

Van Dijk accepts Liverpool 'doubts' before new season



● DAVID CLIFF/AP

REUTERS – Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk said he understands people's concerns over the Premier League club's lack of transfer business ahead of the new season but the defender urged his team mates to step up following the departure of several key players. The 32-year-old Van Dijk, who also captains the Netherlands national team, replaced Jordan Henderson as the Merseyside outfit's skipper after the England midfielder ended a 12-year stay at Liverpool to join Saudi Pro League club Al-Ettifaq last month.

Liverpool have lost as many as six senior players, with Henderson and Fabinho moving to Saudi Arabian sides, while fellow midfielders Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, James Milner, Naby Keita and forward Roberto Firmino leaving on free transfers.

With two days to go before the start of the new season, the number of arrivals at Anfield has not kept pace with exits, with midfielders Alexis Mac Allister and Dominik Szoboszlai being the only two players Liverpool have signed in the close season.

"I can definitely understand it in some ways but I'm not a very negative person," said Van Dijk, who moved from Championship side Southampton to Liverpool in 2018, referring to fans' worries.

"But obviously, when a lot of players are leaving, when your captain is leaving, your vice-captain is leaving, and at the moment, there are only two incomings.

"And the way we have been playing, in possession really good but defensively when you concede goals it's not as good, I can understand some people having doubts."

The six-time European champions will not feature in the Champions League for the first time since manager Juergen Klopp's first full season in 2016-17.

"Let's see if more players are coming in and then we have to be ready again for a long season. It will be very tough if we look at the teams around us, but we want to be up there again, we want to be challenging again," the Dutchman said.

"There have been characters leaving, players who have played a big part in the success, but others have to step up."

IHF U19 Handball World Championship: Iran's fairytale run ends in last-16 dismay



Germany's Max Günther (5) makes an attempt during a victory over Iran at the IHF Men's U19 Handball World Championship in Opatija, Croatia, on August 8, 2023.

● IHF



Sport Desk

A second successive defeat dashed Iran's hopes of a historic last-eight berth at the IHF Men's U19 Handball World Championship in Croatia.

Having suffered a 26:29 loss to Saudi Arabia in the main-round opener, Majid Rahimizadeh's boys were beaten 32:25 by Germany – runner-up in the previous edition – on Tuesday to finish bottom of Group IV.

Max Günther produced a player-of-the-match performance, scoring a game-high eight goals, as the Germans bounced back from a 30:28 setback against the Faroe Islands on the preceding night. Amirhossein Masoudnia topped the scoring for Iran with seven.

Iran had a shaky start, scoring only once in eight minutes, and Germany made the most of it to propel to a 9:4 lead.

German shot stopper Marc

Julian Buchele enjoyed an impressive first half with nine saves out of 18 attempts as the European side took a 13:9 advantage into the break.

Iran kept fighting after the restart and narrowed the gap to three with 15 minutes remaining but technical errors proved costly for the Asian side and led to Germany going on a 5-0 run for a 28:20 lead before ultimately walking away with the victory.

The Iranian boys will perhaps rue the defeat against Saudi Arabia – beaten by Iran in last year's Asian Championship semifinals – where Rahimizadeh's team gave away a halftime four-goal lead in the second period.

Later on Tuesday, the Faroe Islands came out victorious (41:23) against the Saudis to join Germany in progressing to the quarterfinals.

Iran, meanwhile, will still be looking for a bit of consolation

when taking on Brazil today in the first of the 13th-16th placement matches.

Having last appeared in the tournament 14 years ago, Iran got off to decent start in Croatia, holding handball powerhouse Sweden to a 26:26 draw in Group H opener.

Iran then edged the Faroe Islands by two goals (29:27) before a 46:24 rout of Burundi sealed a top-spot finish in the group for the country.

Iran eyeing double title defense in Wrestling U20 Worlds



Defending champion Amirreza Masoumi (R) will represent Iran in the freestyle 125kg event at the Wrestling U20 World Championships in Amman, Jordan.

● ASSEM SHALGUMBAYEVA/UWW

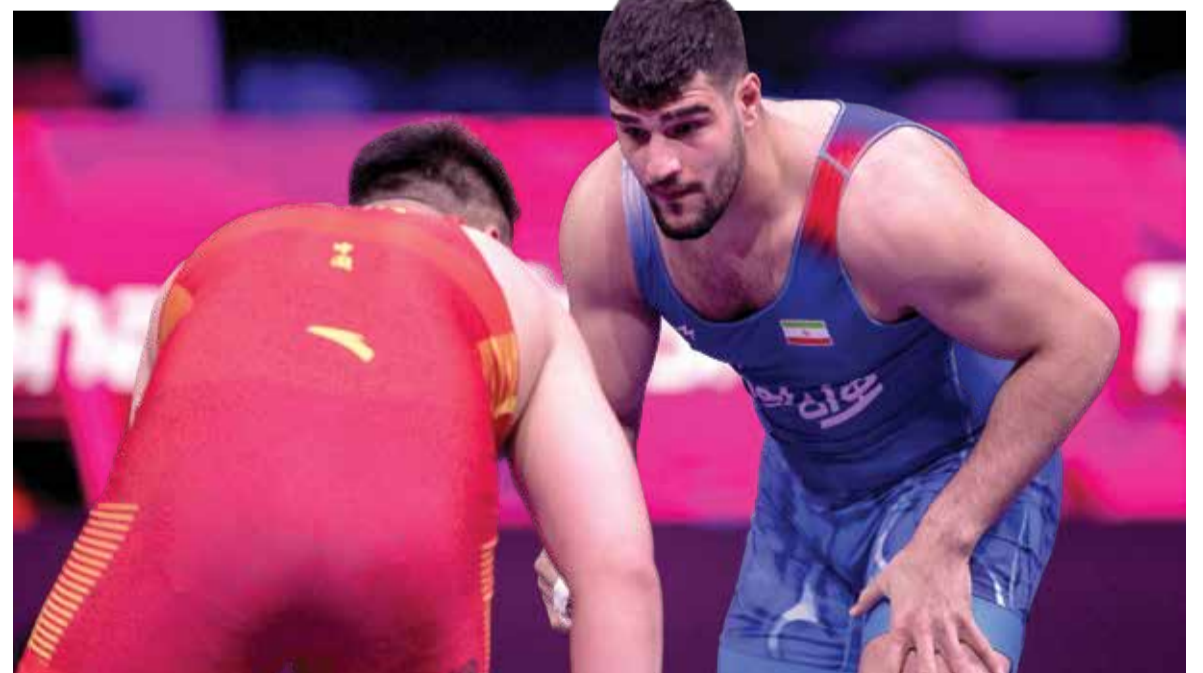
Sport Desk

Days after Iran made a clean sweep of the freestyle and Greco-Roman world under-17 trophies, the country will seek yet another glorious campaign when the Wrestling U20 World Championships get underway in Amman, Jordan, on Monday.

The two Iranian squads will put their world titles on the line in Amman, which brings back fond memories for the wrestling powerhouse, as Iran stormed to double Asian crowns of the age group in the Jordanian capital in July.

Amirreza Masoumi headlines the Iranian freestyle team at the event and will be chasing a second successive world title in the 125kg weight class.

Ali Rezaei (70kg) and Mohammad-Mobin Azimi (92kg), meanwhile, will be looking to build on their Asian gold-winning campaigns, with Ahmad Javan (57kg), Ali Khorramdel (61kg), Mohammadreza Shakeri (65kg), Hossein Aqaei (74kg), Farzad Safi



(79kg), Amirhossein Alizadeh (86kg), and Abolfazl Babalou (97kg) completing the freestyle squad.

A total of eight medals – including three golds – saw Iran beat the USA to freestyle crown last year in Sofia, and both countries will again be the favorites to finish atop the table, though the return

of the Russian wrestlers, participating as neutral athletes, will surely affect the final outcome in each division.

In the Greco-Roman contests, Iran will be represented by some high-profile wrestlers of the age category, including the 2021 world U20 champion Amirreza Dehbozorgi

(60kg), as well as Abolfazl Choubani (87kg) and Fardin Hedayati (130kg), who will hope to improve on their defeats in the final showdowns last year in Sofia.

Ahoura Bouveiri (67kg), Amirreza Akbari (97kg) will return to Amman as the reigning Asian champions, with Ali Ahmadi

Vafa (55kg), Ahmadreza Mohsennejad (63kg), Mohammad-Mehdi Miri (72kg), Alireza Abdevali (77kg), and Yasin Yazdi (82kg) also in the squad.

Iran bagged a remarkable four golds plus two silvers and bronze medals apiece to collect 174 points in Sofia – 55 clear of second-placed Azerbaijan.