

Déjà vu in Bahrain: Iran U21 beats Italy to regain world volleyball crown



Iranian players and coaching staff celebrate after the 3-2 victory over Italy in the FIVB Volleyball Men's U21 World Championship final in Manama, Bahrain, on July 16, 2023.

● FIVB

Sports Desk

Bahrain proved to be the promised land for the Iranian under-21 volleyball. Four years after Behrouz Ataei – now in charge of the seniors' team – had led Iran to a five-set victory over Italy in the Bahraini city of Riffa for a maiden title, the Asian powerhouse again came from behind to beat the European giant 3-2 (25-20, 23-25, 23-25, 25-16, 15-9)

to lift a second trophy at the FIVB Volleyball Men's U21 World Championship in capital Manama. Iranian opposite Amirmohammad Golzadeh rounded off his MVP performance at the event by chipping in 20 points, while outside-hitter Pouria Hossein Khanzadeh, who joined the team midway through the competition after his Volleyball Nations League duty, contributed with 18

points – including five aces. Shayan Sephehrifard also finished in double figures for Iran, scoring 12 points. Alessandro Bovolenta had a game-high 21 points for the Italians, with Mattia Orioli finishing on 17. "We are a very good team. We know our potential, and some of our stars can join the senior team," Golzadeh said after the game. "I had also received the MVP award with the junior

team and now my goal is to get the prize with the senior team, along with the world title at the highest level. You cannot gain anything without pain," Golzadeh told Volleyball World. The Iranian young gun, who was the leading scorer in Manama with a total of 136 points – 107 successful spikes, 11 blocks and 18 aces – also took the Best Opposite prize and was joined by two other teammates in

the Dream Team. Arshia Behnejad was named the Best Setter, while Mobin Nasri was the joint Best Outside Hitter – alongside Italian Orioli. Gabriele Laurenzano took the Best Libero prize, with his fellow Italian Filippo Bartolucci and Bulgaria's Lazar Bouchkov sharing the Best Middle Blocker award. The triumph in Manama came as a consolation for the Iranian fans, who had to

watch their national team suffer 10 defeats in 12 outings and finish third from bottom in the 16-team table of the preliminary round in the Volleyball Nations League last week. "This victory shows the strength of the Iranian volleyball," head coach Gholamreza Momeni-Moqaddam said after the match, while he was full of praise for his players. "Winning the world title is a great honor for the country and I'm proud of my players for that. They worked hard for two years and were rewarded for their relentless efforts. When you're trailing 2-1 against a team like Italy it would be so hard to get back in the game but that's what my players did, which indicates the determination and confidence of the team. They are the future of the Iranian volleyball," added Momeni-Moqaddam, whose team was the only unbeaten side in Manama.

For the Italians, who stepped into the competition as the defending champions, the silver in Manama was the eighth U21 World Championship medal. Earlier in the day, Bulgaria – beaten by Italy in the semifinals – came out on top against Argentina in straight sets (25-22, 28-26, 25-19) to claim the bronze medal.

Iran crowned Asian U20 Greco-Roman champion



Amir-Reza Akbari (top) and Mohammad Morad Ashiri won two gold medals as Iran claimed the Greco-Roman title at the Asian U20 Wrestling Championships in Amman, Jordan.

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Sports Desk

A clean sweep of 10 medals saw Iran march to the Greco-Roman crown at the Asian U20 Wrestling Championships in Amman, Jordan.

Iran bagged five gold medals as well as a silver and four bronzes to dominate the final standing with 205 points, followed by Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, which tallied 180 and 170 points respectively.

On Sunday, Amir-Reza Akbari brought the curtain down on glittering campaign for Iran by outmuscling Uzbekistan's Damirkhon Rakhmatov 11-1 for the ultimate prize in the 97kg weight class.

Mohammad Morad Ashiri had won a first gold of the day for the country, thanks to a 7-0 hammering of Kyrgyzstan's Akyl Sulaimanov in the 60kg final.

In a first final showdown of the afternoon featuring the Iranian and Uzbekistani wrestlers, Ahoura Bouveiri came out on top against Ilyosjon Abdinazarov by a 6-1 victory to grab the 67kg gold. Meanwhile, Mohammad-Mehdi Miri had to settle for a silver in the 72kg contests after suffering a 4-2 defeat against Abdullo Aliev – also from Uzbekistan.

Yasin Yazdi bounced back from a last-four defeat against Kazakhstan's Islam Yevloyev to beat Zhen Nian Tian of the Chinese Taipei 9-0 and finish his campaign with a consolation bronze in the 82kg event.

Sunday's results came after the Iranians had collected double golds and three bronzes on the preceding night. Abolfazl Choubani outclassed Nurassyl Amanaly of Kazakhstan in the 87kg final, while Fardin Hedayati made a quick work of China's Wenhao Jiang, winning 11-1 for the 130kg gold.

A 9-0 victory over Turkmenistan's Abduvali Rahimbayev sealed the joint 55kg bronze for Ali Ahmadi Vafa, while Reza Qeytasi defeated the host's Hassan Saleem Naghouj 10-0 to leave the Jordanian capital with a 63kg bronze.

Alireza Abdevali claimed a third bronze for Iran in Amman, courtesy of a win against Kazakhstan's Dias Kaltay in the 77kg class.

Alcaraz's 'dream' Wimbledon can signal changing of the guard

AFP – Carlos Alcaraz believes his "dream" Wimbledon triumph against Novak Djokovic can signal a changing of the guard in men's tennis.

Alcaraz ended Djokovic's run of four successive Wimbledon titles with an epic 1-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-1, 3-6, 6-4 victory in a final for the ages on Sunday.

The 20-year-old wore down Djokovic over four hours and 42 minutes of unrelenting drama on Centre Court, clinching his first Wimbledon crown and the second major title of his career.

After two decades of Djokovic, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal dominating the sport, Alcaraz says his victory could be the start of a new era. "It's a dream. I'm 20. I didn't experience many moments like this. Making history like I did today, it's the happiest moment of my life," Alcaraz said. "Beating Novak at his best on this stage, making history, being the guy to beat him after 10 years unbeaten on



Carlos Alcaraz holds aloft the Wimbledon trophy after beating Novak Djokovic in the men's singles final in London, Britain, on July 16, 2023.

● ALBERTO PEZZALI/AP

this court is amazing for me. "It's great for the new generation to see me beating him and make them think they are capable of doing it as well. It's great for me, and the young players as well." When Djokovic won his first major at the Australian Open in 2008, Alcaraz was still three months shy of his fifth birthday. But with Federer retired and Nadal close to the end

of his glittering career, Alcaraz has emerged as Djokovic's biggest challenger. Alcaraz, who won his maiden Grand Slam title at the US Open last year, has replaced the Serb at the top of the world rankings and his Wimbledon victory may hasten the emergence of a new generation to replace the "Big Three". "Beating Novak, winning Wimbledon is something I dreamed about since I start

playing tennis," Alcaraz said. Djokovic was aiming for a record-equalling eighth Wimbledon title and could also have matched Margaret Court's all-time mark of 24 Grand Slam singles crowns. Instead, the 36-year-old leaves Wimbledon licking his wounds after being over-powered by the relentless Alcaraz. In an ominous warning to Djokovic, Alcaraz said his

All England Club win can provide a foundation for more success when they meet again.

'I grew up a lot'

"Probably before today I didn't think I was ready to beat Djokovic in five sets in an epic match like this, to stay good physically and mentally against a legend like Djokovic," Alcaraz.

"I will remember this moment in other Grand Slams and think I am ready to play five sets against him. It probably changed my mind a bit."

Alcaraz's previous clash with Djokovic had ended in defeat in the French Open semi-finals in June, when the Spaniard fell apart after suffering stress-related cramping.

Learning from that painful loss, he held his nerve superbly this time.

"I am such a different player since the French Open. I grew up a lot. I took lessons from that match. I prepared a little bit differently mentally," he said.

"I handled the nerves better than I did at the French

Open. I fought until the last ball. It was a long match. The mental part allowed me to stay there for five sets.

"If I had lost the second set probably I couldn't have got the trophy, I would probably have lost in straight sets. That gave me a lot of motivation."

Djokovic's frustration at Alcaraz's stubborn resistance boiled over when he smashed his racquet against the net post after being broken in the final set.

But the Serb had no complaints about the defeat and even labelled Alcaraz a combination of himself, Federer and Nadal.

Asked about that glowing tribute, the ultra-confident Alcaraz said: "It's crazy that Novak say that. But I consider myself a really complete player."

"I have the shots, the strength physically, the strength mentally."

"Probably he's right. But I don't want to think about it. I'm the full Carlos Alcaraz, let's say."