

SPORTS

Iranian Athletes Face Death, Arrest, Heavy Sentences

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All layers of Iranian society have been affected by the heavy-handed crackdown unleashed by the authorities on the nationwide protest movement that kicked off more than 12 weeks ago. The security forces have killed hundreds of people and detained thousands, while the judicial system handed heavy sentences to those taking to the streets to demand more freedoms and women’s rights.

Iran's sports community is not exempt from the state clampdown. In this report, IranWire reviews the list of athletes who have been killed, imprisoned or under pressure from the authorities, and those who are in danger of being executed. Their problems occurred after they participated in rallies against the clerical regime, voiced support for the protesters or criticized the authorities’ clampdown; or they were simply at the wrong place and the wrong time.

Athletes killed by security forces

Ali Mozaffari





Ali Mozaffari, a player for Saipa volleyball club in Tehran, was **killed** during protests in the northeastern city of Ghouchan on September 21. Mozaffari died after being hit by a live bullet shot by security forces.

Mohammad Ghaemifar



On October 22 in the southwestern city of Dezful, security forces shot at 22-year-old football player **Mohammad Ghaemifar** from behind. More than 40 pellets entered his skull and his neck. He died two weeks later in hospital. Ghaemifar was playing for Dezful's Jondishapur Omid Football team. He was set to join the Omidhaye Zob-e Ahan team in the central city of Fuladshahr the next season. His family was under pressure from the authorities for days to not break the news of his death.

Ehsan Ghasemifar



On December 5, the body of 32-year-old Ehsan Ghasemifar was buried in his hometown of Kangavar, Kermanshah Province, after the bodybuilder was killed in the northern city of Karaj. Ghasemifar had won several provincial and national championships and participated in international competitions. The human rights site Hengaw wrote that Ghasemifar was participating in a live Instagram program when government forces surrounded him, and the communication was cut off. A few hours later, the authorities informed his relatives they could come and pick up his dead body, according to the family. His relatives were under pressure from the security agencies to say that he died from a heart attack.

Athletes in danger of execution

Amir Nasr-Azadani



Amir Nasr-Azadani is a former player of Tractor football team who has played in the Premier League for the past years. He is the most prominent Iranian athlete in danger of being executed. On November 20, state media broadcast the forced confessions of three suspects in the killing of a colonel of the Islamic Republic Guards Corps (IRGC) and two members of the paramilitary Basij force. The reports named those arrested in Isfahan as Amir Nasr-Azadani, Saleh Mirhashmi and Saeed Yaghoubi. **IranWire** sources said Nasr-Azadani participated in protests but was never present in the area where the security forces were killed. On December 11, Asadollah Jafari, Chief Justice of Isfahan Province, claimed that Nasr-Azadani was a member of an armed group.

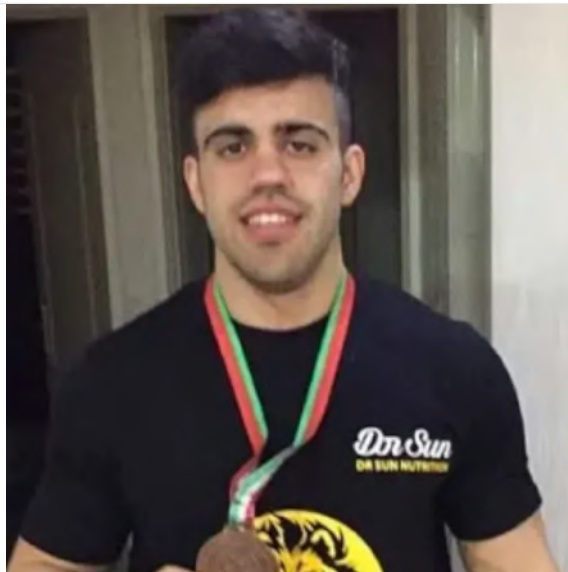
Parham Parvari





Iran's swimming champion Parham Parvari **has been charged** with waging "war against God", which carries a death sentence. Parvari, 26, was born in Saqqez, Kurdistan Province, and settled in Tehran after finishing his studies and military service. According to IranWire sources, Parham was returning home from work in his car when he reached a protest. A relative told Iranwire: "Meanwhile, the forces of the special motorcycle unit started to destroy the cars. A number of cars that were in front of Parham's car were able to escape from the scene...some left their cars and escaped but Parham stayed in his car. He had all his identity cards and car documents. The officers reached his car. They pulled Parham out of the car and beat him up and then arrested him." Parvari has won both provincial and national swimming competitions and is a swimming coach.

Sahand Noormohammadzadeh



Sahand Nourmohammadzadeh was arrested on October 4 during protests on Tehran's Ashrafi Esfahani highway, and his designated lawyer announced a month later he had been sentenced to death on the charge of waging "war against God". He was accused of "breaking the guardrail" of the highway and "setting fire to a trash can", which he denies. In an **audio file** provided to IranWire, he said that from the first moment he was arrested, his jailers told him he would be executed. Nourmohammadzadeh is a bodybuilding athlete who has won medals in provincial and national competitions.

Athletes behind bars

Voria Ghafouri





Voria Ghafouri, one of the most famous Iranian football players, was arrested by the security forces in front of his children while he was training with the Khuzestan Foolad football team in Ahvaz. Ghafouri was charged with "insulting and destroying the Iranian football team" and released on bail on November 29.

Parviz Broumand



Parviz Broumand, the former captain of Esteghlal and former player of the Iranian national team, was arrested on the evening of November 15 in the streets of Tehran for leading "riots", according to government media. Minutes after the news emerged that Broumand was release on bail on November 29, **media** reports said he had been transferred to hospital.

Kaveh Rezaei



Kaveh Rezaei, the current striker of Tractor team and former player of the national team, was arrested on September 29. Rezaei was released on bail three days after his arrest, which came after he expressed support for the protesters on social media.

Hossein Mahini



Hossein Mahini, a Saipa player and former captain of Persepolis, was **arrested** on September 28 during a raid on his house by more than 15 security forces. Government media said he was accused of “inciting riots”. Mahini was **released** on bail on October 4.

Hamidreza Ali Asgari



Hamidreza Ali Asgari was arrested on October 2 for what media close to the government called "supporting rioters". Asgari, a nephew of Abdol Ali Asgari, the former head of state-run broadcaster IRIB, is a former captain of Persepolis football team.

Alireza Nejati



Alireza Nejati, who won several medals at the Asian and World Wrestling Championships, announced on December 11 he had been summoned by the Intelligence of the Police Force, detained and released on bail. In December, Alireza Nejati reported a fraud by a partner of the Iran Wrestling Federation's head, and claimed that he was **threatened** by the two men. He also commented to the recent events in the country on social media.

Reyhaneh Armaghani





Mountain climber Reyhaneh Armaghani was **kidnapped** on November 1 during a raid by security agents on her home. A few days later she told her family over the phone that she was being kept in the detention center of the Ministry of Intelligence (Ward 209) in Tehran's Evin prison. During the raid on her home, the security forces confiscated her mobile and laptop.

Dariush Shahravi



Rock climber Dariush (Hossein) Shahravi was in his car in front of his house on November 1 when he was beaten and **arrested** by plainclothes agents who were attacking protesters.

Eshragh Najafabadi





Eshragh Najafabadi, a former member of Iran's national cycling and mountaineering teams, was arrested in the southern city of Shiraz on October 30. He is being held in an unknown location, and his family are "very worried that Eshragh might be under pressure to make forced confessions", a source told IranWire.

Amir Arslan Mahdavi



In the evening of October 26, rock climber Amir Arslan Mahdavi was arrested on Maali Abad Street in Shiraz and was taken to an unknown location. The 34-year-old is a snowboard instructor and a member of Iran's mountaineering teams.

Marjan Jangjou





On November 2, Marjan Jangjou, another rock climber from Shiraz, was arrested and taken to an unknown place after the security forces raided her house. There is no information about the whereabouts of Jangjou, who owns a sports club.

Dena Shaybani



Dana Shaybani, a snowboard instructor from Shiraz, was arrested by the security forces on November 10 while she was in a taxi. After her arrest, she was reportedly transferred to No 100 Detention Center in Shiraz, but her family has had no information about her since November 22.

Hamed Ghashghaei





Hamed Ghashghaei is another mountaineer from Shiraz who is said to have been **arrested** since November 16. He had written the word "freedom" with plaster and mortar on the heights of Drak Mountain near Shiraz.

Hessam Mousavi



Hessam Mousavi, a rock-climbing instructor from Shiraz, was reportedly arrested on November 30.

According to information received by IranWire, more than 30 athletes from Shiraz have been kidnapped and detained by the security forces. Their families are not willing to speak about these arrests because they are under pressure from the authorities. Many of these families have not been informed of the whereabouts of their loved ones after more than a month since their arrest.

Athletes under threat

Ali Karimi





Iranian football coach and former player Ali Karimi is currently in self-imposed exile. He joined the nationwide protests on his social pages since the beginning of the movement. His bank accounts and his house in Tehran Province have been seized by the Islamic Republic.

Elnaz Rekabi



Rock-climbing champion Elnaz Rekabi has been under house arrest since her return to Iran after she participated in a competition in South Korea without the mandatory hijab. Her brother has said the family house had been **destroyed** in retaliation.

Ali Daei





Former soccer star **Ali Daei** joined the protest movement from the first days of demonstrations. After joining a three-day nationwide strike in December, the Islamic Republic closed his jewelry store and restaurant in Tehran. Hard-liners in the Islamic Republic have called for more severe judicial actions against Daei, a former Iranian national team captain and the country's record international goalscorer.

Yahya Golmohammadi



Football star **Yahya Golmohammadi** criticized the national team after it held a controversial meeting with Iran's president before heading off to Qatar for the World Cup. A day later, he was summoned by the authorities, and his activities in cyberspace were banned.

Aref Gholami





Aref Gholami, a defender in Esteghlal football team, was one of the first Iranian athletes who criticized the state crackdown on protesters. Sardar Mostafa Ajorlou, the former CEO of this club, removed Gholami from the team and did not even allow him to practice.

Parmida Ghasemi



Parmida Ghasemi, a recurve archer and a member of the Iranian national team, took off her mandatory hijab during the medal ceremony of a Tehran competition in November. The next day, she was forced to make forced confessions and claimed that she didn't notice that her hijab had been blown away by the wind. She declared to the Ministry of Sports that she will not accept interviews.

Soroush Rafiei





Soroush Rafiei, the captain of Persepolis football club, was severely beaten in Tehran on November 15 after he helped a girl who was being chased by security forces. Rafiei was not able to practice with his team for a while.

Saeed Piramoun

The players of the Iranian beach football team, who did not sing the Islamic Republic anthem during an international competition, were subjected to **pressures** after returning to Iran. Some of the players, including Saeed Piramoun, Mohammad Ahmadzadeh, Moslem Mesigar, and Mostafa Kiani, were **not invited** to the team's latest training camp because of their support for the people of Iran.

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