

Iran confirms freestyle lineup for Wrestling World Championships



◀ Mohammad Nokhodi will be Iran's freestyle 79kg wrestler in September's World Championships after winning the gold medal at the UWW Ranking Series in Budapest, Hungary.
● UWW

Sports Desk

Two-time world silver medalist Mohammad Nokhodi as well as Amirmohammad Yazdani and Milad Valizadeh sealed their spots in September's Wrestling World Championships as Iran completed the 10-man squad for the freestyle competitions in Belgrade. The trio were in action in the UWW Ranking Series event in Budapest on Thursday and Friday – which also served as the final round of the Iranian trials for the World Championships. Nokhodi represented the country in the 79kg

contests – alongside Ali Savadkouhi – and defeated Georgian Vladimeri Gamkrelidze 3-0 for the ultimate prize. The Iranian came within inches of the world gold over the past two years, only to come short against American sensation Jordan Burroughs in the final on both occasions. With the six-time world champion absent in September's world meet, Nokhodi will be looking to make it third time lucky in the Serbian capital. Savadkouhi stole the headlines in last year's FS World Cup by coming out victorious against Burroughs

– a first triumph over the legendary wrestler in 15 attempts for the Iranians – but his pursuit of a place in the world event came to an end after a last-eight defeat against Georgia's Avtandil Kentchadze, who was later beaten by Nokhodi in the semifinals. Yazdani, meanwhile, had a below-par run in the 70kg contests as back-to-back defeats against American Joseph McKenna and Kazakhstan's Sanzhar Doszhanov saw the 2021 world silver winner settle for a fifth-spot finish in Budapest. However, Yazdani was given a second chance in about

against his fellow Iranian Mohammad Bakhshi – who was stunned by Egyptian Amr Hussien in the quarterfinals – and made the most of it by a 6-0 win to book the ticket for Belgrade. The quest for the Iranian 57kg berth also went down to a head-to-head battle after both Valizadeh and Ahmad Mohammadnejad-Javan failed to finish on the podium. Valizadeh was knocked out by USA's Zane Richards in the quarterfinals while Mohammadnejad-Javan suffered a 5-0 defeat against China's Zou Wanhao in the bronze medal match. Valizadeh still managed to

edge out his compatriot 4-3 in the decider for a place in the Iranian team. The three wrestlers will join reigning world champions Rahman Amouzad (65kg) and Kamran Qassempour (92kg) plus Reza Atri (57kg), Younes Emami (74kg), eight-time world and Olympic medalist Hassan Yazdani (86kg), Mojtaba Goleij (97kg), and Amirhossein Zare' (125kg) in the World Championships as Iran – runner-up to USA last year – will be chasing a first freestyle crown in a decade. Qassempour could still miss out on a third successful world gold after limping off injured in a training

session in June, though he insisted last week that he would recover in time for the visit to Belgrade. Should the Iranian be ruled out of the World Championships, he will be replaced by young prodigy Amir-Ali Azarpira – a two-time world under-23 champion. Azarpira took part in the Budapest tournament and delivered some impressive performances – including an emphatic 11-0 victory over last year's world bronze winner Miriani Maisuradze of Georgia – but was unlucky to leave the event empty-handed due to a leg injury before the semifinals.

Record-breaker Paralympian Afroz grabs world javelin gold



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Sports Desk

Iran's Saeid Afroz stole the show at the World Para Athletics Championships in Paris on Friday by shattering the world record en route to the javelin throw gold. Representing the country in the F34 class, Afroz – gold medalist at the Tokyo Paralympics – registered a remarkable throw of 40.27m for the ultimate prize, finishing above Colombian duo Mauricio Valencia and Diego Meneses, who settled for the silver and bronze medals respectively. This was a third gold for Iran in Paris, following victorious shotput campaigns for Mehdi Olad and Rashid Masjedi earlier in the competitions. Olad's 13.79m throw sealed a second world gold for the Tokyo Olympic champion in the F11 event, while Masjedi topped the F53 table thanks to a successful 8.49m throw. Olad won his second world medal in the French capital on Saturday – a discus throw silver in the F11 class with 43.73m. Also a reigning Paralympic champion, Amir Khosravani left the French capital with a long jump silver as a best attempt of 7.26m saw the Iranian finish second to Uzbekistan's Daniyir Saliev in the T12 class. In the women's contests, Hashemiyeh Motaqian's successful 22.95m attempt saw the Tokyo Paralympic gold medalist bag a bronze in the javelin throw F56 event. The five Iranian medalists were joined by Elnaz Darabian, Elham Salehi, Amanollah Papi, and Alireza Mokhtari in securing a quota for next year's Paralympic Games in Paris.

Iranian sprinter Fasihi wins Asian 100m silver; Taftian bags men's bronze

Sports Desk

Iran's Farzaneh Fasihi won the women's 100m silver in the Asian Athletics Championships in Bangkok, Thailand, while Hassan Taftian took the men's bronze. An Asian Indoor 60m champion in February, Fasihi crossed the finish line in 11.39 seconds to stand next to Singaporean gold medalist Shanti Pereira (11.20 seconds) on the podium. China's Ge Manqi took the bronze with 11.40 seconds. Fasihi's compatriot Hamideh Esmailnejad, whose 11.33 record in the preliminary round

was a new national high, finished fourth in the final. In the men's 100m final, Taftian – a champion in 2017 – settled for the third place behind Japan's Hiroki Yanagita (10.02 seconds) and Saudi sprinter Abdullah Abkar Mohammed (10.19 seconds) with 10.23 seconds. Elsewhere in the competition, Mehdi Saberi added a silver to Iran's medal count on Friday – thanks to a 19.98m throw in the men's shotput contests. Indian Tajinderpal Singh Toor – a gold medalist in the 2018 Asian Games – tallied 20.23m for the top spot, with Ivan Ivanov of Kazakhstan taking the bronze with 19.87m.

Aliakbari beats Canadian Joynson, taunts Malykhin for world heavyweight title

ASIAN MMA – Mixed martial arts fighter Amir Aliakbari looks set to challenge for the ONE Championship heavyweight title. The Iranian was supposed to face off with Anatoly Malykhin after his victory over Canadian Dustin Joynson at ONE Fight Night 12 on Friday but the plan was scrapped after the two men nearly came to blows. Malykhin was invited into the ring and immediately began to taunt Aliakbari, although it wasn't clear exactly what was being said. The two men briefly wrestled with one another before the altercation was broken up and the Russian escorted back to his seat. They both ended up in an awkward clinch although it is possible one of them might have been simply trying to embrace the oth-



◀ Iranian Amir Aliakbari celebrates his victory over Canadian Dustin Joynson at ONE Fight Night 12 in Bangkok, Thailand, on July 14, 2023.
● ONE CHAMPIONSHIP

er. Whether or not the plan was to announce a rematch we don't know but Aliakbari is clearly the number one contender. The Iranian has well and truly turned his ONE Cham-

pionship career around after losing his first two fights with the promotion. He will have an opportunity to avenge one of those losses when he rematches Malykhin later this year.

Aliakbari looked sharp in the early exchanges as he fired off hooks to the head. The Iranian drove Joynson back with a series of jabs and had the Canadian trapped in the corner. He fired off a hard right hand to the head and with Joynson's hands high Aliakbari was easily able to secure a takedown. He immediately secured side control and trapped the Canadian in the crucifix position. With both arms pinned Joynson's head was completely exposed and Aliakbari took advantage to land several punches. Eventually the Canadian decided he had had enough with the tap coming at the 1:48 mark. With the win Aliakbari improves to 13-3 and probably secures a shot at the heavyweight title. Joynson drops to 7-2-0-1.