



SportsUnited

SPORTS INITIATIVES WITH IRAN

“We place sports as a bridge among our hearts for friendship with the United States.”

~Shahrokh Shahnazi, President, Iran Table Tennis Federation

In response to the need for people-to-people interaction and exchange with Iran, the State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) is including Iranians in a broad range of traditional educational, professional, and cultural exchange programs for the first time since 1979. Included in these programs are sports exchanges. Through these sports initiatives we see the proliferation of messages of international understanding, cultural tolerance, and mutual respect.

Working in partnership with the U.S. Olympic Committee, the National Basketball Association (NBA), and the National Governing Bodies of Sport, ECA has brought the Iranian Men's National Basketball Team, Women's and Men's National Table Tennis Teams, Men's Junior National Weightlifting Team, and the Men's Junior National Water Polo team to the United States for sports programs. The Iranian men’s National basketball team, who qualified for the Olympics for the first time in 60 years, came to the US in July 2008 to participate in the Rocky Mountain Revue basketball tournament in Salt Lake City, Utah in



preparation for the Olympics in Beijing. The scrimmages pitted the Asian League champion against NBA development league teams. Because of this exposure, 7’2” Hamed Ehadadi recently signed with the Memphis Grizzlies, the first Iranian citizen drafted by the NBA.

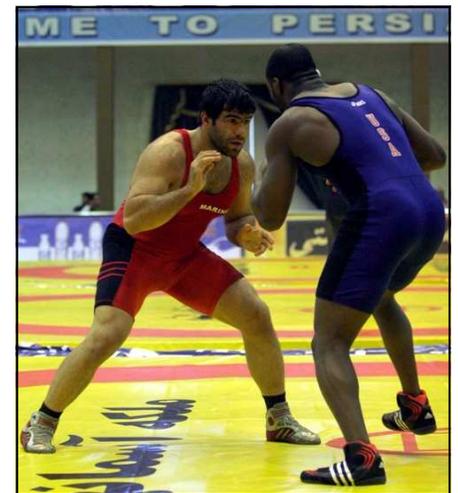


The first Iranian exchange that included female athletes was the visit by the Men’s and Women’s National Table Tennis Teams. The group spent an afternoon with American youth at the Boys and Girls Club, and the women met with female business leaders who spoke about

the relationship between success in business and leadership skills. The teams also competed in international table tennis tournaments in Florida and Nevada.



In the spirit of two-way exchange, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs sent twenty representatives of USA Wrestling, both athletes and coaches, to Bandar Abbas, Iran in January 2007. There they were hosted by the Iranian Wrestling Federation and competed in the International Wrestling Tournament “The Takhti Cup,” a major event in a country where wrestling is one of the top sports. It was a trip in which the Americans won not just a medal, but also many fans.



“This program has changed my outlook on the United States. I really felt the spirit of cooperation and friendship.” ~Professor Abbas Ali Gaeini, Iranian Jr. Weightlifting Delegation