



Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games:

Nemati opens gold account as Iran bags four karate medals



Sports Desk

Iran's wait for a first gold medal at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games came to an end on the third day of the multi-sport event in Japan after Morteza Nemati secured the top prize in the men's kumite contests on Tuesday. Nemati's gold was part of a prolific run for the Iranian karate squad, which also bagged three silver medals across different men's and women's categories at the Toyohashi Gymnasium. A gold medalist at June's Asian Championships, Nemati picked up where he had left off at the continental showpiece in Bali, opening his -75kg campaign with an emphatic 8-0 victory over his familiar foe Nurkanat Azhikanov of Kazakhstan – a three-time Asian champion and gold medalist at the previous Asian Games – in a repeat of the Asian Championships final. The Iranian then defeated Filipino karateka Alwyn Batican

8-2 to progress to the final, where he edged out Turkmenistan's Davut Nazmyradov 4-3. Elsewhere, two-time Asian champion and former world team kumite gold medalist Ali-Asghar Asiabari settled for silver in the men's -84kg class. Asiabari began with a 4-1 win against Qatar's Abdulla Babikr before beating Palestine's Abdallah Alkhatib, who was disqualified by hansoku, in the semifinals. Mohammad Al-Jafari – the reigning Asian champion and bronze medalist at the 2025 World Championships – proved too strong for Asiabari in the final, as the Jordanian won 9-1 to improve on his bronze medal at Hangzhou 2022. In the women's division, Fatemeh-Zahra Saeidabadi also finished her campaign with a silver medal in the -55kg class. The 20-year-old sensation outclassed Pa Torvanhxai of Laos 8-0, followed by commanding victories over Singapore's

Iranian karateka Morteza Nemati celebrates after winning the men's kumite -75kg gold medal at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan on Sept. 22, 2026.

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Hafezan Marissa (9-1) and Indonesia's Cok Istri Agung Sanistyarani (8-0), but fell to a controversial 6-4 loss to Malaysia's Adeola Fay Robert in the final. The Iranian representative saw several three-point kicks go unacknowledged by the officials, while even protests from Iranian women's head coach Pegah Zangeneh fell on deaf ears, resulting in her being ejected from the coaching area. The silver medal still gave Zangeneh something to cheer about after she had seen world champion Atousa Golshadnejad crash out in the first round of the -68kg class on the preceding day. Iran also bagged a silver medal through the trio of Fatemeh

Sadeqi, Zeynab Hosseini and Sepideh Amini in the women's team kata event.

A bronze medalist at the Asian Championships, the Iranian team defeated Thailand and the Philippines by unanimous decision but fell short against world champion Vietnam by the same scoreline in the final, providing Sadeqi with a bit of consolation after she had missed out on the podium in the individual kata event on Sunday.

Beach volleyball

The Iranian pair of Abolhasan Khakizadeh and Amir-Ali Qalenovi celebrated a second successive victory in the preliminary phase of the men's beach volleyball event, defeating their Bangladeshi opponents in straight sets. Having beaten the Maldives' pair in their Pool G opener, the Iranian duo emerged victorious 21-13 and 21-12 to go level on two wins from two with Japan's Kota Kurosawa and Taito Mizumachi ahead of their top-spot decider on Thursday. Referring to his teammate's physical condition, Qalenovi said: "My teammate has been dealing with a back injury for about a month, but now we will go back to the hotel to recover and get some rest for our next game. "Japan will be a tough opponent because they are the hosts and will have a lot of fans behind them. We will conduct a good analysis of Japan. We need to put in our best performance against them, and I hope we can come away with a victory."

3x3 basketball

Iran also enjoyed a victorious day in the men's 3x3 basket-

Iran's women's kata team performs at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan on Sept. 22, 2026.

● IRNA



Iranian karateka Fatemeh-Zahra Saeidabadi (r) is seen in action against her Indonesian opponent at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan on Sept. 22, 2026.

● IRNA

ball, claiming back-to-back wins against China and Hong Kong. Mohammadbasir Momeni chipped in a game-high nine points as the Iranian team – also featuring Mohammad Ghaffari, Saren Jafari and Mohammad-Mahdi Rahimi – defeated China 18-15 in their Pool B opener. Momeni and Rahimi then contributed six points apiece to lead Iran to a 16-11 victory over Hong Kong.



The Iranian team will be back in action against Malaysia today at the Kinjo Futo Station Square Venue for its final game in the group stage.

Tuesday's results continued Iran's impressive run in 3x3 basketball, after the women's team had also emerged victorious against Uzbekistan (19-5) and Japan (18-16) on Monday. Elsewhere on Day 3 of the Asian Games, the Iranian women's kabaddi team continued its perfect run with a one-sided 54-19 victory over Bangladesh in Group A. Having outclassed the host team 63-20 in their opening game, the Iranian team will now have to gear up for a highly anticipated clash against India in the final round of the group phase today.

Azmoun back in the fray for Uzbekistan, Russia friendlies

Sports Desk

Prolific striker Sardar Azmoun has received a call-up from head coach Amir Qalenoei as Iran named a 26-man squad for friendly meetings with two familiar opponents in recent years, Uzbekistan and Russia, during the upcoming FIFA international break. The third all-time scorer for the Iranian national team with 57 goals in 91 caps, Azmoun was left out of the squad for June's FIFA World Cup, where Team Melli failed to advance to the knockout stage after three successive draws against New Zealand, Belgium and Egypt in Group G. While Qalenoei insisted at the time that "nothing other than technical criteria" played a part in his team selection for the global showpiece, Azmoun's omission was widely believed to have been driven by off-field issues, following his controversial social media post regarding the regional war in the early stages of the conflict, which began with U.S.-Israeli airstrikes on Tehran on February 28.

Qalenoei's side will take on Uzbekistan in Fergana on Thursday, looking to beat the Central Asian foe for the first time since the 2023 CAFA Championship final. The two sides shared the spoils in four 2026 World Cup qualification games before Uzbekistan won 1-0 in extra time in the 2025 CAFA final and then emerged victorious in a shootout when they met in a friendly tournament in the United Arab Emirates last November. Iran will then play Russia in Kazan on Tuesday, which will mark a third friendly between the two sides since Qalenoei was appointed to the national team job for a second spell in March 2023. Meanwhile, Allahyar Sayyadmanesh, who also missed the World Cup, has been overlooked by the Iranian head coach yet again, despite the versatile winger bagging seven goals and two assists in 15 appearances across all competitions

for Lech Poznan after joining the Polish top-flight champions in the summer.

Unlike Sayyadmanesh, Shahab Zahedi has received recognition from Qalenoei for his flying form

with Malaysia Super League champion Johor Darul Ta'zim, which has seen the 31-year-old striker score a remarkable 10 goals in eight games for the club this season.

The two friendlies will be part of Iran's preparations for the 2027 AFC Asian Cup, which kicks off on January 7 in Saudi Arabia.

A semifinalist at the previous two editions, Iran will begin its bid for a fourth Asian Cup title – and its first since 1976 – against China in Group C, which also features Kyrgyzstan and Syria, at Riyadh's Kingdom Arena on January 9.

Established national team players in recent years Alireza Jahanbakhsh, Hossein Kananizadegan, Saman Qoddous, Rouzbeh Cheshmi, Shahriar Moghanlou, Ali Alipour, Milad Mohammadi and Mahdi Qayedi, who all represented the national team at

the World Cup, have also missed out on a call-up for the upcoming games. The following is Iran's 26-man squad for the friendly games against Uzbekistan and Russia:

Goalkeepers: Alireza Beiranvand (Tractor), Payam Niazmand (Persepolis), Seyyed Hossein Hosseini (Sepahan)
Defenders: Mohammad Naderi (Tractor), Ehsan Hajsafi (Sepahan), Shoja Khalilzadeh (Tractor), Mohammad-Mahdi Zare (Persepolis), Aref Aghasi (Esteghlal), Saman Fallah (Esteghlal), Saleh Hardani (Esteghlal), Aria Yousefi (Sepahan), Ramin Rezaeian (Foolad Khuzestan), Ali Nemati (Lusail SC)
Midfielders: Aref Haji-Eidi (Sepahan), Omid Nourafkan (Sepahan), Mahdi Limouchi (Sepahan), Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi (Persepolis), Amirhossein Mahmoudi (Persepolis), Milad Sourgi (Shams Azar), Saeid Ezzatollahi (Shabab Al Ahli), Mohammad Qorbani (Al Wahda FC), Mohammad Mohebbi (HNK Rijeka)
Strikers: Mahdi Taremi (Al Wasl), Sardar Azmoun (Shabab Al Ahli), Dennis Eckert (Standard Liège), Shahab Zahedi (Johor Darul Ta'zim)



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