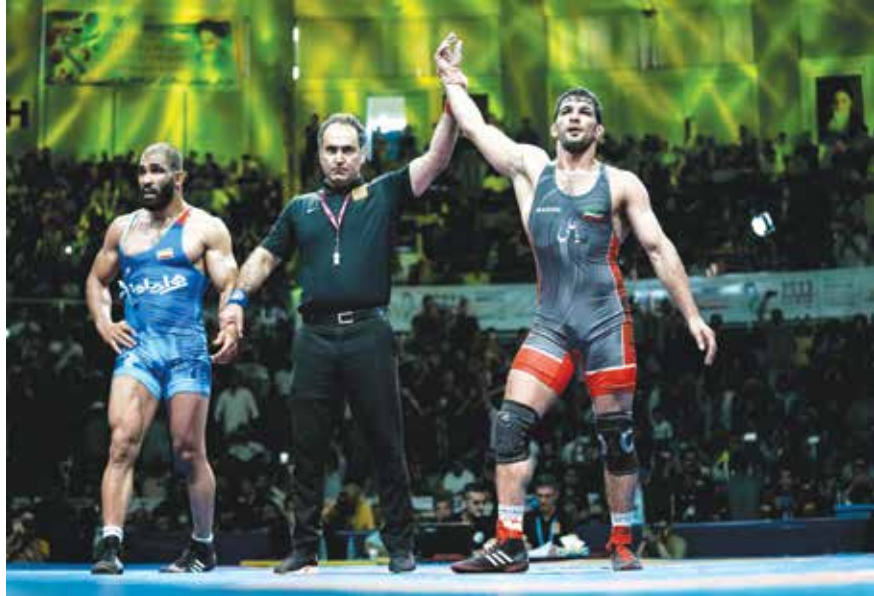


International Freestyle Wrestling Takhti Cup: Yazdani, Zare' among gold winners, set to wear Iranian singlet at World Championships



Hassan Yazdani (R) has his hand raised as the winner after a victory over Hadi Vafaiepour in the 86kg final at the International Freestyle Wrestling Takhti Cup in Urmia, Iran, on May 26, 2023.
● AMIR-REZA ALI-ASGARI/iw/fir



Amirhossein Zare' (R) is in action against Amir-Reza Ma'soumi in the 125kg final at the International Freestyle Wrestling Takhti Cup in Urmia, Iran, on May 26, 2023.
● MEHDI NASIRI/iw/fir

Sports Desk

Hassan Yazdani and Amirhossein Zare' were among the 10 Iranians to walk away with the ultimate prizes of their respective weight classes at the International Freestyle Wrestling Takhti Cup in Urmia, northwestern Iran. Featuring wrestlers from Iraq and Afghanistan, the event – named after late wrestling icon Gholamreza Takhti – also served as part of the Iranian freestyle team trials for September's

World Championships, meaning the gold medalists will be in pole position to represent the country in Belgrade. On Friday, Yazdani, a winner of eight world and Olympic medals, made a quick work of winning the 86kg gold by cruising to a 12-2 victory over fellow Iranian Hadi Vafaiepour in the final. The Iranian sensation will be looking to square off against David Taylor in a third consecutive major final, chasing only a second

triumph against the American in a possible sixth showdown in the Serbian capital. Zare', meanwhile, stormed to a statement victory over Amir-Reza Ma'soumi, outmuscling the 19-year-old prodigy – a major contender for the Iranian singlet – 8-0 in the 125kg final. A bronze medalist at the Tokyo Olympics, Zare' will be after a third world medal in Belgrade, having collected a gold and a bronze in the previous two editions. Elsewhere on the final day

of the event, Reza Atri – a world silver winner last year – came out victorious 11-0 against Mohammad Ramezani for the 61kg gold, while two-time world bronze winner Younes Emami defeated reigning world under-23 champion Mohammad-Sadeq Firouzpour 6-0 in the 74kg final showpiece. An Asian bronze medalist in April, Mojtaba Goleij came out on top in the 97kg contests by edging two-time world U23 champion Amir-Ali Azarpira 3-2.

The first day of the competitions had seen Ahmad Mohammadnejad Javan beat Milad Valizadeh 7-6 in a thrilling 57kg final. Mohammadreza Shakeri had an easy task against Ebrahim Elahi in the 65kg final, romping to a 9-2 win, while in the 70kg contests, Mohammad Bakhshi beat Ali-Akbar Zaroudi 2-1 for a top-podium finish. In a decisive encounter for the 79kg spot in the Iranian team, Ali Savadkouhi, who stunned the world wrestling by a victory over

Jordan Burroughs in last year's FS World Cup, defeated Mohammad Nokhodi – beaten by the American great in the past two world finals – 4-3. Mohammad-Mobin Azimi capped off an impressive campaign with a 5-2 win against Mohammad-Javad Ebrahimi in the 92kg final but will still be unlikely to take part at in September's meet as Kamran Qassem-pour – the dominant force of the class – is set to pursue a third successive world gold in Belgrade.

Fury offers Joshua September fight deal at Wembley



● SHUTTERSTOCK

BBC – WBC world heavy-weight champion Tyson Fury says he wants to fight fellow Briton Anthony Joshua at Wembley in September and has sent him a contract.

Fury, 34, has not fought since stopping Derek Chisora in the 10th round at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in December.

A fight with Oleksandr Usyk, the IBF, IBO, WBO and WBA champion, was expected to happen in 2023 but fell through.

"A few days ago I sent a draft contract to Anthony Joshua for a fight in September at Wembley," Fury wrote.

In a post on Instagram, Briton Fury added: "It's a fight everyone wants to see, including myself."

"Come on AJ let's give the world what they want to see. This time I'm not going to make a million videos and keep putting pressure on. The ball is now on your side."

A fight between Fury and two-time world champion Joshua, 33, has long been talked about, but never materialised.

Fury set a deadline in September, which was not met, and said at the time: "It's officially over for Joshua. He is now out in the cold with the wolfpack."

"Forget about it. Always knew you didn't have the minerals to fight the 'Gypsy King'."

Unbeaten Fury fought Chisora instead and afterwards faced-off with Usyk, who had been ringside, with a bout between the two lined up for Wembley on 29 April.

However, Fury's promoter Frank Warren said in March that fight was off – and he "did not think" it would happen in the near future.

Usyk, also unbeaten with 20 wins from 20 fights, had agreed a 70/30 purse split in Fury's favour with terms for a rematch the only outstanding issue.

Joshua has twice lost to the 36-year-old Usyk, but then said Fury could "redeem himself from the circus" by agreeing to fight him.

"There's no better time to get Fury in the ring than now because he needs me to redeem himself from this circus, this let-down," said Joshua.

"He needs me so there's no better time than for him to call my name out and I'm someone that will take on any challenge."

Fury has 33 wins and one draw from 34 bouts, while Joshua – who beat American Jermaine Franklin on points in London in April – has 25 wins and three defeats in his 28-fight professional career after winning Olympic gold as an amateur in 2012.

Klopp calms concern over Salah's Liverpool future after outburst



● SHUTTERSTOCK

THE GUARDIAN – Jürgen Klopp has said there are no concerns over Mohamed Salah's future at Liverpool despite the forward's devastation at missing out on Champions League football next season.

Liverpool's leading goalscorer made clear his frustration in a strongly worded tweet after Manchester United's 4-1 defeat of Chelsea on Thursday, a result that confirmed Klopp's team will not compete in the Champions League for the first time in seven seasons next term. Salah, who signed a new three-year contract last summer, said he was "totally devastated" and "there's absolutely no excuse for this".

Klopp claimed Salah was in a good mood the morning after his uncharacteristic outburst on social media and that this season's disappointment would harden the resolve of everyone at Liverpool to reclaim a place among the European elite. The Liverpool manager said: "No worries, no [that Salah wants to go]. I couldn't read anything that could lead in that direction. Obviously Mo loves being here and Mo was part of it. He said apologies for what 'we' did – not apologies for 'what the other guys did, but I had to go with them'. Not at all. It is all fine.

"If ever a player would come to me and say: 'Oh we didn't qualify for the

Champions League, I have to leave,' I would drive him to the other club myself. I would take the key, and say: 'Come in the car, where do you want to go?' I'll drive you.' That would be something I never could understand. It's like me saying: 'We didn't qualify for the Champions League and I need to work in the Champions League, so I go. I am responsible for this mess, or whatever, so you cannot go in these moments.

"It is not the case with Mo, not at all, and nobody else [asked] me. They ask if they can have a day longer holiday but nobody asks me if after the holiday they have to come back. That was not in our conversations."

Brazil to play African nations in anti-racism campaign to support Vinicius Jr

REUTERS – Brazil will play friendlies against two African nations as part of an anti-racism campaign in support of their Real Madrid forward Vinicius Jr, who has been racially abused in Spanish League games this season, the Brazilian FA (CBF) said on Friday.

The five-time world champions will face Guinea in Barcelona on June 17 and Senegal in Lisbon three days later.

The CBF has also launched a national campaign against racism in Brazilian league matches starting this weekend following the racist insults 22-year-old Vinicius Jr suffered in a LaLiga match at Valencia on Sunday, the 10th such episode against the player that LaLiga has reported to

prosecutors this season.

With the slogan "There is no game with racism", the CBF aims to extend the fight started in 2022 under its new president Ednaldo Rodrigues, who pushed for changes in legislation that saw the football authorities and Brazilian justice system apply more severe punishments against racism in stadiums.

"We want Brazil to lead the fight against racism worldwide," Rodrigues told Reuters in an interview on March.

The CBF worked closely with Vinicius Jr on the details surrounding the two friendlies as it wanted to be sure the player was comfortable with the matches being held in Iberia and the Real Madrid winger sup-

ported the idea, sources said.

With the CBF still looking for a new national team manager, Brazil will again be coached by caretaker Ramon Menezes, who will leave the Under-20s for a day during the World Cup that is currently being played in Argentina to announce today in Rio de Janeiro the squad for the Barcelona and Lisbon friendlies.

Rodrigues told Reuters in March that Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti would be an obvious choice for the vacant Brazil post if he was available at the end of the European season.

However, last week the Italian said he would honour the last year of his contract at the Bernabeu.



Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior (C) gestures towards a fan after witnessing racial abuse in a LaLiga match against Valencia at Mestalla, Valencia, Spain, on May 21, 2023.
● PABLO MORANO/REUTERS