-2 victory over her Chinese opponent in the final and also teamed up with Mohadeseh Babahabib to win a bronze medal in the women's recurve team event last Wednesday. "Because of the wartime conditions in Iran over the past year, we missed the opportunity to participate in many tournaments, some of which served as qualifiers for the Asian Para Games," Nemati told Mehr News Agency. "Therefore, the World Series event in India was a good opportunity for our athletes to test themselves in an official competition ahead of the upcoming showpiece in Nagoya." "Except for South Korea and Japan, almost all our Asian rivals were there. Our archers had a proper test ahead of the Asian



Iran's Somayeh Rahimi won the women's individual recurve gold medal at the 2026 World Archery Para Series event in Ahmedabad, India.

● WORLD ARCHERY

Para Games and registered decent results," she said.

"The individual recurve gold had been in my possession for 16 consecutive years. I won my last gold at the Hangzhou Asian Para Games. That was the last recurve gold for Iranian women, which is why I was thrilled to see Somayeh bring the title back home," said the archery great, who won three Paralympic gold medals during her illustrious career.

Nemati, however, stopped short of making any medal guarantees for her five-member team at the Asian Para Games, which will kick off on Oct. 18, but vowed that her team would give its best.

"I make no promise that we will definitely win medals in Aichi-Nagoya, but I promise that we will follow the same path and approach we have taken so far. We will give it our all against our rivals," she said.