

Iran U17 team marches to Asian FS wrestling crown

Sports Desk

A clean sweep of medals across 10 weight classes saw Iran's under-17 team cruise to the freestyle wrestling crown at the Asian Championships in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Iranian boys collected six golds, three silvers, and a bronze medal to dominate the team table with 225 points – 45 points clear of second-placed India, with Kazakhstan finishing third with 158 points. On Tuesday, Tohid Noori defeated opponents from India, Turkmenistan, and Mongolia before coming out on top against Kazakhstan's Samir Dursunov 4-1 for the 92kg gold. Having marched to the final showdown without conceding a point, Ahoura Khateri won the first gold of the day for the country, thanks to a victory by technical superiority (11-0) over Indian Dhanraj Bharat Shirke in the 45kg contests. A second final showpiece of the afternoon featuring the Iranian and Indian wrestlers saw Sam Sayyar edge Rupesh Rupesh for the ultimate prize of the 48kg class. Meanwhile, Amir-Reza Teymourizad finished his campaign with the 55kg



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silver after suffering a 6-5 loss to India's Ankush Ankush in the final. Sajjad Pirdayeh was the second Iranian to fall to a defeat in the final as he was beaten 2-1 by the host's Omurbek Uulu and took the 60kg silver, while Abolfazl Mohammadnejad was the second best against

Yedige Kassimbek of Kazakhstan in the 110kg final – suffering an 8-1 setback. In the 51kg event, Amir-mohammad Navazi bounced back from a last-four defeat against Japan's Leo Akagi to outmuscle Uzbekistan's Shohiron Aliev 7-0 and leave Bishkek with a consolation bronze.

Tuesday's medals came after the Iranians had scooped all three golds up for grabs on the preceding night. Sina Khalili came out victorious by an 8-3 scoreline against home-favorite Rustamzhan Kakharov in a thrilling 65kg final, while Abolfazl Hosseini outpow-

ered Nurdaulet Seilbekov of Uzbekistan 6-2 for the 71kg gold. Abolfazl Rahmani made a quick work of winning the 80kg gold by a 10-0 win against Indian Saurabh Yadav in the final contest. Iran's emphatic triumph came a year after the country had to settle for a fourth-

spot finish at the event, courtesy of five medals – including a single gold. "Thank God we won a medal in all weight classes, but this is just the beginning for this team," said Iran head coach Behnam Ehsanpour. "Our ultimate goal will be to succeed at the upcoming World Championships in Istanbul [starting July 31]. I'm confident this team is also capable of winning the world title," added the Iranian. The freestyle crown meant Iran left the Kyrgyz capital with double boys' crowns after the country won four golds as well as two silvers and bronzes apiece for the first Greco-Roman title in the competitions in four years. Mohammad-Meraj Mohammadi (51kg), Mohammadreza Gholami (55kg), Ali-Akbar Asghari (92kg), and Amirhossein Abdevali (110kg) walked away with the top prize of their respective weight classes. Erfan Moradi (45kg) and Habibollah Rahimi (71kg) added a couple of silvers to the country's medal haul, while Ali Dezfoulinejad (60kg) and Ahmadreza Mohammadian (65kg) were the Iranian bronze medalists at the event.

Mbappé questions PSG with Madrid 'lies' claim



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THE GUARDIAN – Kylian Mbappé will leave Paris Saint-Germain next summer but not before – if the French striker is to be believed. Within an hour of his camp releasing a statement announcing he had no intention of continuing at the club beyond the end of his contract, which expires in 2024, the Frenchman responded to reports that he wants to join Real Madrid immediately by dismissing them as "lies" and insisting: "I have already said that I will continue at PSG next season where I am very happy." Mbappé's statement comes as a direct challenge to the PSG hierarchy, who are determined not to lose him for free in a year's time, as a standoff develops, the first step in a long summer. Madrid had initially planned to move for Mbappé in 2024 but would be prepared to bid now if he is put on the market, particularly after the departure of Karim Benzema 12 months ahead of schedule. The Spanish club, though, remain reluctant to be drawn into another battle having failed with a €200m (£171m) bid to sign him in 2021 and again in 2022 as his contract was coming to an end, when they believed he would join them on a free transfer. That pursuit was played out publicly, with Madrid convinced they had an agreement in place. Mbappé's last-minute decision to remain in Paris had angered many in the Spanish capital but contact was reestablished, an apology had been made, and the intention was to line up his signing ready for next summer. This time, it would be up to Mbappé to take the necessary steps. He has now done so. L'Équipe reported on Monday night that Mbappé had written to PSG to inform them he was not going to exercise the option to extend his contract beyond 2024. In a statement released on Tuesday through AFP, his camp said he had told the PSG board that as far back as 15 July 2022 – shortly after signing the original deal which was for two years with an optional extra year. Since then, it claimed, there had been no meaningful negotiations over an extension and he had no intention of continuing beyond June next year. Faced with the prospect of losing him for free – a risk they had been prepared to take in 2021 – PSG's preference is to push through a sale this summer.



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Greek manager Ouzounidis agrees to join Golgothar

Sports Desk

Greek manager Marinus Ouzounidis is set to be named as the new head coach of Golgothar Sirjan after agreeing a two-year deal with the Persian Gulf Pro League club. The fee of the contract is yet to be officially disclosed but Iranian Mehr News Agency, quoting Greek media, reported that Ouzounidis and his coaching staff will receive two million euros per season during their time in Iran.

Ouzounidis, 49, will take over from interim coach Saeed Al-hoei, who led Golgothar to the sixth spot in the newly-finished Iranian top-flight season. Alhoei, a former assistant coach in the club, replaced Amir Qalenoee midway through last season, after he parted ways with Golgothar to take charge of the Iranian national team. A former player of Greek giant Panathinaikos and APOEL Nicosia, Ouzounidis is familiar with working as a coach in the Middle East, as he was in charge of Saudi

Arabia's Al Faisaly during two spells over the past 18 months. His second stint at the Saudi club came to an end following a defeat against Iranian side Foolad Khuzestan in the AFC Champions League last-16 round last March. Capped on 49 occasions for the national team, Ouzounidis led APOEL to the Cypriot First Division title in 2002 and was named the Manager of the Year in the Greek Super League after steering Panionios to a fifth-place finish.

Lukaku offered €25 million a season by Al Hilal

GOAL – Romelu Lukaku has received a formal offer from Al Hilal, which could see him follow Cristiano Ronaldo to Saudi Arabia. The Chelsea striker, who spent the 2022-23 season on loan at Inter, visited Saudi Arabia on Monday to meet with Al Hilal officials, GOAL has learned. The Saudi club have offered Lukaku a two-season contract worth a grand total of €50 million (£43m/\$54m). Lukaku is due to return to Chelsea now that his loan deal with Inter has expired. It has been reported that the Italian giants do not have the necessary funds to sign him outright, and new Blues boss Mauricio Pochettino is said to be ready to give the striker another chance at Stamford Bridge. However, GOAL can confirm that Lukaku is very much open to a switch to Al Hilal. The 30-year-old will first try to squeeze an even

larger salary out of the club, though, as he wants to be rewarded handsomely if he is to turn his back on European football. Al Hilal will have to enter into direct negotiations with Chelsea if they strike an agreement with Lukaku. The Blues are open to a sale as they seek to trim their squad ahead of the new season, but will ask for a fee in excess of €50 million. GOAL understands that Al Hilal are reluctant to pay that much for Lukaku, but they will be receptive to a potential compromise with Chelsea in order to push a final deal over the line. The Chelsea forward has expressed his desire to remain at Inter, who reached the 2022-23 Champions League final only to lose 1-0 against Manchester City, but it appears unlikely that the Italian giants will be able to keep him for another year. The lure of riches in Saudi Arabia could prove too strong for Lukaku

to ignore, with Ronaldo paving the way for more high-profile stars to play in the Middle East after his record-breaking switch to Al Nassr in December. Ronaldo's former team-mate Karim Benzema has since left Real Madrid to join Al Ittihad, with Chelsea's N'Golo Kante also set to complete a move to the Saudi Pro League champions. Meanwhile, the Guardian reported that Manchester City's Riyad Mahrez who has attracted interest from the Saudi side Al Ahli, is understood to be open to leaving the club despite being part of their treble-winning squad. The Algeria forward signed a two-year contract extension at the Etihad Stadium last summer and City will demand a considerable fee for the player they signed from Leicester in 2018 for £60m.



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