

Iran eyeing further domination at Asian Wrestling Championships

Sports Desk

Iran will be looking to extend domination over continental wrestling when the Asian Championships kick off in Astana, Kazakhstan, next Sunday.

Having seen a run of three successive Asian titles come to an end by Kazakhstan last year in Ulaanbaatar, the Iranian 10-man Greco-Roman squad will be headlined by world 130kg silver medalist Amin Mirzazadeh, who will be competing in the tournament for the first time since winning the gold in 2020. Last year's world under-23 champion Pouya Dadmarz will be after a first Asian gold in the 55kg contests after his previous participation at the event finished with a bronze medal in 2021.

Mehdi Mohsennejad will be looking to build on his silver-winning campaign last year though reigning world champion Zholaman Sharshenbekov of Kyrgyzstan remains the favorite to defend his 60kg gold.

Iman Mohammadi will represent the country in the 63kg contests, fresh from a glorious 12 months in 2022, which saw the young Iranian finish third at the Asian



Iranian 65kg freestyle wrestler Rahman Amouzad (blue) is seen in a training session in Tehran on March 31, 2023.

Championships before bagging world U23 and junior gold medals.

Reza Abbasi will be the Iranian 67kg contestant in Astana, with Sajjad Imentalab in the 72kg event.

Former Asian 72kg champion Amin Kavianejad will be chasing further continental glory in the 77kg

class, while Alireza Mohmadi will take part at the 82kg competitions.

Nasser Alizadeh (87kg) will try to repeat his 2022 Asian gold-medal finish, carrying some extra motivation after being just a win short of a podium finish at the World Championships last year. Also returning as an Asian

gold medalist, Mehdi Bali went undefeated at the Greco-Roman World Cup last November and would be keen to take that form into the 97kg event in Astana. Meanwhile, all eyes will be on world champion Rahman Amouzad, who will be defending his 65kg title as

Iran is tipped for a fifth consecutive Asian crown in the freestyle competitions.

The 20-year-old sensation is joined by Alireza Sarlak (57kg) – a world and Asian silver winner in 2021 – in the Iranian team.

Yassin Rezaei (61kg), Morteza Qiasi (70kg), Hossein Abouzari (74kg), and Amirhossein Kavousi (79kg)

will also be part of the freestyle showdown.

Three-time world medalist Alireza Karimi (86kg) will be hoping to add to his three Asian gold medals with host nation's Azamat Dauletbekov – defending Asian champion and world bronze winner in 2022 – also in the mix.

The two squared off in last year's FS World Cup, where the Iranian walked away with a 4-0 triumph.

Arashk Mohebbi will step into the 92kg contests on high after winning the gold at the Dan Kolov tournament in March, while former world U23 champion Mojtaba Goleij (97kg) faces little competition on his way to a second Asian gold.

Looking to pose a challenge to fellow Iranian Amirhossein Zare' ahead of the World Championships in the summer and next year's Olympics, Amirreza Masoumi will hope to continue his impressive run in the 125kg division after dominating the world junior and under-23 championships last year, however he will likely have to overcome Mongolian world silver medalist Lkhagvagerel Munkhtur en route to a first major gold at the seniors level.

Chelsea sack manager Potter after six months in charge

Chelsea's season has descended into chaos after they fired Graham Potter and began looking for their third manager since being bought by Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital last summer.

Julian Nagelsmann is prominent in Chelsea's thoughts after the ruthless dismissal of Potter, who was informed of his fate at 2.45pm on Sunday, but the former Bayern Munich manager is believed to be reluctant to take the job until the summer. A full-time appointment is not imminent. Chelsea have installed Bruno Saltor, who was part of Potter's backroom staff, as interim head coach and want to think carefully before making their next move, the Guardian reported.

Chelsea have drawn up a shortlist of candidates, including Mauricio Pochettino, and would like someone in place before pre-season.

Nagelsmann is the early favourite but Luis Enrique could come under consideration. Chelsea have been linked with the Eintracht Frankfurt manager, Oliver Glasner, while Rúben Amorim is building a strong reputation at Sporting Lisbon. However, eyebrows will be raised at the new regime's behaviour. Much has been made of Boehly and Clearlake, which is owned by Behdad Eghbali and Jose Feliciano, trying to move away from Roman Abramovich's sacking culture.

Yet Chelsea, who are 11th in the Premier League despite spending close to £600m on signings since last summer, have fired two managers in seven months. Potter was hired after the departure of Thomas Tuchel in September. Chelsea paid £21.5m in compensation to Brighton & Hove Albion to bring the 47-year-old and his coaching staff

to Stamford Bridge.

It had seemed that Potter had bought himself time after Chelsea reached the last eight of the Champions League by beating Borussia Dortmund last month. They play the first leg of their quarter-final away to Real Madrid next week.

Last month's mini-revival was not sustainable and Potter's fate was sealed by Aston Villa winning 2-0 at Stamford Bridge on Saturday. There was alarm at Potter's tactics against Villa. Chelsea had two centre-backs, Trevoh Chalobah and Benoît Badiashile, on the bench and two full-backs, Reece James and Marc Cucurella, in their back three. Cucurella gifted Villa the opening goal.

Potter has been linked with the Leicester City job after Brendan Rodgers left by mutual consent on Sunday, but is likely to need to re-

cover mentally.

Chelsea feel they have done everything to support Potter. They bought eight players during a wild January transfer window, although Potter cautioned against too many signings. He was left with a bloated squad once the window shut and struggled to find a settled starting XI, with injuries playing apart.

DAVID KLEIN/REUTERS



GETTY IMAGES

Messi's name whistled by own fans as PSG lose again

Lionel Messi's name was met by whistles from some Paris St-Germain fans before they fell to a seventh defeat of 2023 at home to Lyon.

The Argentine, linked to Barcelona when his contract expires this summer, has seen two Champions League last-16 exits in his two seasons at the club, BBC Sport reported. Whistles could be heard as his name was announced beforehand, although some fans chanted his name in support.

Lyon forward Bradley Barcola scored the only goal as PSG were booed off. The game kicked off 10 minutes late as Lyon's bus could not fit under a bridge so they had to drive around the capital.

Alexandre Lacazette had earlier struck a post with a penalty for the ninth-placed visitors. Kylian Mbappe, PSG's all-time top scorer, almost rescued a point late on, but his shot was saved.

The perennial French champions are now only six points above Lens and Marseille with nine games left. PSG have lost seven of their 18 matches in all competitions since the end of the World Cup, having been unbeaten in all 22 games before the break. Messi is in talks with PSG about extending his contract, but Barcelona have also approached him about a return to the club where he spent the bulk of his career. He has scored 29 goals in 67 games for the club.

'Hard court specialist' Medvedev confronts clay court season



Daniil Medvedev celebrates with the Miami Open trophy after his victory over Jannik Sinner in Miami, FL, US, on April 2, 2023.

MIKE FREY/
USA TODAY SPORTS

Miami Open champion Daniil Medvedev said he will try to keep his sensational start to the year going as the tour shifts to the clay court season, but said he is realistic about his prospects on a surface where he has enjoyed far less success.

The Russian called himself a "hard court specialist" at Indian Wells last month while complaining about the slow speed of the courts and it is hard to argue with his expertise, Reuters reported. He won his fourth hard court event of the year in Miami on Sunday with a 7-5 6-3 victory over Jannik Sinner and his lone Grand Slam title came on the U.S. Open's concrete courts in 2021.

"I love hard courts. If it would be my choice, it would be only hard courts," he told reporters.

"I feel the best at my game on hard courts. Even if I know that I can play well enough on the grass and clay, on hard courts I feel the most fluid. I can play not my best tennis but still win the matches. That's a big difference."

The vanquished Sinner even joked that perhaps the European clay could help slow down the hard-hitting Medvedev, who claimed titles in Doha, Rotterdam and Dubai and finished runner-up at Indian Wells before his triumph in Miami.

"Now clay season starts so let's see how you do there, but I wish you all the best," Sinner said with a smile during the trophy ceremony. It has not been all bad news for Medvedev on clay. He made the quarter-finals of the French Open in 2021, the semi-final at Monte-Carlo in 2019 and has beaten some of the sport's biggest names on the surface.

"I know that I can play well on clay," he said.

"I beat Novak (Djokovic) once on clay. I actually beat (Stefanos) Tsitsipas and Novak at the same tournament once, wow. That's pretty good achievement on clay."

But working against him is the limited amount of time he has to prepare ahead of the Monte-Carlo Masters, which begins April 9.

"The earlier you lose in Miami, the more clay court practice you can get," he told Tennis Channel.

"So the first tournament is going to be tough. I'm already preparing myself mentally not to lose my mind if I play really bad in Monte-Carlo."

"But maybe not? The confidence is still there. I am going to try my best and see how it goes."