

Asian Wrestling Championships:

Iran finishes third, hits all-time low in freestyle contests

Sports Desk

An under-par campaign at the Asian Wrestling Championships in Astana, Kazakhstan, saw Iran stand third in the freestyle contests – the lowest finish for the dominant force of the sport in the continent since the competition was first introduced in 1979.

Iranian head coach Pejman Dorostkar did not take a full-strength squad to the event but the result will still go down as a failure for the 29-time champion, which saw its run of four successive titles come to an end by the host.

Kazakhstan bagged four golds, two silvers and a bronze to dominate the freestyle table with 179 points, with Japan in second with 129 points, thanks to the 92kg gold for Arash Yoshida, whose father is an Iranian, as well as a silver and four bronze medals.

The Iranian team managed only a single gold medal across 10 weight classes – courtesy of reigning world champion Rahman Amouzad in the 65kg contests – while Alireza Karimi fell short against home favorite Azamat Dauletbekov in the 86kg final on Friday.



Iran's Alireza Karimi (blue) is in action against Kazakhstan's Azamat Dauletbekov in the freestyle 86kg final at the Asian Wrestling Championships in Astana, Kazakhstan, on April 14, 2023.

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A bronze medalist in last September's World Championships, Dauletbekov won the bout 4-1 to grab his second Asian gold in a row and settle the score with Karimi, who had beaten him on numerous occasions over the

past a decade – most recently at the FS World Cup in December. Meanwhile, Yassin Rezaei bounced back from a semifinal setback against Kyrgyzstan's Taiyrbek Zhumashbek Uulu to defeat Kodai Ogawa of Japan 7-4

for a joint 61kg bronze alongside Mongolian Tuvshintulga Tumenbileg.

It was a final day to forget for Iranian wrestling on Friday as Amir-Reza Masoumi, trailing 4-2, was pinned by China's

Buheerdun in a 125kg third-place match, with Hossein Abouzari (74kg) and Arashk Mohebbi (92kg) also leaving the event empty-handed.

Amirhossein Kavousi (79kg) and Mojtaba Goleij (97kg) had bagged a couple of bronze medals for Iran on the preceding night as the country finished with 124 points – four points clear of fourth-placed Uzbekistan.

The freestyle disappointment for Iran came after the country had tallied 196 points en route to the Greco-Roman title earlier in Astana.

Pouya Dadmarz (55kg), Iman Mohammadi (63kg), Nasser Alizadeh (87kg), Mehdi Bali (97kg), and Amin Mirzazadeh (130kg) were the five Iranian gold medalists, while Amin Kavianejad settled for the silver after an injury kept him out of the 77kg final.

Sajjad Imentalab fell short against Ibragim Magomadov of Kazakhstan in the 72kg final with Alireza Mohmadi taking a joint bronze in the 82kg class.

Kyrgyzstan followed Iran in the Greco-Roman standing with 166 points, with Kazakhstan finishing third on 160 points.

PSG coach Galtier denies racism allegation



AURELIEN MEUNIER/GETTY IMAGES

Christophe Galtier denied he had made racist comments during his time as coach of Ligue 1 club Nice as a preliminary investigation into "discrimination based on alleged race or religion" was launched by the Nice prosecution office on Friday.

The allegation was made in emails of Julien Fournier, the former director of football at Nice, Reuters reported.

Galtier, now coach of Paris St Germain, was in charge of Nice during the 2021-22 season.

"There is a preliminary investigation into discrimination based on alleged race or religion. The headquarters of OGC Nice are being searched," Nice prosecutor Xavier Bonhomme said on Friday.

According to RMC Sport website, Fournier's emails alleged that Galtier complained about "having too many black and Muslim players" in the Nice team.

"I have decided to take legal action against those who have violated my honour and I can only be satisfied with the opening of an investigation," Galtier told a news conference ahead of Saturday's top-of-the-table clash against second-placed RC Lens at the Parc des Princes. "As many of you I was stunned by the comments that were attributed to me and that were relayed in an irresponsible manner," Galtier added.

"I am a child of the HLM estates (subsidised housing estates), raised in diversity, raised to respect others no matter their origin, their colour or their religion."

PSG said they supported their head coach.

"PSG supports Christophe Galtier and wishes that the judicial system will shine a light on the truth on the serious allegations against our coach," PSG said in a statement.

Fournier said earlier this week that he was dismayed by the timing of the revelation, although he did not deny having made the allegation.

Galtier has been placed under protection by PSG, daily newspaper Le Parisien reported, after his phone number was shared on social media.

Several Ligue 1 coaches and footballers who played under Galtier have been supporting the PSG coach.

"I worked with Galtier and never felt negative behaviour from him about my religion or nationality. He is a great coach as well as a great person," said Turkish striker Burak Yilmaz, a Muslim who won the Ligue 1 title with Lille in 2021 under Galtier.

Butler, Strus lead Heat past Bulls into Playoffs

Jimmy Butler and the Miami Heat caught fire down the stretch to beat the Chicago Bulls 102-91 and reach the NBA Playoffs on Friday, as the Minnesota Timberwolves dominated the Oklahoma City Thunder to book their postseason berth.

Miami, smarting from a loss to the Atlanta Hawks on Tuesday, clinched the Eastern Conference's eighth and final seed to set up a meeting with the top seeded Milwaukee Bucks starting tonight, AFP reported.

Minnesota meanwhile will face Western Conference top seeds Denver in the first round of the Playoffs after a comprehensive 120-95 blowout of Oklahoma City.

While Minnesota romped into the postseason, Miami's clash with Chicago went down to the wire before Butler, helped by the three-pointers of Max Strus, secured victory for Erik Spoelstra's team.

Butler put up 31 points, a tally matched by Strus who shot 7-12 on three-pointers, including a crucial 26-foot jumper with 1:14 left that put Miami 96-91 up.

Strus secured the win with three free throws after he was fouled by Alex Caruso as he tried to make a throw from the corner.

The Heat had been 14 points up in the first quarter but a 12-2 run from the Bulls in the third levelled the game up at 56-56.

A Zach LaVine dunk then put Chicago up for the first time since the opening basket of the game and three three-pointers early in the fourth from Coby White ensured the Bulls were 90-87 with three minutes to go.

But then Butler and Strus took control. Butler was fouled while making a lay-up and then Bam Adebayo, who grabbed 17 rebounds, sank two free throws after he was fouled by Nikola Vucevic to make it 93-90.

Butler set up Strus for a three pointer before he then made sure of the victory from the free-throw line.

The Heat had found themselves in the elimination game after losing their opening play-in game to the Atlanta Hawks and faced the prospect of being the first divisional winner not to make

the playoffs.

"I don't think any of us felt any type of pressure. We went out, we competed, we played the right way, corrected some things, and did what we were supposed to do," said Butler.

DeMar DeRozan top scored for the Bulls with 26 points and nine assists.

In Minneapolis, the Timberwolves put their team's recent turbulence behind them to demolish Oklahoma City.

Minnesota finished the regular season in disarray, with team-mates Rudy Gobert and Kyle Anderson involved in a sideline punch-up in their final regular season game last Sunday.

Gobert was subsequently suspended for Tuesday's play-in defeat to the Los Angeles Lakers, but returned on Friday to contribute 21 points in a convincing victory.

Minnesota led by as many as 29 points at one stage in the fourth quarter and were up by double digits for most of the second half.

Karl-Anthony Towns led the Timberwolves scoring with 28 points while all five starters finished in double figures.



Heat forward Jimmy Butler (22) goes up for the basket during an NBA victory over the Bulls in Miami, FL, US, on April 14, 2023.

nba.com

Big-money moves 'like child asking for Ferrari', Klopp says



PHIL NOBLE/REUTERS

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp has compared talk of big-money transfers with a five-year-old asking for a Ferrari for Christmas.

Despite being heavily linked with a move, the Reds will not pursue signing England midfielder Jude Bellingham because of the money involved, BBC Sport reported.

Any move for the 19-year-old Borussia Dortmund player could cost in excess of £100m.

"We cannot have six players in a summer, everyone for £100m," he said.

The German added: "We are not children; when you ask a five-year-old what they want for Christmas and they say a Ferrari, you wouldn't say 'oh, that's a good idea'."

"You would say 'no, that's too expensive and anyway, you cannot drive it'. If this kid is then unhappy their whole life because he cannot

get a Ferrari, it would be a really sad life.

"You look what you can do, and you work with that."

"What we need and what we want, we try absolutely everything to get it, but there are moments when you have to accept that this or that is not possible for us – you step aside and do different stuff."

Liverpool will have Luis Diaz available when they face Leeds United at Elland Road on Monday.

The Reds, eighth in the table, have won just one of their past five Premier League games. Klopp says he expects Leeds to come out fighting, particularly after the "proper knock" they faced in Sunday's 5-1 home defeat by Crystal Palace.

"We expect them to be on their toes, proper atmosphere," said Klopp.

"We have to build on two games with good moments. We will try to do that. We

have nothing to lose, we have to try new things; everything is on the table. I'm looking forward to the game. Leeds will go with all they have. It will never be an easy game."

Meanwhile, the Football Association said it would not be taking any further action against assistant referee Constantine Hatzidakis over an incident involving Liverpool left-back Andy Robertson during Sunday's 2-2 draw with Arsenal.

Hatzidakis had been stood down while an investigation was held, after he made contact with Robertson's chin when the player approached him at the end of the first half at Anfield.

"I think it has been dealt with really well," said Klopp.

"I wasn't aware of it during the game; I spoke to Robbo and the other guys, not the assistant, but now we can carry on."