

Iran to play Venezuela before FIBA World Cup



● FIBA

Sport Desk

Iran will face Venezuela in a friendly on Monday in the buildup to the upcoming FIBA Basketball World Cup.

The three-time Asian champion will face the South American team in the Chinese city of Jinjiang before leaving for Jakarta, Indonesia, to take part in the international basketball flagship event – also cohosted by Japan and the Philippines.

Iran will begin its Group G campaign with a game against Brazil next Saturday.

Hakan Demir's men will take on Ivory Coast two days later before concluding the group fixtures against reigning world champion Spain on August 30.

Turkish coach Demir, who took charge of the team in May, will be looking to steer Iran to a maiden progress beyond the first-round group phase at the fourth time of asking.

Sweden beat Australia to finish third at World Cup



● AMANDA PEROBELLI/REUTERS

REUTERS – Sweden picked up their fourth Women's World Cup bronze medal on Saturday after beating co-hosts Australia 2-0 in the third-place playoff match at Lang Park in Brisbane.

The Swedes, ranked third in the world, were awarded a penalty in the 28th minute after a VAR review showed Australia's Clare Hunt clipped Stina Blackstenius' heels, and Fridolina Rolfo slotted home the resulting spot kick.

Sweden captain Kosovare Asllani doubled their lead just after the hour mark, rifling a sweet strike from the edge of the penalty area beyond goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold following another quick counter-attack.

While disappointed to sign off at the World Cup with another defeat, the Matildas still achieved their best result at the tournament having never previously gone beyond the quarter-final stage.

England and Spain will square off in the final showdown today.

Masoumi remains dominant force of junior wrestling



Amir-Reza Masoumi is seen with the Iranian flag after winning the freestyle 125kg gold medal at the Wrestling U20 World Championships in Amman, Jordan, on August 16, 2023.

● UWW



Sport Desk

For Iranian wrestler Amir-Reza Masoumi, the U20 World Championships in Amman, Jordan, was a test of character – one that he passed in emphatic fashion.

The Iranian, who will turn 19 in less than a month, stepped into the freestyle 125kg contests on the back of a couple of domestic and international setbacks.

April's Asian Championships was one to forget

for the young prodigy as he was beaten 8-6 by high-profile Mongolian Mönkhörtiin Lkhagvagerel in the semifinals – a first international defeat for the Iranian – before a loss to China's Buheerdun in the bronze-medal bout saw the superheavyweight wrestler leave Astana empty-handed.

A second blow to Masoumi's progress as a senior wrestler came in May's Takhti Cup in Urmia – which also served as the national

team's trials for the upcoming World Championships – where he was outclassed 8-0 by fellow Iranian Amir-Hossein Zare' in the final showdown.

Still, Wednesday's gold medal in the Jordanian capital proved that Masoumi is in a league of his own when it comes to the age-group wrestling.

In cruising to the ultimate prize, Masoumi – whose father Fardin is a former world superheavyweight silver and bronze medalist

– collected a remarkable 51 points across five bouts, while conceding only one – in the first-round 9-1 victory over Turkey's Hakan Buyukcingil.

The Iranian then made a quick work of China's Da Lu, American Christian Carroll, and Volodymyr Kochanov of Ukraine, outmuscling all three by technical fall en route to the final.

It was the same scenario in the showpiece against Russian Said Akhmatov – representing the Individual

Neutral Athletes team – as a four-point throw with nine seconds into the contest put Masoumi on his way to a second successive world under-20 gold before the six-minute mark.

Masoumi's fourth gold in the international age groups, following the cadet crown in 2021 and last year's under-23 triumph, capped off a glorious campaign in Amman for the Iranian freestyle squad, which won the team title with 165 points – 13 clear of runner-up

USA – with Mohammadreza Shakeri (65kg), Mobin Azimi (92kg), and Abolfazl Babalou (97kg) also among the gold medalists for the Asian powerhouse.

Masoumi might spend some time behind Tokyo Olympic bronze medalist Zare' – who will be chasing a third world medal in September's showdown in Belgrade – in the Iranian seniors' pecking order but he has already cemented his status as the next big thing in freestyle wrestling.

Spalletti, an Italian champion to revive the Azzurri

AFP – Luciano Spalletti, crowned Italian champion with Napoli last season, was on Friday handed the task of reviving the Azzurri, five days after Roberto Mancini's shock resignation as Italy coach. Spalletti's main objective will be to qualify the European champions for the 2026 World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico, after Italy missed the 2018 and 2022 editions.

"Let's welcome Spalletti," said FIGC president Gabriele Gravina, "the national team needed a great coach and I am very happy that he accepted the technical guidance of the Azzurri." The duration of his contract was not specified, but according to the Italian press, it would cover three years until 2026.

The FIGC said Spalletti would be presented officially at the national training centre at Coverciano, near Florence, before Euro 2024 qualifiers

against North Macedonia and Ukraine in early September.

Spalletti had been out of a job since he left Napoli, just weeks after leading them to the third Scudetto in their history.

Negotiations had been complicated because his contract with Napoli, which runs until June 2024, included a clause requiring him to pay compensation of 3 million euros (\$3.3 million) if he takes up a new position.

Napoli president and owner Aurelio De Laurentiis had refused to release the Tuscan coach from this obligation.

The FIGC did not specify whether an agreement has been reached with Napoli.

'Enthusiasm'

But before thinking about the next World Cup and healing the traumas of a nation, the new Azzurri coach will have to put his team, reigning European champions, back on track



● CIRO FUSCO/REUTERS

for Euro 2024 which will take place in Germany. Italy are third in Group C with three points after a 2-0 win over Malta and a 2-1 loss to England, who are top with 12 points from four games.

"His enthusiasm and his expertise will be fundamental for the challenges that await Italy in the

coming months," said Gravina.

Spalletti has only a few days to prepare for a complicated trip to Skopje to face North Macedonia on September 9, a country that blocked Italy's path to the World Cup in Qatar, then host Ukraine in Milan three days later.

Like his predecessor,

Spalletti will have a major problem to solve, with a limited pool of forwards. The top Italian scorers in Serie A last season, Sassuolo's Domenico Berardi and Lazio's Ciro Immobile, both managed 12 goals.

This offensive fragility did not prevent Mancini from winning the European ti-

tle, 53 years after Italy's first continental trophy, and going on a 37-match unbeaten run between September 2018 and October 2021, a record for a national team.

Spalletti has a temperament and style which can transform the national side and the credentials to convince his players after a stunning season with Napoli.

He became the oldest ever coach to win the Italian title last season at 64 but his vibrancy and the modern, free-wheeling way his teams play bely his advancing years.

After a modest playing career as a midfielder in Italy's third division, Spalletti made his mark as a coach in small clubs before leading AS Roma, Inter or even Zenit Saint-Petersburg.

Meanwhile Mancini, 58, who resigned after five years at the helm citing "a personal decision", has been touted to take over as Saudi Arabia coach.