

Iranian MMA fighter Aliakbari eyeing a shot at ONE heavyweight title



● onefc.com

Sports Desk

Iranian mixed martial arts fighter Amir Aliakbari will be chasing a third successive victory in ONE Championship when he takes on Canadian Dustin Joynson at Fight Night 12 event in Bangkok on Friday.

After going undefeated in 2022, the 35-year-old Iranian hopes a win will put him in pole position for a shot at the ONE heavyweight title against reigning world

champion Anatoly Malykhin.

Malykhin took out Arjan Bhullar in a unification bout at ONE Friday Fights 22 this past June and now is looking for a challenger for his heavyweight crown.

Having joined ONE Championship in 2020, Aliakbari got off to a shaky start to life in the organization, suffering back-to-back defeats against South Korean Kang Ji Won and Russian Malykhin.

The Iranian, who is on a 12-3 record – including nine knockouts – bounced back last year to come out on top against Italy's Mauro Cerilli before outmuscling former ONE heavyweight world champion Brandon Vera in December.

In an article on the ONE Championships website, combat sports writer Ben Coate recently described Aliakbari as "one of the division's most intriguing – and dangerous – contenders."

"The former Greco-Roman wrestling world champion is a suffocating and powerful grappler of the highest degree, capable of putting practically any opponent on the canvas whenever he wants. "The Tehran native is competing not just with the goal of winning a ONE world title – but also to prove he's a better fighter than what he showed against Malykhin in their first bout."

Alakbari's Friday opponent, meanwhile, steps into the

fight on the back of a victory via split decision over then-unbeaten Brazilian Hugo Cunha in February last year, which saw him elevate his record to 7-1.

Like Aliakbari, Joynson didn't have an ideal start to his tenure in the organas he was beaten by former ONE world title challenger Kirill Grishenko in October 2021. "Yeah, he's a good wrestler. Everyone seems to be a wrestler in ONE. I think if I can just tag him and put

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pressure on him, make sure he doesn't grab me, I think I can probably drop him," Joynson said of Aliakbari recently.

"Best-case scenario, he walks right into my right fist or to my head kick." With Malykhin now living in Phuket, Thailand, perhaps he will make the short trip to Bangkok's Lumpinee Boxing Stadium to closely watch Friday's bout and find out who his next opponent will probably be.

Mes Rafsanjan signs Iraqi international Adnan



Sports Desk

Iraqi international full-back Ali Adnan joined Persian Gulf Pro League club Mes Rafsanjan as a free agent.

Adnan, 29, spent last season at Russian top-flight club Rubin Kazan, where he made eight appearances.

The former Vancouver Whitecaps and Vejle BK player has eight goals in 85 international outings under belt.

He was an integral part of the Iraqi under-20 team which made it to the 2013 FIFA U-20 World Cup in Turkey, before suffering a shootout defeat against Uruguay.

Having started his overseas career with Turkish club Çaykur Rizespor in 2013, Adnan joined Serie A club Udinese in 2015, where he scored once in 65 games either side of a loan spell at Atalanta.

The Iraqi will join up with his new teammates in a training camp in Armenia. Mes enjoyed an impressive run under ex-manager Mohammad Rabiei last season – finishing fifth in the Iranian league – but will have Saket Elhami as the new head coach for the start of the upcoming campaign.

Sheikh Talal elected head of OCA



● OCA

REUTERS – Sheikh Talal Fahad Al Ahmad Al-Sabah of Kuwait became the third member of his influential family to become the President of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), edging out Husain Al-Musallam in Saturday's General Assembly in Bangkok.

The 54-year-old, son of the first OCA president Sheikh Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, beat OCA Director General Al-Musallam 24-20, the OCA said in a statement.

Sheikh Talal succeeds his brother Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al-Sabah, who led the organisation from 1991 to 2021 before stepping down following a guilty verdict against him in a Swiss forgery trial.

Former secretary general Randhir Singh of India had led the OCA as its acting president since 2021.

Murray unsure of Wimbledon return after Tsitsipas loss

THE GUARDIAN – Andy Murray was unable to hide his crushing disappointment after his painful second-round loss to Stefanos Tsitsipas at Wimbledon and could not guarantee he will play again in the tournament.

After leading by two sets to one in a match postponed on Thursday night due to Wimbledon's 11pm curfew, Murray conceded the final two sets on Friday to Tsitsipas, the fifth seed, losing 7-6 (3), 6-7 (2), 4-6, 7-6 (3), 6-4.

"Ultimately this was an opportunity for me," said Murray. "I had a good chance of having a proper run for the first time in a long time at a slam. I didn't take it. Regardless of the atmosphere and those things, it's still very, very disappointing to be sitting here right now."

Murray said he had no immediate plans to retire but could not be certain about his future. Asked how confident he is that he will return next year, Murray said: "I don't know. Motivation is obviously a big thing. Continuing having early losses in tournaments like this doesn't necessarily help with that. Yeah, it's similar to

I guess last year. I had a long think about things, spoke to my family, decided to keep on going. I don't plan to stop right now. But, yeah, this one will take a little while to get over. Hopefully I find the motivation again to keep training, keep pushing, try and keep getting better.

"Obviously, you never know how many opportunities you're going to get to play here. The defeats maybe feel a bit tougher."

During his post-match press conference, which was conducted minutes after his defeat, the 36-year-old appeared close to tears as he digested another bitter, close defeat in a major tournament.

"I certainly can [beat top players]," said Murray. "It's clear based on how the match went. I mean, there's only a few points in it today. Like, it's not just about winning the odd match against them really. To have a run at these tournaments, you need multiple, multiple wins in a row. Yeah, I've obviously not done that."

Djoko through

Elsewhere, reigning champion Novak Djokovic defeat-



Andy Murray leaves the court after a Wimbledon second-round defeat against Stefanos Tsitsipas in London, Britain, on July 7, 2023.

● ALBERTO PEZZALI/AP

ed old rival Stan Wawrinka to reach the last 16 and move closer to an eighth men's singles Wimbledon title.

Djokovic won 6-3 6-1 7-6 (7-5) in a match that finished 14 minutes before the 23:00 BST cut-off on Friday night, BBC reported.

Wawrinka, 38, is a three-time Grand Slam winner, beating Djokovic in two of those finals – the 2015 French Open and 2016

US Open – but had said he had zero hopes of winning the tournament and "no chance" of beating 36-year-old Djokovic.

The Serb dominated the opening two sets, winning them in a total of 67 minutes, dropping only four games while doing so, but Wawrinka produced a better performance in the third set. But Djokovic, who is aiming to equal Roger Federer's

men's record of eight titles, ensured his match would not go into extra time as he fought back from 5-3 down in the tie-break to advance into the last 16.

"We are two old guys fighting with the young guns," said Djokovic. "We have had some amazing battles on the biggest courts. I respect him as a player and he is a really nice guy so I wish him all the best for the rest of the season."