

Leeds boss Marcelo Bielsa indicated he is ready to sign a new contract with the Premier League club, but would prefer to wait until the end of the season before deciding his future, BBC reported.

New coach Alekno believes his style fits Iranian volleyball

Sports Desk

New Iran's head coach Vladimir Alekno pushed back against the idea that his Russian style would not suit the Asian powerhouse's volleyball.

the country in February 2020 after leading the country to a second consecutive berth at the Olympics.

Alekno is tasked with steering Iran at two major events of 2021 – the Volleyball Nations League (VNL) and the Tokyo Olympics.



zenit-kazan.com

Alekno's American counterpart John Speraw had previously said that the Russian's philosophy is not the best choice for the Iranian style of play.

"I suggest the American coach to concentrate on his own team. I know how to help the Iranian volleyball and I don't need anyone's help," said Alekno in an interview with the YouTube channel of his current team Zenit-Kazan.

"Of course the Iranian players do not possess the physical strength of the Russians, but they play with higher tempo and pace, thanks to the skipper Saeid Marouf," added the Russian, who is to fly to Iran in March to start in his new job.

"I'll put in hard work for Iran as there is no other miraculous formula to reach success."

The 53-year-old Russian was named Iran's head coach last November, replacing Montenegrin Igor Kolakovic, who parted ways with

"The idea of participating in the fourth successive Olympics was so exciting for me, when I was offered the Iranian job. To be a part of the Games is a dream come true for all players and coaches," Alekno said.

Alekno led his country to the gold medal at the 2012 Olympics in London – having won the bronze in Beijing 2008.

His Russian team also won the gold at the World League, now called Volleyball Nations League, and the FIVB World Cup in 2011.

When asked about his knowledge of the Iranian players, Alekno said, "My Italian assistant Thomas Totolo is closely watching the Iranian league's games and is providing me with full information of the players in the country, and also the ones playing in the European leagues."

"I worked with Marouf in 2015, when he was playing for Zenit. He is definitely among the world's top five setters. He is a popular figure in his country and a true leader on the court, which makes him an important player for the team."

Iran – a quarterfinalist in Rio 2016 – is pitted in Pool A of the volleyball competitions in Tokyo alongside the host nation Japan, Poland, Italy – the silver medalist in Rio – Canada, and Venezuela.

Questioned about Iran's main opponent in Tokyo, the Russian said, "At the moment, Iran's biggest opponent is Iran itself. We need to first make a proper assessment of ourselves and make sure everything is at the right place."

"Before we think of other teams, we will have to improve in certain areas to prepare for every opponent."

Beyond the Big Three: Djokovic sets sights on Williams, Court

Not content with challenging Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal for the men's Grand Slams record, Novak Djokovic has Serena Williams and Margaret Court in his sights after claiming an astonishing ninth Australian Open title.

the quarterfinals, and Federer, who was absent through injury.

But the Serb also raised the prospect of a bigger goal: Reaching the 23 held by Williams, and even the 24 won by Court straddling the amateur and Open era.

Slams and breaking records, of course. And most of my attention and my energy from this day forward, until I retire from tennis, is going to be directed in majors, trying to win more major trophies."

tournament, after he suffered a muscle tear in the third round and was criticized for requesting better conditions for players during quarantine.

"It hurts," he said of the criticism. "I'm a human being. I have emotions."

The Serb's 7-5, 6-2, 6-2 win over the 25-year-old Medvedev, who was on a 20-match winning streak, was also a sobering moment for the younger players hoping to dislodge the 'Big Three'.

"The three knights of tennis," Djokovic smiled.

"Roger and Rafa inspire me," he added. "I think as long as they go, I'll go. In a way it's like a race who plays tennis more and who wins more."

"It's a competition between us in all areas. But I think that's the very reason why we are who we are, because we do drive each other, we motivate each other, we push each other to the limit."

Djokovic's coach Goran Ivanisevic said the Big Three were producing "better and better tennis" and also noted that Court's record was on the horizon.

"I don't know where is the end. Maybe they're going to overtake Margaret Court and Serena, maybe not," he said.

"But it's amazing what they doing on the court. It's amazing how they perform in the big matches."

And Djokovic, dubbed the "King of Melbourne" by Medvedev, had a warning for the generation coming up behind the Big Three.

"Roger, Rafa, myself are still there for a reason," he said. "We don't want to hand it to them and we don't want to allow them to win Slams."

"I think that's something that is very clear. Whether you communicate that message or not, we are definitely sending that vibe out there."



MATT KING/GETTY IMAGES

Novak Djokovic holds aloft the Australian Open trophy after beating Daniil Medvedev in the final at the Rod Laver Arena, Melbourne, Australia, on February 21, 2021.

The world number one's bold statement followed Sunday's final, when he ended a turbulent tournament marked by a muscle injury and media attacks by humbling an in-form Daniil Medvedev, AFP reported.

Djokovic's 18th major crown placed him within striking distance of the men's record of 20, jointly held by Nadal, who lost in

"Getting closer to maybe Roger's, Rafa's record, Serena, Margaret," said Djokovic, when asked about his goals and schedule for this year.

"Everyone has their own journey and their own way of making history. They've made history already. They made a tremendous mark in our sport."

"I think about winning more

Djokovic, 33, said he would play a slimmed-down schedule focusing on the majors, rather than the rankings, now he's guaranteed to surpass Federer's record of 310 weeks as world number one on March 8.

Three knights of tennis

His triumph follows a difficult

Pelicans overcome 24-point deficit to beat Celtics in OT

Brandon Ingram scored 33 points, including a go-ahead three-pointer with 34.4 seconds left in overtime, as the host New Orleans Pelicans overcame a 24-point deficit to defeat the Boston Celtics 120-115 on Sunday.

Zion Williamson had 28 points and 10 rebounds to help lead the largest comeback in New Orleans' history, while Josh Hart had 17 points with 10 rebounds and Lonzo Ball scored 16 for the Pelicans, Reuters reported.

Jayson Tatum scored 32 for the Celtics, Jaylen Brown had 25, Tristan Thomson and Kemba Walker added 14 each and Aaron Nesmith had 10.

Brown made a layup to give Boston a 112-111 lead with 1:12 left in overtime and Ingram tied it with a free throw and added a three-pointer to give the Pelicans a 115-112 lead. Walker missed a three-pointer and Hart hit two free throws for a five-point lead with 18.6 seconds left as New Orleans closed it out.

the Nets. Brooklyn's Kevin Durant (hamstring) missed his fourth straight game. The Nets lost forward Jeff Green with an apparent shoulder injury with 2:50 remaining.

Paul George had 34 points and seven rebounds but sat out the game's crucial minutes down the stretch while on a minutes restriction.



STEPHEN LEWUSA TODAY SPORTS

Pelicans' Zion Williamson (top) dunks the ball during an NBA victory over the Celtics at Smoothie King Center, New Orleans, Louisiana, US, on February 21, 2021.

Nets 112 Clippers 108

James Harden had 37 points, 11 rebounds and seven assists as Brooklyn won its sixth consecutive contest, knocking off over host Los Angeles to complete a five-game road trip.

Kyrie Irving scored 28 points with eight assists as the Nets improved to 7-0 against the Pacific Division this season. Joe Harris, DeAndre Jordan and Bruce Brown scored 13 each for

Kawhi Leonard had 29 points with five three-pointers and 13 rebounds, while Ivica Zubac finished with 13 points and eight rebounds.

Bucks 128 Kings 115

Giannis Antetokounmpo had a double-double by halftime and he combined with Khris Mid-

dleton for 70 of host Milwaukee's points in the victory over Sacramento.

Antetokounmpo finished with a game-high 38 points and 18 rebounds, while adding four assists. Middleton finished with 32 points, while shooting 13 of 22 from the field and adding eight rebounds, six assists and four steals. The Bucks won their second consecutive game after snapping a five-game losing streak.

Sacramento dropped its seventh consecutive game and played without leading scorer Harrison Barnes (left foot strain) for the third consecutive game. Rookie Tyrese Haliburton led the Kings with 23 points, while adding eight assists and five rebounds and was one of six Sacramento players to score in double figures.

Raptors 110 76ers 103

Fred VanVleet and Pascal Siakam each scored 23 points as Toronto defeated visiting Philadelphia at Tampa.

Chris Boucher scored 11 of his 17 points in the fourth quarter off the bench for the Raptors, who have won four straight. Norman Powell added 11 points and OG Anunoby had 10.

Ben Simmons scored 28 points for the 76ers, who have lost 16 straight regular-season road games against Toronto. Joel Embiid added 25 points and 17 rebounds for Philadelphia.

Liverpool's Jota to resume full training this week after knee injury



ANDREW POWELL/GETTY IMAGES

Diogo Jota is expected to resume full training with Liverpool this week after more than two months out with a knee injury.

The Portugal international was in potent form for Jürgen Klopp's team before sustaining the injury in the Champions League dead-rubber against FC Midtjylland on December 9, the Guardian reported.

His absence has been sorely felt with Liverpool struggling for goals and facing a fight to finish in the top four following the derby defeat by Everton on Saturday, the Reds' fourth home league defeat in succession.

Jota, who had scored nine goals in 17 appearances for Liverpool following his £41-million arrival from Wolves, hopes to receive the all-clear to rejoin team training on Wednesday. The trip to Sheffield United on

Sunday may come too soon for the 24-year-old's comeback, although he could be in contention for the home game against Chelsea on March 4.

Liverpool is waiting to discover the full extent of the groin injury that forced Jordan Henderson off against Everton but fears the captain faces an extended time out of action.

The Premier League champion, meanwhile, is also waiting to discover whether the Champions League last-16 second leg against RB Leipzig will be held. Anfield appears unlikely because of the quarantine restrictions that would have an impact on the German club and, while venues in the Netherlands and Belgium are under consideration, a return to Budapest – where Liverpool won the first leg 2-0 last week – remains a possibility.