

## Qasempour major doubt for Wrestling Worlds after second injury blow



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## Sports Desk

A second groin injury in three months could force Iran's Kamran Qasempour out of the Wrestling World Championships, starting September 16 in Belgrade, Serbia.

The Iranian, who has dominated the freestyle 92kg class with back-to-back world golds, had already missed the Ranking Series events in June and July after suffering the same problem, though it was on the other leg.

Abazar Eslami, a member of the Iranian coaching staff, told IRNA that Qasempour would undergo an MRI scan before the medical team makes a full assessment of his injury within the coming days. Should Qasempour miss out on the event in the Serbian capital, he will likely be replaced by young prodigy Amir-Ali Azarpira.

Azarpira walked away with the world under-23 gold medals in 2021 and 2022, while he was part of the Iranian seniors' team that finished second to the USA in last December's Freestyle World Cup in Coralville, Iowa, the United States.

Mohammad-Mobin Azimi could also be considered for the 92kg slot in Belgrade after he won the ultimate prize at the U20 World Championships in Amman, Jordan, last week. Milad Valizadeh (57kg), Reza Atri (61kg), reigning world champion Rahman Amouzad (65kg), Amirmohammad Yazdani (70kg), Younes Emami (74kg), Mohammad Nokhodi (79kg), eight-time world and Olympic medalist Hassan Yazdani (86kg), Mojtaba Goleij (97kg), and Amirhossein Zare' (125kg) will also represent the country in the freestyle events in Belgrade, where Iran – runner-up to the USA last year – will be chasing a first freestyle crown in a decade.

# Iran's Tractor devastated, misses out on ACL group stage



Sharjah FC skipper Shahin Abdulrahman heads home his team's opening goal in a 3-1 victory over Tractor in the AFC Champions League group stage playoffs at the Yadegar-e Iman Stadium, Tabriz, Iran, on August 22, 2023.

AFC

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Tractor's campaign at the AFC Champions League came to an early finish after the Persian Gulf Pro League club suffered a 3-1 playoff defeat against Emirati side Sharjah FC at home on Tuesday, failing to secure a place in the group stage of competition.

Inspired by former AS Roma and Juventus midfielder Miralem Pjanic, the visitors took the lead in the 25th minute, when Shahin Abdulrahman's free header on a corner kick went past Tractor keeper Hossein Pourhamidi to silence the jam-packed crowd at the Yadegar-e Iman Stadium in Tabriz.

Tractor's desperate push for an equalizer in the second half left Paco Jémez's men vulnerable in the backline and they were punished late as Guinean striker Osmane Camara doubled Sharjah's lead with six minutes left on the clock.

Just when the Tractor faithful were leaving the stadium substitute Meh-



di Hashemnejad headed home two minutes later to give his team a lifeline.

However, Brazilian Caio Lucas shattered Tractor's hopes for a dramatic comeback, sending Pourhamidi the wrong way from the spot in the 90th minute.

The result summed up a dreadful 13 days for Trac-

tor after back-to-back defeats against Sepahan and Persepolis in the start of the new Iranian top-flight season.

Tractor's setback also means Iran will be represented by three clubs in today's draw for the Asian elite clubs' competition at the AFC House in Kuala Lumpur.

Reigning Iranian league and cup champion Persepolis is in Pot 1 of the West Zone and will avoid Saudi Pro League giants Al Hilal and Al Ittihad as well as Qatar's Al Sadd SC, and Pakhtakor of Uzbekistan in the group stage.

The Tehran Reds could still be pitted against Saudi team Al Nassr and its

Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo in a repeat of the 2020 semifinals, which Persepolis won in the shootout.

Ronaldo and Sadio Mané had Anderson Talisca to thank for a group spot, after the Brazilian scored a brace – including a 95th-minute strike – as Al Nassr came from behind to

beat Shabab Al Ahli Dubai 4-2 in the playoffs on Tuesday.

Runner-up to Persepolis in the Iranian league last season, Sepahan is joined by the 2022 Hazfi Cup champion Nassaji Mazandaran in Pot 2 – also featuring Qatari club Al Duhail SC, Uzbekistan's FC Nasaf, and Saudi side Al Fayha FC.

## World Athletics Championships: Italian Tamberi wins thrilling high jump final

**REUTERS** – Italy's Olympic champion and showman Gianmarco Tamberi captured the high jump title at the World Athletics Championships on Tuesday, in a dramatic finish against young American JuVaughn Harrison.

Tamberi, who famously shared the Olympic title with three-time world champion Mutaz Barshim of Qatar, cleared a world-leading 2.36 metres for gold. He missed at one attempt at 2.40 and then called it a night, his victory secured.

"I feel like a human being who beats superheroes," Tamberi said.

The 31-year-old Tamberi, wearing one green sock and one red, and his face shaved on only one side, leapt into the water hazard of the steeplechase in wild celebration with Soufiane El Bakkali of Morocco, who had just raced to gold in the men's 3,000m steeplechase.

"It's crazy, it's an indescribable feeling," Tamberi said. "I have been rewarded for all the sacrifices made.

"I managed to stay focused, expressing my feelings. My secret is being myself on the platform. It worked," he added.

The 24-year-old Harrison also cleared 2.36 but had more misses on the countback, and so took silver for his first senior global medal. "I think this was the best year of my career," Harrison said. "I was consistent in every competition. After qualification I was about to have fun in the final and enjoy the jumps.

"It is fantastic that I beat one of the Olympic winners and I equalled the other. This is what I came for. This result gives me a great confidence for the Olympic Games in Paris."

Barshim cleared 2.33 for bronze, missing at all three attempts at 2.36. The 32-year-old, who has the second best jump in history – 2.43 behind Cuban great Javier Sotomayor (2.45 in 1993) – looked in for a rough night when he missed his first attempt at 2.25.

"Everything was different today," Barshim said. "I came here with three world golds and one silver and managed to add a bronze tonight. Look at my career. If it was not me that did this, but someone else, I would like to be that someone. I am the only high jumper with such a medal count. This almost brings tears to my eyes.



Italian Gianmarco Tamberi competes in the men's high jump final at the World Athletics Championships in Budapest, Hungary, on August 22, 2023.

EPA

"The rivalry between all the jumpers was incredible. I am happy that Tamberi won the gold," he added. "It was a medal he was missing from his CV and he added it tonight. The Paris Olympics is my next goal but it will be my last. It will be more like a contest, not revenge."

Elsewhere in Budapest's National Athletics Centre, Olympic gold medallist El Bakkali claimed his second consecutive world 3,000 metres steeplechase title.

The 27-year-old held off world record holder and Olympic silver medallist

Lamecha Girma of Ethiopia to win in eight minutes 3.53 seconds.

The 22-year-old Girma, who blazed to 7:52.11 at the Paris Diamond League on June 9 to break the 19-year-old world record, lost contact with El Bakkali over the final water jump en route

to his third world silver in 8:05.44.

Kenyan Abraham Kibiwot clipped a barrier and fell heading into the final lap but scrambled back to his feet and then overtook team mate Leonard Kipkemoi Bett to take a well-earned bronze in 8:11.98.