

## Saudi spending no one-off, says top league official

REUTERS – The vast sums invested to entice some of the world's top players to Saudi Arabia this season is no one-off, but part of a long-term strategy to make the Saudi Pro League one of the best in the world, its chief operating officer has said.

Carlo Nohra told Reuters in an interview that authorities in the "football-mad country" are confident their strategy of going all out to sign the game's biggest names would ensure that fans flocked to stadiums in the new campaign, which starts on Friday.

Saudi clubs have spent more than 400 million euros (\$439 million) in the close season to sign players from Europe's elite teams, including Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema from Real Madrid, Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson and treble winner Riyad Mahrez from Manchester City.

The influx began just a few months after Al-Nassr signed Cristiano Ronaldo on a reported salary of more than \$200 million a year in December.

Football website Transfermarkt ranks the Saudi League as the fifth-biggest spender in the current transfer window, ahead of Spain's LaLiga.

"It's very straightforward and I tie it back to our strategy," Nohra told Reuters. "One of the very first objectives that the Saudi Pro League was set was to improve the product."

"We had to improve quality and in order to improve quality, you have to bring in the best. Spending was always going to be an essential component for us to do this."

"What you're seeing is simply the Saudi Pro League doing what other leagues needed to do ... We have joined these ranks, and we're doing whatever it takes to improve quality on the pitch."

Nohra added that the league's strategy would take time to come to full fruition and that the spending was set to continue.

"Look, this is definitely a journey," he said. "This is not just for one weekend. We've set out to achieve this objective to be one of the top 10 leagues in the world."

"We have a mission, and that is to unleash the potential we have to drive change. We want to become one of the recognised leaders for excellence in governance, in club development and player acquisition, and also in commercialization."

Multiple media reports say Saudi Arabia has allocated more than \$17 billion to support clubs under the country's "Vision 2030" economic and social reform blueprint, but Nohra said each transfer period would be dealt with independently.

"We're taking it one window at a time."

# Taekwondo glory leads Iran's 23-medal run in World University Games

### Sport Desk

Iran finished 11th among 120 participating countries at the FISU Summer World University Games – formerly known as the Summer Universiade – in Chengdu, China, courtesy of 23 medals – including five golds.

Of the 11 disciplines in which 83 Iranians were entered, five yielded medals, with the taekwondo contestants leading the list of the medalists for the country with 13.

Reigning world champion Nahid Kiani headlined Iran's taekwondo campaign as she secured a second international gold in two months when she defeated Su Po-ya of the Chinese Taipei in the women's -53kg final showdown.

Kiani was joined in the list of the female medalists by fellow Iranian Anahita Tavakkoli, who took the +73kg silver, -62kg bronze winner Narges Mirnourollahi, and Yasaman Limouchi, a winner of the individual poomsae competition before she grabbed a second bronze in the team event alongside Mobina Sharifi and Reihaneh Omrani.

In the men's contests, Mehdi Haji Mousaei (-54kg), Alireza Hosseinpour (-58kg), and Mirhashem Hosseini (-74kg) also walked away with the ultimate prize of their respective weight classes, while Arian Salimi settled for the -87kg silver and Mehran Barkhordari took the -80kg bronze.

Hosseinpour, Hosseini, Salimi, and Barkhordari



Iran's Nahid Kiani (L), a reigning world champion, won the women's -53kg gold in the taekwondo event of the Summer World University Games in Chengdu, China. **XINHUA**

then teamed up to finish second to South Korea in the men's team kyorugi contest. Morteza Zendehehdel was

also a double individual and team bronze winner in the poomsae competitions as he was part of the Iranian trio – along with Reza

Jalalifar and Ali Mousania – which shared the men's third podium with Vietnam. Iran's only other gold medal in Chengdu came in the

wushu event, where Mohammad Hosseini came out on top in the men's gunshu. Shahin Banitalebi also left the Chinese city with a

men's taolu medal, taking the nanquan bronze.

Hamidreza Sahandi (70kg) and Ali Khorshidi (80kg) added a couple of men's sanda silvers to Iran's medal haul after suffering final defeats against the host's athletes, while Shoja Panahi finished third in the 60kg class. Mohana Rahimi was the Iranian medalist in women's sanda – a 60kg bronze.

There were further glories for Iran in shooting – a couple of bronzes in the women's team events.

The team of Fatemeh Shekari, Laya Mohammadi, and Haniyeh Rostamian finished third in the 10m air pistol campaign, with the latter two teaming with Amitis Jafari for the 25m pistol bronze.

Elsewhere in the Games, Amirhossein Mahmoudpour clocked 7:13.01 minutes to win a rowing silver in the men's lightweight LM1x final, with Reza Sha'bani defeating Moldova's Dan Olaru to finish his archery campaign with a men's recurve bronze.

China, as expected, dominated the Games on home soil with 178 medals, including a remarkable 103 golds.

Japan collected 21 golds, 29 silvers, and 43 bronzes to finish runner-up in the medal table and a neck-and-neck race saw South Korea pip Italy to the third spot.

Both countries won 17 golds and 18 silvers apiece, but the South Koreans collected 23 bronzes against Italy's 21.

## Iran completes GR lineup for Wrestling Worlds

### Sport Desk

Iran Greco-Roman head coach Hassan Rangraz completed his 10-man squad for the Wrestling World Championships – starting September 16 in Belgrade, Serbia.

The final berth in the Iranian team was secured by Danial Sohrabi who came out victorious against Sajjad Imentalab in a best-of-three contests in Tehran on Tuesday.

Sohrabi defeated his opponent twice (5-1 and 3-1) either side of a victory for Imentalab, which came after a 1-1 draw in the second bout.

A world under-23 gold medalist last year, Sohrabi will be joined by some top-notch wrestlers in the Iranian squad who will be seeking further glories in the Wrestling Worlds – hosted by the Serbian capital for the second year running.

Mohammadreza Geraei will headline the team in Belgrade, when chasing a fourth successive major medal in the 67kg weight class.

A winner of the Tokyo Olympic gold and a world champion in 2021, Ger-



Tokyo Olympic gold medalist Mohammadreza Geraei, pictured during a training session in Tehran, will be chasing a fourth major Greco-Roman medal in the 67kg weight class in the upcoming Wrestling World Championships. **iwfir**

aei saw his dominance in the class come to an end against Serbian Mate Nemes in last year's world final.

Geraei's older brother, Mohammad-Ali, will head

into the 77kg event on the back of three world bronzes under his belt – the last of which came in 2021.

Amin Mirzazadeh will be after a second world superheavyweight medal af-

ter last year's 130kg silver, while Mohammad-Hadi Saravi – a bronze medalist in Tokyo – will be looking for a third world medal, having won the 2021 gold in Oslo before a third-spot

finish last September. Pouya Dadmarz – Asian gold medalist in April – will be the Iranian contestant in the 55kg contests and will be hoping for a better result than his 2022

run in the World Championships, where he was knocked out in the quarterfinals.

Having claimed a gold and a bronze at the UWW Ranking Series this year, Mehdi Mohsennejad will take his second form into the 60kg event, while Iman Mohammadi will be looking to build on his double world age-group golds in 2022 when representing the country in the 63kg competitions.

The Asian champion for the past three editions, Nasser Alizadeh (87kg), and Alireza Mohmadi (82kg) – a bronze winner at the Asian Championships this year – complete the country's Greco-Roman lineup in Belgrade.

With Russia barred from the 2022 UWW Worlds, the Iranian team, which had finished second to the Russians in 2021, looked to be the ultimate favorite for the Greco-Roman crown last year, but a below-par campaign under former head coach Mohammad Bana saw the country leave the event without a gold, settling for a fourth-spot finish behind Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Serbia.