

Iran eyeing Olympic success after Sabre World Cup bronze



Iranian fencers pose for a photo after winning the team bronze at the Men's Sabre World Cup in Madrid, Spain, on May 14, 2023.
● FIE

Sports Desk

Iran will be looking to secure an Olympic berth and succeed at next year's Games in Paris after an impressive run at the Men's Sabre World Cup in Madrid, said Alireza Pour-Salman, the chairman of the country's Fencing Federation. On Sunday, the Iranian three-man team – comprising Mohammad Rahbari, Mohammad Fotouhi, and Ali Pakdaman – defeated Italy 45-37 to leave the Span-

ish capital with the team bronze.

The tournament – featuring 237 fencers and 29 teams – served as a qualification event for the 2024 Olympics.

Pour-Salman said Iran was unlucky not to square off against European powerhouse Hungary in the final showdown, following a 45-24 setback against USA.

"The Americans escaped from us in the semifinals. The team only had 15 minutes of rest after the win

against Georgia in the quarterfinals, not to mention our game against Canada in the previous round had been delayed due to a technical issue. That is why the physical burden of the last-four contest was too much for us," Pour-Salman told ISNA. Iran came out on top against Chile and Canada and then edged Georgia 45-44 for a place in the last four.

Pakdaman, meanwhile, stunned the world fencing by defeating three-time Olympic gold medalist Aron

Szilagy of Hungary, before suffering a 15-14 loss to Italian Riccardo Nuccio in the men's individual quarterfinals.

Hungary beat USA 45-42 for the team gold, with Georgia's Sandro Bazadze walking away with the ultimate prize of the individual contests, thanks to a 15-6 triumph against Nuccio.

"It was a tough tournament as all countries sent their full-strength squads to Madrid. Even Hungary labored to victory over Japan, but I

still believe our team did a great job," said the head of the Iranian fencing body, adding: "We collected decent Olympic qualification points but still have a long way ahead of us before sealing the quota for the Games." Next for the Iranian fencers is the Asian Championships in Wuxi, China, in June before the FIE Fencing World Championships gets underway in Milan on July 22.

"I hope we could emulate the recent success in the upcoming Asian and world

events to pave the way for a place in Paris. Those tournaments, though, will also be demanding as you could see teams like China, Japan, and Uzbekistan have really improved in the continent," said Pour-Salman.

"The Iranian team took the first step firmly but every match and every tournament will be a whole different challenge and the pressure will continue until we book the Olympics ticket and, hopefully, win a medal in Paris.

Argentine Bielsa named Uruguay coach



● GETTY IMAGES

BBC – Former Leeds United manager Marcelo Bielsa has been named head coach of the Uruguay national team.

The 67-year-old Argentine has been out of a job since he was sacked by the Elland Road club in February 2022.

He held talks with both Bournemouth and Everton in recent months over their then-vacant managerial positions.

Two-time champions Uruguay failed to progress out of their group at the World Cup in Qatar.

Bielsa joined Leeds in 2018 and is still revered by the club's fans for overseeing their return to the Premier League after a 16-year absence. Before moving to the Premier League, he managed in France, Italy, Spain and Argentina, as well as taking charge of Chile for four years between 2007 and 2011.

Marcelo Broli has served as interim head coach since February. Diego Alonso, who was appointed Uruguay boss in 2021, resigned following the World Cup.

Uruguay are 16th in FIFA's world rankings.

De Bruyne seeks Champions League vindication to sparkling Man City career

AFP – Real Madrid managed to blunt Manchester City's goalscoring phenom Erling Haaland in the first leg of their Champions League semi-final, but there was no stopping the brilliance of Kevin De Bruyne.

The Belgian's thunderbolt at the Bernabeu left the tie delicately balanced at 1-1 heading into tonight's second leg, but with City oozing confidence thanks to a 100 percent record in 14 home games in 2023.

Pep Guardiola's men are four matches away from becoming just the second side to ever win the treble of Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup in the same season.

A fifth league title in six seasons is as good as won with a maximum of three points needed from City's final three games.

Manchester United will have their chance to prevent the Red Devils' treble in 1998/99 being matched in the FA Cup final.

But with whoever emerges victorious at the Etihad big favourites to be crowned European champions against Inter Milan or AC Milan in Istanbul next month, Madrid

are the biggest obstacle between City and immortality.

Real's own run to Champions League glory last season was fuelled by goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois' perceived slight at his reputation in England.



Kevin De Bruyne (C) fires home Manchester City's equalizer in a 1-1 draw against Real Madrid in Santiago Bernabeu, Madrid, Spain, on May 9, 2023.
● ALEX LIVESEY/GETTY IMAGES

"I don't think I get enough respect, especially in England," said the former Chelsea stopper after his man-of-the-match performance denied Liverpool in the final. For his international teammate De Bruyne, it is the opposite.

Widely considered one of the Premier League's finest imports, the 31-year-old has twice been crowned players' player

of the year by his peers alongside a growing haul of 10 major trophies under Guardiola.

But City's failure to get over the line in the Champions League and the Belgian golden generation's lack of a major tour-

of players, saw a lot of players, played against some of the greatest. I think Kevin, his brain is the best I've ever seen," said Arsenal and Barcelona great Thierry Henry, who worked with De Bruyne during two spells as an assistant

City's success.

He scored twice as the defending champions landed a telling blow on Arsenal in the Premier League title race last month.

But creativity rather than goals is the currency in which De Bruyne's influence is best measured.

He has 27 assists in 43 appearances this season, becoming the fastest player to 100 Premier League assists in the process.

"He's not comfortable to play with a pause, he needs to play with speed," said Guardiola.

"It is so difficult to find a player that plays at this speed and has the ability to see the passes more than when is more calm or walking.

"The normal players, when you walk, you see everything. But when you run a high speed, you are not able to see what happened. He's completely the opposite. That's why he is an exceptional player."

Much like his manager, De Bruyne's achievements at City have always come with the caveat of never having won the Champions League.

Win tonight and it is hard to see how they will be stopped.

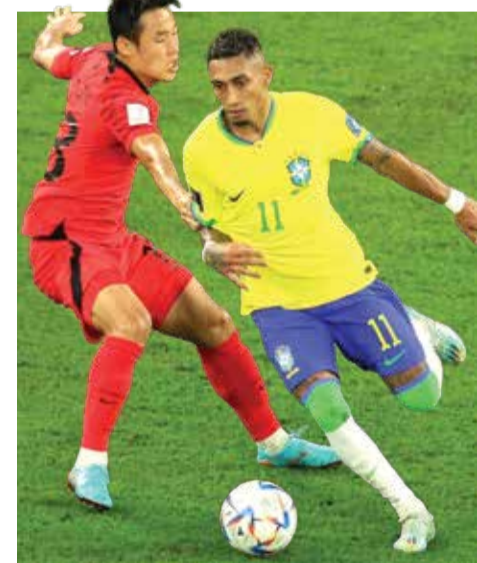
South Korean player detained in China over suspected bribery

REUTERS – A South Korean citizen, whom South Korea's government identified as football player Son Jun-ho, is suspected of accepting bribes and has been detained by the public security department of Liaoning province, China's Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.

Son, detained on Friday, is being held in police custody in northeast China in connection with a bribery case, a South Korean diplomatic source said on Monday. Reuters was unable to reach Son for comment.

Son plays for the South Korean national team and Chinese Super League club Shandong Taishan, based in the northeastern province of Shandong.

"China is a country governed by the rule of law and handles the relevant cases in accordance with the law to protect all the legitimate rights and interests of the parties involved," ministry



South Korea's Son Jun-ho (L) is seen in action against Brazil in the World Cup last 16 in Doha, Qatar, on December 5, 2022.
● PEDRO NUNES/REUTERS

spokesperson Wang Wenbin told a news briefing. South Korea's Foreign Ministry said its mission in China was providing necessary consular support to Son, but declined to comment further, citing privacy. A Korea Football Association official said it had reached out to Shandong Taishan, seeking an explanation, but has not heard back.

Son played in three of the national team's four games during the World Cup last year in Qatar, where South Korea reached the elimination round of the tournament for the first time in 12 years.

His club has not commented publicly on Son's situation, but uploaded a poster wishing him happy birthday on Friday, the day of his detention.