

Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games:

Davoudi says he weighed up retirement before super-heavyweight glory



Sports Desk

Iranian weightlifter Ali Davoudi, who won the men's super-heavyweight gold at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan on Tuesday, said he seriously considered retiring months ago due to persistent injury problems. A silver medalist at the previous edition of the Asian Games in Hangzhou, Davoudi tallied 466kg in total to walk away with the top prize in a thrilling, controversy-ridden +110kg event at the Nagoya City Trade and Industry Center. Best known for his clean-and-jerk expertise, Davoudi opened his snatch campaign with a successful 197kg lift and went on to clear 202kg and 206kg with his next attempts, finishing second in the category. However, the Iranian – an Olympic silver medalist at

Tokyo 2020 – still had an uphill task in the clean and jerk after Iraq's Ali Ammar Yusur Rubaiawi topped the snatch standings with a new world record of 219kg. Davoudi comfortably lifted 242kg with his first clean-and-jerk attempt. However, having fallen 13kg behind in the snatch, he needed a high mark in his final two attempts to make up the deficit. Iran head coach Behdad Salimi took a risk with his second selection, calling for 260kg. Meanwhile, Ammar successfully lifted 240kg and 246kg and had selected 252kg for his third attempt. In a bizarre turn of events, he was sitting on a chair in the warm-up area, apparently unaware that it was his turn to lift, before realizing that he had very little time remaining. He rushed onto the platform but ultimately failed with his final

attempt of the day. Davoudi then came onto the platform to attempt 260kg and successfully completed the lift, only to be given two red lights by the officials. A timely appeal by the Iranian coaches, however, saw the decision overturned following a video review, securing a 10th gold medal for the Iranian delegation at the multi-sport event. "It was a great moment, and I was blessed by God. I won the silver medal at the previous edition, but this time I managed to win gold, and I am truly grateful for that," Davoudi said after securing Iran's second weightlifting gold in Nagoya. "The judges were a bit harsh on me, but after our appeal and a review of the footage, my second clean-and-jerk lift was upheld. "I seriously considered retiring from weightlifting a few months ago because



things had become difficult for me due to a lingering injury problem. However, I continued, and thankfully I was blessed by God and managed to win a medal at these Games," added the 27-year-old, who became

emotional after securing the triumph. "The gold medal was very important for the Iranian delegation. Thankfully, I was able to win it. I will do everything I can to win the same medal at the Los Angeles Olympics."

Salimi, meanwhile, was thrilled by Davoudi's success, saying: "The super-heavyweight medal is an important one and has always held a special place for Iranians. Ali reaped the



Iranian weightlifter Ali Davoudi makes a clean & jerk effort during the men's +110kg competition at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan on September 29, 2026.
● VARZESH3

rewards of his hard work and all the effort he had put in. He has lived a professional life and shown great perseverance, and today he received the reward for all his efforts."

"Today, it really felt as though I had won the medal myself. I feel the same way about all members of the team. I am genuinely happier than I was when I won a medal myself. I dedicate this medal to all the people of Iran," added Salimi, a three-time world champion and London 2012 Olympic gold medalist in the super-heavyweight category.

Qalenoee takes dig at players after successive friendly setbacks



Iranian midfielder Mohammad Qorbani (L) is seen in action during a 2-0 defeat against Russia in a friendly game in Kazan, Russia, on September 29, 2026.
● FFIRI

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee said "some of the players" would never get an international call-up again after his team fell to a 2-0 defeat against Russia in a friendly game in Kazan on Tuesday. Monaco winger Aleksandr Golovin put the hosts in front with a composed finish from inside the box midway through the first half and then doubled the advantage 15 minutes later when his well-taken free-kick from 30 yards out found the top corner. The scoreline would have been more overwhelming for Iran, which started the game with a three-man backline – as it did against Belgium and Egypt at the World Cup – had it not been for Persepolis goalkeeper Payam Niazmand, who was introduced at halftime and pulled off a couple of fine saves to deny Golovin and substitute Lechii Sadulaev. This was a second defeat in five days for Iran following a 3-1 loss to Uzbekistan in Fergana

on Thursday – a wake-up call for Qalenoee and his players ahead of January's AFC Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia. "We aim to identify the team's weaknesses through friendlies and work on addressing them ahead of our upcoming games," Qalenoee said after the game. "That is what friendly matches are for. With the game level and both teams pursuing their tactical objectives, we conceded two goals because of two mistakes. Thank God we are making these mistakes in a friendly match," added the Iranian coach, whose team will look to end a 50-year title drought at the Asian Cup. "This match reminded us of the World Cup, as its level was on par with that competition. It was a very useful outing for us. Although I am disappointed with the result, we lost despite conceding few chances, as the two teams had an equal expected-goals figure. "Our game plan was working relatively well, and [Mahdi] Taremi and Sardar Azmoun also had two very good chances.

However, because they were not in ideal physical condition, they were unable to take advantage of those opportunities. The score was goalless at the time," added the Iranian. Despite back-to-back defeats, Qalenoee remained confident of his team delivering at the Asian Cup. "Although we lost our last two matches against Uzbekistan and Russia and conceded a lot of goals, these games will help us in the future to identify our weaknesses." Referring to the use of a number of players in the two friendlies, Qalenoee said: "Some of the players were given a fair share of game time through both games, but they did not make the most of the opportunity. They will certainly not feature in future camps." Qalenoee also blamed "school-boy mistakes" made by some of his senior players, namely veteran fullback Ehsan Hajsafi and goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand, when Team Melli was beaten by its Central Asian foe last week.

FIBA West Asian Super League Final 8:

Shahrdari off the mark, remains in last-four contention

Sports Desk

Shahrdari Gorgan notched their first win in the FIBA West Asia Super League (WASL) Final 8 2026 by defeating Qatar's Al Arabi SC 85-76 on Tuesday at the Nouhad Nawfal Sports Complex in Zouk Mikael, Lebanon. Navid Rezaeifar and Jordan Stevens took turns sparking the Iranian side's fourth-quarter pullaway as it broke through in Group B and, more importantly, revived its semifinal aspirations. The 2024 bronze medalists improved to 1-1 after losing steam against Sagesse SC in their opener and will try to strengthen their bid when they take on Saudi outfit Al Ula Club on Thursday. Al Ula is also 1-1 after losing to Sagesse later in the day. "My players fight as one," said Shahrdari head coach Mehran Hatami when asked about his team's confidence entering the

crucial game. "As you saw, our team was not dependent on one individual. We played as a team, and we won." Shahrdari did rely on collective effort to enter the win column, with Rezaeifar top-scoring for Hatami's side with 20 points on 8-of-16 shooting from the field, along with seven rebounds. Returning big man Sajjad Pazirofteh was solid as well, posting a strong double-double of 18 points and 14 rebounds. He recorded an efficiency rating of 28 to earn Player of the Game honors. Pazirofteh put Shahrdari ahead for good late in the third quarter, scoring on the break to untie the 48-48 deadlock. Rezaeifar followed with a layup to widen the gap to 52-48. Back-to-back three-pointers by D'Angelo Harrison pushed their lead to a game-high 17 points at 79-62 with 3:21 remaining, which proved enough for Shahrdari to put away what had been a tightly contested

game early on. Stevens finished with 12 points, six rebounds and eight assists, while Harrison also chipped in 12 as Shahrdari's supporting cast stepped up and the team did not need its reinforcements to do the heavy lifting. "In the previous game, we hustled a lot. Unfortunately, we didn't have enough practice together as a team. We were not lucky, especially in the last moments of the game. Now, we're past these two games," Rezaeifar said. "Now, we can think about the next game," continued the Iran national team veteran, stressing the importance of the upcoming clash with Al Ula. "We are thinking about the next game, which is very important for us." Mosti Rashed, meanwhile, had a game-high 24 points on 10-of-19 shooting to lead the Red Devils, who fell to 0-2 and are now in a precarious position in their bid to reach the semi-finals.

