

Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games:

Iran cruises past Pakistan to reach men's volleyball final



Sports Desk

Iran's men's volleyball national team will chase a fourth successive gold medal at the Asian Games in today's final after securing an emphatic 3-0 semi-final victory (25-13, 25-15, 25-11) over Pakistan at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 on Friday. Outside hitter Ali Haqparast led the way with a match-high 21 points, with opposite spiker Amin Esmailnejad adding 15, as Iran, entering the contest on the back of a gruelling five-set quarterfinal against South Korea on the previous day, made quick work of its opponent, finishing the match in just under one hour at the Okazaki Chuo Sogo Park Gymnasium. Middle blocker Seyyed Eisa Nasserli also reached double figures, chipping in 15 points, while outside hitter Morteza Sharifi finished with nine. Standing between Iran and the top prize will be host and volleyball powerhouse Japan, which defeated Iran in straight sets in the Continental Championship final on home soil in

September to book its place at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics. Japan also emerged victorious in five sets when the two sides met in the Volleyball Nations League preliminaries in June.

Greco-Roman glory

Elsewhere at the multi-sport event, Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Alireza Abdevali claimed the gold medal in the 77kg division in style, defeating reigning Olympic champion and home favorite Nao Kusaka 5-3 in the final. With Kusaka joined by two-time world champion Akzhol Makhmudov of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan's Olympic silver medalist Demeu Zhadravey in the other half of the bracket, the 22-year-old Iranian capitalized on the favorable draw to add Asian Games glory to his two world under-20 titles. Given a bye in the first round, Abdevali defeated Indonesia's Andika Sulaeman by technical superiority (8-0) before beating Qatar's Iranian-born Shahin Baddaghi in similar fashion,

winning 9-0, to advance to the final.

"Perhaps few people fancied me against the Japanese opponent, but I wrestled boldly and with determination, fought hard and, thankfully, managed to win the gold," Abdevali said after the final.

"I believed in myself, and my coach, Hassan Rangraz, also believed in me," he said.

"Over the past year or two, I had not been able to wrestle the way I wanted and had not achieved good results either. But I am grateful that I managed to find my form again and become the Asian Games champion."

Abdevali's triumph marked a second gold medal for the Iranian roster across six weight divisions.

Reigning world super-heavyweight champion Amin Mirzazadeh grabbed the 130kg gold on the opening day of the wrestling event, thanks to a 3-1 victory over Uzbekistan's Rafael Tsitsushvili in the final.

Mahdi Bali, meanwhile, added



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a bronze to Iran's medal haul, recovering from a last-four setback against Japan's Yuri Nakazato – during which the Iranian surrendered a four-point lead to lose 5-4 – to defeat Kazakhstan's Islam Yevloyev by fall, while leading 5-1, in the third-place bout of the 97kg category.

Alipour settles for silver

Iranian sport climbing sensation Reza Alipour, entering the Asian Games as the two-time defending gold medalist, had to settle for silver this time around in the men's speed event. A former world record holder, 32-year-old Alipour clocked

5.36 seconds in the four-man final to finish behind China's teenage prodigy Chu Shouhong, who scaled the wall in 4.71 seconds for his third major triumph in a year, having also won the title at the 2025 World Games and April's Asian Championships.

Iran coach Qalaneoi accepts mistakes, vows to rebuild team ahead of Asian Cup

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalaneoi has acknowledged shortcomings in the national team's recent performances and vowed to rebuild the side ahead of the 2027 AFC Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia.

In its first outings since the 2026 FIFA World Cup, Iran faced Uzbekistan and Russia in two friendlies during the ongoing international break, losing 3-1 to the Central Asian side in Fergana last week before suffering a 2-0 defeat against the European side in Kazan on Tuesday – results that fell short of expectations among fans and pundits in the country.

"I have heard all the criticism from experts, the media, former players and the people, and I have listened carefully," Qalaneoi told the Iranian Football Federation newspaper. "If criticism is well-intentioned, it is not upsetting for me; rather, it can be a guiding light."

"I don't want to run away from the recent results or make excuses for them. The technical responsibility for the team lies with me," he said. "If a wrong decision was made, the planning was not good enough, or we failed to make the best use of the players' abilities, I accept responsibility."

Qalaneoi also acknowledged concerns about Iran's prospects at the 2027 Asian Cup, where the three-time champion – a semifinalist in the previous two editions – will look to end a six-decade drought in the flagship continental showpiece. "We will review our planning, address our weaknesses and, if necessary, make changes to the technical structure and the players we select," he said. "My goal is clear: I want to rebuild the national team, even better than before, so that at the Asian Cup we have a team worthy of Iranian football and capable of competing for major success."



Iran's Aria Yousefi (17) is seen in action during a 2-0 loss to Russia in a friendly game in Kazan, Russia, on Sept. 29, 2026.

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Qalaneoi stressed that his experience of difficult periods during his career would help him deal with the current situation. He pointed to his spells at Esteghlal and with the national team as examples of how teams can recover from setbacks through time, hard work and planning. However, Qalaneoi said acknowledging mistakes should not be confused with giving up.

"I accept the mistakes, but I will not surrender," he said. "My responsibility is to get through this stage and build a team that makes people feel again that this is the Iranian national team capable of fighting for major objectives." He also highlighted the need to strike a balance between experienced players and younger talents, while improving tactical preparation and coordination between different generations.

Qalaneoi identified the physical condition of players as another area requiring attention. He said Iran's high-intensity running figures had

dropped significantly between the June World Cup and the match against Uzbekistan.

According to the coach, Iran recorded around 8.28 kilometers of high-intensity running and 118.8 kilometers of total team distance against Egypt at the World Cup, compared with approximately 6.78 kilometers of high-intensity activity and 103.6 kilometers of total distance against Uzbekistan.

Qalaneoi said the decline should not be used as an excuse for the result but should serve as a warning about the physical demands of international football.

"We had a long preparation period before the World Cup, but we had only four training sessions before the match against Uzbekistan," he said. "This is a warning and a lesson, not an excuse." Qalaneoi concluded by asking Iranian fans to give the team an opportunity to recover.

"You have every right to be upset and to criticize," he said. "We accept responsibility for the results and will correct our mistakes. The defeats of today should not be the end of the road; they should be the starting point for serious rebuilding."

FIBA West Asia Super League Final 8:

Shahrdari beaten by Al Ula, fails to make its way to last four

Sports Desk

Iranian club Shahrdari Gorgan missed out on a semi-final spot at the FIBA West Asia Super League Final 8 after suffering a 99-84 defeat against Saudi Arabia's Al Ula Club in Zouk Mikael, Lebanon, on Thursday.

A second defeat in three outings saw 2024 bronze medalist Shahrdari finish third in Group B with four points – one behind Al Ula and two adrift of Lebanon's Sagesse, which enjoyed a perfect run on home soil to advance.

Elijah Stewart erupted for 44 points and five rebounds to lead the Saudi side, particularly helping turn the game in his team's favor late in the first quarter as Al Ula built enough momentum to eventually pull away.

It soon became a one-sided affair, with Al Ula cruising to a historic victory as the club became the first Saudi Ara-

bian team to reach the semi-finals of the pan-regional competition.

Mitch Creek came through with 17 points and seven rebounds, while David Michineau recorded a rare triple-double with 12 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists. Ahmed Almkhtar also scored 12 points, including four three-pointers from six attempts.

Creek and Michineau helped Stewart erase Shahrdari's five-point lead during the opening quarter through a 13-2 scoring run, punctuated by a Stewart three-pointer, to put Al Ula ahead 24-18 at the end of the period.

Almkhtar and Mo Alsuwailam then helped widen the gap to double digits, and Al Ula maintained its advantage until the final buzzer as Gorgan struggled to mount a serious comeback.

Creek pushed Al Ula's lead to 20 points for the

first time at 62-42 following a three-pointer with 7:47 remaining in the third quarter. The gap grew as large as 24 points twice later in the same period.

Jordan Stevens scored 22 points, albeit on 22 shots, to lead Gorgan, which failed to advance to the Final 8 semi-finals for the second time in three appearances.

D'Angelo Harrison supplied 17 points, eight rebounds and three assists, while Navid Rezaeifar added 13 points as the trio were the only Gorgan players to score in double figures in the defeat for coach Mehran Hatami.

"We lost the game, but the result didn't show the level of the players. My team is way better than what they did today. But our opponent played better. We deserved to lose," said the former Iran men's national team head coach.



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