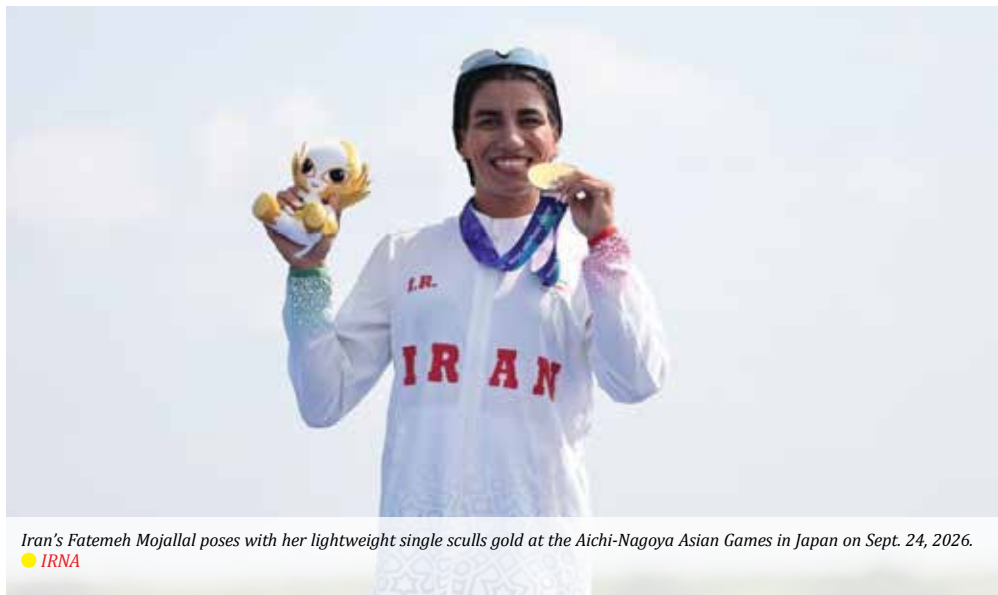




Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games: Rowing heroics spearhead Iran's medal hunt



Iran's Fatemeh Mojallal poses with her lightweight single sculls gold at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in Japan on Sept. 24, 2026.
● IRNA



Kimia Zarei (L) and Zeinab Norouzi celebrate with the Iranian flag after winning the lightweight double sculls gold at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in Japan on Sept. 24, 2026.
● afrazvazesh.ir

Sports Desk

Iranian female rowers stole the show at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games on Thursday, collecting five medals, including two golds, across different events.

Fatemeh Mojallal headlined the medal hunt by winning a historic gold and a bronze, while Zeinab Norouzi and Kimia Zarei teamed up for a gold and silver in the double sculls events. Mojallal first clocked 7:24.57 to win the top prize in the lightweight single sculls event, securing Iran's maiden rowing gold in the history of the multi-sport event, and then settled for a third-place finish in the single sculls final with a time of 7:35.99.

"Thank God. I would like to thank everyone who helped me along this journey. I am very happy that I was able to raise my country's flag and make the Iranian people happy. I won the most precious color of medal,

and I am very happy about it," said the 24-year-old rower, who dedicated her gold medal to her fellow Iranian girls.

"We had never won a rowing gold at the Asian Games, and I am the first," she said. "I worked very hard to break this spell, training hard in camps for two years in difficult conditions." There were further milestone achievements as Norouzi became the most decorated Iranian female athlete in the history of the Asian Games with one gold and three silvers to her name.

Norouzi and Zarei crossed the finish line in the lightweight double sculls with the fastest time of 6:53.93 – 5.31 seconds clear of Hong Kong's silver-winning pair – and then stood runner-up to the Chinese duo in the double sculls final in 6:55.78.

Meanwhile, the Iranian quartet of Mahsa Javer, Hengameh Kamyab, Soha Fakhri and Saqi Maleki added another silver

medal in the women's quadruple sculls event, courtesy of a 6:27.24 performance in the final, as Javer secured a fifth Asian Games medal of her career – a national high for any Iranian female athlete. Iran was also not short of success in the men's competition, as Amirhossein Mohammadpour claimed silver in the lightweight single sculls.

3x3 basketball consolation

The Iranian men's team won a bronze medal in 3x3 basketball, thanks to a 21-10 victory over the Philippines in the third-place contest on Friday. Mohammadbassir Momeni contributed 12 points, with Mohammad Rahimi finishing with five points and seven rebounds, as Iran, having hammered the host 21-3 in the quarterfinals, bounced back from a 14-11 setback against Qatar in the semifinals earlier

in the day to finish with a consolation medal.

Wushu quartet

Elsewhere, Iranians capped off an impressive wushu campaign on Thursday by collecting a gold and three sanda medals. Soheil Mousavi defeated Kazakhstan's Abdurashid Abdullayev in the final to finish with the gold in the men's 75kg class, while three of his compatriots fell short against Chinese fighters in their respective finals. Sogand Sinkaei suffered a 2-0 loss to Wu Di in the women's 52kg showdown, while Shoja Panahi (65kg) and Erfan Moharrami (70kg) were undone by Wang Chengjin and Ma Shue, respectively, by the same scoreline in the men's finals.

Artistic gymnastics

Iranians also enjoyed a decent run in artistic gymnastics by

grabbing two silver medals in the men's event.

Arman Khodaei opened Iran's account on Thursday by finishing second to Uzbekistan's Utkirbek Juraev in the pommel horse final, becoming only the second Iranian in the sport to win an Asian Games medal, following Mahdi Olfati's vault silver at Hangzhou 2022. Khodaei's 14.566 performance saw the 20-year-old sensation, making his international debut, finish above three-time Olympic gold medalist and five-time world champion Daiki Hashimoto of Japan, who settled for bronze.

Olfati, meanwhile, replicated his historic success from the previous edition, delivering a 14.533 performance to finish behind the Philippines' Carlos Yulo – a gold medalist at the Paris 2024 Olympics – in the men's vault final on Friday.

Athletics heartbreak

Iran was dealt a massive blow

in its bid for a maiden women's medal in athletics after Fatemeh Mohitizadeh was disqualified from the heptathlon.

A gold medalist at last year's Islamic Solidarity Games, Mohitizadeh emerged as the favorite for the top prize after finishing atop the overall standings on Thursday by a safe margin ahead of Friday's three remaining disciplines.

However, her campaign came to an abrupt end after she was reportedly found to have worn sprint footwear for the long jump contest, which is against World Athletics regulations. Iran still found some consolation in the athletics contests after Sadeq Samimi managed to win bronze in the men's discus throw. Samimi registered a personal-best throw of 60.32m with his third attempt, while Abuduaini Tuerhong (64.26m) and Wu Nanjun (61.58m) completed an all-Chinese one-two as Iran missed out on the discus gold for the first time since Busan 2002.

Iran coach Qalenoey rues 'schoolboy mistakes' in Uzbekistan defeat

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoey lamented "schoolboy mistakes" by two players in his side's 3-1 defeat to Uzbekistan in a friendly in Fergana on Thursday, apologizing for the loss but expressing confidence that the national team would improve. Iranian captain Ehsan Hajsafti, who on the day equaled Javad Nekounam as Team Melli's all-time most-capped player with 149 appearances, was to blame for the first goal, as his sideways pass was intercepted by Eldor Shomurodov before the Uzbek striker's low drive found the bottom corner in the 10th minute.

Jakhongir Urozzov's own goal from a Ramin Rezaeian set piece drew Iran level four minutes into the second half, but Shomurodov restored the home side's advantage from the spot nine minutes later after Iranian goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand punched Behruzjon Karimov in the head while attempting to clear the ball.

Khusain Norchaev added the third in the fourth minute of added time as Iran's winless run against the Central Asian side extended to seven games

since the 2023 CAFA Championship final.

"I apologize for this defeat and congratulate Uzbekistan and their good coach. It was a very good game," Qalenoey said after the game. The coach said Iran conceded its first two goals through individual errors while controlling the game.

"We conceded the first and second goals because of individual mistakes, at times when we were controlling the game," Qalenoey said. "The first goal came from a very schoolboy mistake. In the second half, our substitutions helped us score, and we were trying to score a second goal, but an experienced player made another very

inconsistent performance, with several players making their international debuts.

"We made many changes and many players were playing in the national team environment for the first time," he said. "We were satisfied with some of them, while others need more time and more matches before they can

help the national team."

The Iranian coach acknowledged Uzbekistan's progress but said the match was primarily an opportunity to assess younger players. He rejected suggestions that Iran's problems were physical, saying the team had held only a few training sessions since the World Cup.

"The problem was not physical. You can only have two or three training sessions in such circumstances," he said. "This was also the first FIFA international window after the World Cup, and I said yesterday that we have not yet reached our ideal condition. I am certain we will be in much better shape against Russia."

Iran will then play Russia in Kazan on Tuesday, which will mark a third friendly between the two sides since Qalenoey was appointed to the national team job for a second spell in March 2023.

Qalenoey still accepted responsibility for the defeat, while saying mistakes were part of football.

"I accept that the schoolboy mistakes made by two of our players cost us the result," he said. "The

main culprit is me. Even though it was a friendly, we have to apologize to the Iranian people."

With the Asian Cup approaching, Qalenoey also acknowledged the need for changes to the squad but said they would have to be made gradually.

"We want to make changes, but they have to be made in a way that does not hurt us too much," he said. "Unfortunately, today we were hurt by two experienced players and conceded goals. That is part of football." Qalenoey concluded by expressing confidence in Iran's recovery. "I am certain that the national team's progress will resume," he said.

Three-time champion Iran will begin its bid for a first title since 1976 when the continental showcase gets underway in Saudi Arabia on January 7, where Team Melli is joined by China, Kyrgyzstan and Syria in Group C.



Iranian center-back Shoja Khalilzadeh (4) challenges Uzbekistan's Eldor Shomurodov during a friendly game in Fergana, Uzbekistan, on September 24, 2026.
● FFIRI