

Iranian women crowned at Asian Belt Wrestling Alysh



Sports Desk

A total of four medals – including a couple of golds – saw Iranian women's team win the title at the freestyle competitions of the 2023 Asian Belt Wrestling Alysh in Jizzakh, Uzbekistan. On Wednesday, Ommolbanin Mohseni and Reyhaneh Gilani walked away with the ultimate prizes of the 60kg and 70kg contests respectively, while Roqiyeh Mahmoudabadi (65kg) and Ezzat Qorbani-Sani settled for double silvers, as the country finished atop the freestyle ranking with 230 points. The host stood second with 215 points, with Kyrgyzstan in the third place.

The triumph came a day after Iran had also lifted the winner's trophy in the classic event – courtesy of four silver medals and two bronzes. Mohseni, Gilani, and Mahmoudabadi were joined by their 55kg teammate Sepideh Babaei in grabbing the silver in their respective weight classes, with Qorbani-Sani and Sahar Ghanizadeh (75kg) leaving Jizzakh with two bronze medals.

Iran was followed by Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the team table. This was a second successive double team gold for Iran at the competition.

Members of the Iranian women's team pose with the national flag after winning the title at the classic event in the Asian Belt Wrestling Alysh in Jizzakh, Uzbekistan, on May 23, 2023.

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My mother is my constant hero: Iranian karateka



By Mahdiyeh Qazvinian
Staff writer

EXCLUSIVE

Ali-Asghar Asiabari says his family has always been the biggest inspiration for the Iranian karateka, praising his mother for being "my constant hero" throughout his life and career.

"My mom and dad have played an integral part in my career. I've been privileged to have their support and encouragement. My mother is my constant hero in life," Asiabari told Iran Daily.

A men's team gold medalist in the World Championships in 2018, Asiabari, 27, started learning the basics of the sport at the age of six before turning pro when he was 12.

"I had the mentality and spirit of a warrior since I was a little kid, that's why I found karate a fascinating sport in the first place. Even today I'm a calm guy in personal life, but a true fighter on the tatami," says the Iranian, whose first coach was his father, Qesmat Asiabari.

"My father is a prominent grassroots coach in the country, under whom several high-profile Iranian karatekas, namely Bahman Asgari, Majid Hassan-Nia, and Amir-Reza Mirzaei have flourished." Asiabari burst onto the international scene of karate in 2013.

"I was always confident about my skills and qualities, which helped me find my way into the Iranian team at such a young age of 17," added Asiabari, whose fondest memory of representing the country to date is the 2016 World Championships in Linz, Austria.

Asiabari had to settle for a kumite-75kg bronze at the event – sharing the third podium with Italian great Luigi Busà – but still revels in the "thrilling" semifinal against Azerbaijan's Rafael Aghayev – the eventual gold medalist in the weight class.

The world bronze is only one of many medals Asiabari has won throughout a glittering career, including double golds as well as a silver and a bronze in the Asian Championships, plus a silver medal at the 2017 World Games in Wrocław, Poland. Asiabari has been dedicating part of his time to teaching young children – a job that has been "both absorbing and stressful" for him.

Ex-champion Esteghlal Khuzestan promoted back to Persian Gulf Pro League

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Esteghlal Khuzestan, a former champion in the Persian Gulf Pro League, is back in the Iranian top-flight after a four-year absence, thanks to a 5-0 victory over Arman Gohar in Ahvaz on the final day of the Azadegan League season.

Ali Helichi gave the host a 15th-minute lead at the Ghadir Stadium before Javad Aqaiepour and Behrouz Barani scored in the space of seven minutes to all but secure the three points by the half-hour mark. Aqaiepour bagged his second of the day right before the interval, and Keykhosro Siahpour sealed the victory for

the southern Iranian Blues in the fourth minute of the stoppage time. Nicknamed 'Leicester City of Iran' after stunning football fans in the country with a top-flight crown in 2016, Siros Pourmousavi's men finished second in the Azadegan League table with 57 points – two points clear of third-place Saipa, also an ex-Iranian league champion, which defeated Esteghlal Mollasani 4-0 but will have to settle for another season in the second-tier league. Dedicating the achievement to the people of Ahvaz, Pourmousavi was full of praise for his players for "their relentless efforts throughout the sea-

son." "We experienced a really tough 11 months. Things did not quite go well for us earlier in the season, but the solidarity within the team paid off as we managed to rally in the second half of the campaign," added Pourmousavi, who led the Esteghlal Khuzestan to the round of 16 at the AFC Champions League in 2017 before an aggregate defeat against Saudi giant Al Hilal. Esteghlal Khuzestan joins Shams Azar Qazvin, which had secured a first-ever promotion to the Pro League with three games to spare, finishing atop the table with a remarkable 70 points.



Esteghlal Khuzestan players celebrate promotion to the Persian Gulf Pro League after a 5-0 victory over Arman Gohar in Ahvaz, Iran, on May 23, 2023.

SEYED KHALIL MOUSAVI/ISNA

Celtics beat Heat to keep alive play-off hopes



Celtics' Jayson Tatum (0) grabs a rebound during the Game 4 victory over the Heat in the NBA Eastern Conference finals in Miami, FL, US, on May 23, 2023.

GETTY IMAGES

BBC – Jayson Tatum scored 33 points as the Boston Celtics kept alive their NBA play-offs by beating the Miami Heat.

Jaylen Brown added 17 points and Derrick White 16 in a 116-99 win for the Celtics, who would have been eliminated with a defeat.

The second seeds trail 3-1 in the best-of-seven series going into game five tonight.

"Now we just have to go win another one, that's all that matters," said Celtics guard Marcus Smart. No team in NBA play-off history has ever recovered from a 3-0 deficit to win a series.

"We're taking one game at a time," Smart added. "We understand that the odds are stacked us, but we're a team that believes in us no matter what, and all that matters is the next game."

Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla, who blamed himself for their below-par display in their 128-102

loss in game three, added: "We have to keep that same level of intensity, same mindset, same focus for the next game."

Jimmy Butler scored 29 points in reply for the Miami Heat, who are hoping to become just the second eighth-seeded team to advance to the NBA Finals after the New York Knicks in 1999.

"We have to play like our backs are against the wall," said Butler. "All year long, we've been better when we have to do things the hard way."

Caleb Martin, who added 16 points off the bench for the Heat, said: "It's definitely disappointing. That would have been a perfect situation [to end it]. Everyone knows we typically don't get things the easy way."

The winners will play the Denver Nuggets after they completed a 4-0 Western Conference championship sweep over the Los Angeles Lakers.