

Asian Karate Senior Championship: Iranians scoop four medals on Day 2



L-R: Behnam Dehqanzadeh (gold), Atousa Golshadnejad (gold) and Bahman Asgari (silver) were among the Iranian medalists on the first two days of the Asian Karate Senior Championship in Melaka, Malaysia. **ikfir**

Sports Desk

The second day of the Asian Karate Senior Championship saw Iranians collect four medals – including a kumite silver for Bahman Asgari – in Melaka, Malaysia, to take the country's medal count to nine. Four-time world gold medalist Asgari, who missed out on the Tokyo Olympics due to a positive doping test, beat Sultan al-Zahrani of Saudi Arabia for a place in the men's -75kg final, before a 3-2 setback against Kazakhstan's Nurkanat Azhikanov brought him a seventh Asian medal. Earlier in the day, Tokyo Olympic champion Sajjad Ganjzadeh's run also came to a rather under-par finish with a men's kumite +84kg bronze.

Stepping into the competition on the back of a remarkable 11 Asian medals, Ganjzadeh eased to successive victories over participants from Macau and Indonesia but came short against Saudi karateka Tareg Hamed, whom the Iranian beat for the Olympic gold. Ganjzadeh still managed to get back to winning ways in the repechage bouts and defeated Emirati Sulaiman al-Mulla 5-0 for a joint-third place alongside Abily Toltoy of Kazakhstan. Hamed, meanwhile, went on to beat Japan's Daiki Ando in the final. Sara Bahmanyar and Fatemeh Sa'adati also won two women's kumite bronzes for Iran. Bahmanyar stood on the third podium alongside

Hawraa al-Ajmi of the UAE in the -50kg event, with Sa'adati finishing her run with a -55kg bronze. Saturday's medals came after a glittering first day in Melaka for the Iranian karatekas, who bagged a couple of kumite gold medals plus three bronzes. Atousa Golshadnejad clinched a first women's gold for the country at the event. The Iranian girl defeated opponents from Jordan, Kazakhstan, and China before beating Sarah al-Ameri of the United Arab Emirates 3-0 in the -61kg final. Behnam Dehqanzadeh was the Iranian gold medalist in the men's kumite contests on Day 1 – thanks to a thrilling 7-4 victory over Jordanian Omar Shaqrah in the

-55kg weigh class. Two-time world champion Amir Mehdizadeh had to settle for a joint third-spot finish in the men's -67kg event. The Iranian, who also has double Asian golds under his belt, bounced back from third-round defeat against Kazakhstan's Didar Amirali to beat Palestinian Mahmoud Daifallah (2-0) and Mohammad al-Otaibi of Kuwait (3-2) and share the third podium with Hong Kong's Cheng Hui Pan. Jordan's Abdelrahman al-Masatfa – a bronze medalist at the Tokyo Olympics – came out victorious against Amirali for the ultimate prize. The individual kata events saw Iranians finish their campaigns with two bronzes.

Fatemeh Sadeqi scored 41.6 points against Filipino Sakura Alforte's 41.2 to grab a third Asian kata bronze of her career. Hong Kong's Grace Lau came out on top against Japanese Kiyou Shimizu in the final, with Liya Koshkarbayeva of Kazakhstan taking the other bronze medal of the category. Meanwhile, Abolfazl Shahrjerdi – a 2018 world bronze winner – registered 40.7 points in the third-place contest, with the Chinese Taipei's Chen Chao-Ching on 40.0, to take his tally at the Asian Championship to five medals – including double silvers. Kakeru Nishiyama of Japan beat Kuwait's Mohammad Bader for the gold, while South Korean Park Hee-jun also won a bronze.

Messi scores late winner in Inter Miami debut



Inter Miami's Lionel Messi scores in a win against Cruz Azul in Fort Lauderdale, FL, US, on July 21, 2023. **MARCO BELLO/REUTERS**

REUTERS – Lionel Messi made a rousing debut for Major League Soccer's Inter Miami as he scored a stoppage-time winner to beat Liga MX's Cruz Azul 2-1 on Friday in their Leagues Cup opener in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Messi drew a foul about 25 yards from goal in the dying seconds and stepped up to deliver what everyone came to see as his free kick sailed into the top left corner and sent the crowd into delirium.

After the goal, Messi ran toward the right corner of the field with his arms spread wide and then headed to the sidelines on the other side where he shared a hug with his family.

"I knew I had to score, it was the last play of the game and I had to score so we didn't go to penalties," Messi said on the broadcast through a translator.

"It was very important for us to get this win because it's a new tournament and it's going to give us confidence moving forward."

With four-times NBA champion LeBron James, tennis great Serena Williams and reality television star Kim Kardashian among those in the sold-out crowd, Messi entered the game as a second-half substitute to a rousing ovation with Miami ahead 1-0.

Messi was introduced as "the world's number 10" when he came into the game in the 54th minute, slipped the captain's armband on his left arm and sent the crowd into a frenzy whenever he touched the ball.

"As soon as I saw the free kick given I thought this is the way it's meant to end," said Inter Miami co-owner David Beckham. "It's so exciting tonight for our fans. All of these people that have come down here to see Leo just step on the pitch, let alone just do what he's done."

"It's a dream come true for everybody in this stadium and everybody around this country to see Leo step into the MLS and perform and I don't have many words for that."

PSG put Mbappé up for sale after pre-season tour omission

THE GUARDIAN – Paris Saint-Germain have put Kylian Mbappé up for sale after leaving the France forward out of their squad for the pre-season tour of Japan. Last month, Mbappé informed PSG that he would not take up the option of a one-year contract extension next summer but underlined his intention to remain in the French capital and leave on a free transfer. However, PSG will now listen to offers for the 24-year-old after the president Nasser Al-Khelaifi insisted Mbappé must sign a contract extension or leave the club he joined from Monaco in 2018 for £166m. PSG are understood to feel betrayed as they believe Mbappé has already agreed a free transfer with Real Madrid. Mbappé has yet to respond

to Al-Khelaifi and will now be excluded from manager Luis Enrique's squad that is due to travel to Japan for a pre-season tour. "My position is very clear. I don't want to repeat it all the time. If Kylian wants to stay, we want him to stay. But he needs to sign a new contract," Al-Khelaifi said earlier this month. "We don't want to lose the best player in the world on a free. That's impossible. He had said that he would never leave on a free. It's not my fault that he's changed his mind now. We don't want to lose the best player in the world for free. That's very clear." Despite his contract situation, Mbappé would still demand an astronomical fee that only a handful of sides could afford. But the news will still interest every elite club in Europe,

particularly in the Premier League. Manchester United, Liverpool and Chelsea have all been linked in the past, although Madrid appears his most likely destination. Mbappé has long been admired by Madrid's president, Florentino Pérez, and even after the shock renewal of his PSG contract last year – a deal that was said to include a salary of £20m after tax and a signing bonus in excess of £100m – the striker spoke openly about the idea of joining Madrid and called Pérez personally last year to explain his decision to stay. "I have lots of respect for [Pérez] and for Real Madrid," Mbappé said in May 2022. "They wanted to do a lot to make me happy. So I thank them for that. I'd also like to thank Real fans. I hope they'll understand



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the fact I've chosen to stay [at PSG]. Mbappé did play for PSG in a friendly against Le Havre on Friday, scoring the second goal in a 2-0 victory. His 16-year-old brother

Ethan is included in the touring squad along with star names like Neymar, whose future has also been the subject of speculation. PSG will play matches against Cristiano Ronal-

do's Al Nassr and Cerezo Osaka in Osaka next week before taking on Internazionale in Tokyo on 1 August and South Korean side Jeonbuk Motors two days later.