

Legendary Haddadi bids farewell to international duty

Sports Desk

Iconic Hamed Haddadi, probably the greatest Iranian basketball player in the history of the game, brought the curtain down on an illustrious career with the national team.

The 7-foot-2 center called time on two decades with the Iranian jersey after an 81-73 defeat against Lebanon in a classification contest at the FIBA World Cup in Jakarta, Indonesia.

"No-one knew about the decision except some of my teammates. I wasn't sure about until the last moment. To say goodbye to the national team after 20 years was really a tough decision to make," said Haddadi, who had 14 points and eight rebounds in his last outing for Iran.

"It is time for the young generation. They need to get more time and experience with more game-time," said the Sichuan Blue Whales player.

"I know I gave everything for my country, even when I was injured or out of shape. I feel good, but I also feel upset because I have to leave my team and my young teammates," added the former Memphis Grizzlies center.

Haddadi finished his final World Cup with an average 10.0 points, 6.3 rebounds, 3.5 assists, and 1.6 blocks per game – moving into the top-five for blocks in World Cup

history with 31 rejections.

"I wish the best of luck for the Iran national team. We have talent, but we need to be patient with our younger players. They came here and played. Some players improved, while others are still a work in progress."

The 38-year-old was surrounded by his teammates at the final buzzer, as well as the entire Lebanese team, with Wael Arakji – an MVP in last year's Asia Cup – paying tribute to the Iranian by wearing his No. 15 jersey.

Haddadi was part of the Iranian team that grabbed the silver medal at the 2022 FIBA Asia U18 Championship – a first-ever podium finish in the competition for the country.

He won the Asian under-20 title two years later and the rest is history for the Iranian, who featured in every one of the Asian side's World Cup participations as well as two Olympic Games in Beijing 2008 and Tokyo 2020.

A memorable campaign in 2007 saw Haddadi lead Iran to a maiden crown at the FIBA Asia Cup, before he repeated the success with the country in 2009 and 2013 – coupled with a 2017 silver and a bronze in 2015 – winning the MVP award on four occasions.

He also claimed back-to-back silver medals at the Asian Games in 2014 and 2018, with a 2006 bronze in Doha also under his belt.



Iranian center Hamed Haddadi is surrounded by teammates and the Lebanese players after a classification match at the FIBA Basketball World Cup in Jakarta, Indonesia, on September 2, 2023.

FIBA

World Taekwondo GP: Barkhordari bags second gold for Iran



Iranian Mehran Barkhordari (red) is in action against Apostolos Telikostoglou of Greece in the men's -80kg final at the World Taekwondo Grand Prix in Paris, France, on September 2, 2023.

WORLD TAEKWONDO

Sports Desk

Iran continued a glittering run at the World Taekwondo Grand Prix as Mehran Barkhordari walked away with the ultimate prize of the men's -80kg contests. Having outclassed American world No. 4 Carl Alan Nickolas in straight rounds for a place in the final, Barkhordari – a world bronze medalist last year – came out victorious against Apostolos Telikostoglou in the showdown to earn 60 Olympic qualification points.

The Iranian won a thrilling first round 8-6 but was stunned by a late fightback from the Greek, who landed a turning kick with 10 seconds left on the clock

for a 9-7 win, forcing the bout into the decider.

Barkhordari shook off the second-round disappointment with three successive punches for a three-point advantage and then never looked behind as back-to-back head kicks extended his advantage to 9-0.

A former silver winner at the event, Barkhordari rounded off a 12-0 triumph with a final head kick to grab the gold. Matin Rezaei, meanwhile, finished his -68kg campaign empty-handed after a defeat against Jordanian Ziyad Kareem in his second bout.

Barkhordari's gold came after the Iranians had scooped three medals on the

preceding night.

Mahdi Hajimousaei and Abolfazl Zandi completed a one-two in the men's -58kg event, with the latter withdrawing from the final showpiece to boost his fellow 19-year-old's chances of securing a berth in next summer's Olympics in the French capital.

Iranian teenage girl Mobina Ne'matza-deh got off to a brave start against Tokyo Olympic silver medalist Adriana Cerezo of Spain in the -49kg semis, winning the first round, but eventually fell to a 2-1 defeat and settled for a joint bronze – alongside China's Xiaolu Wang. Turkey's Merve Dincel defeated the Spaniard for the gold.

Ronaldo celebrates 850th career goal in Al-Nassr win

REUTERS – Cristiano Ronaldo celebrated his 850th career goal as Al-Nassr won 5-1 at Al-Hazm in the Saudi Pro League on Saturday.

Ronaldo scored his sixth goal in his last three games and claimed two assists as Al-Nassr recorded a third straight league victory. Sadio Mane was also on the scoresheet.

"Another great team performance! We keep improving. Let's go @AlNassrFC..

850 career goals and still counting!" the 38-year-old Ronaldo posted on social media.

After Al-Nassr lost their first two league games this term, last season's runners-up, who have scored 14 goals in their last three games, are now just four points off leaders Al-Hilal.

Ronaldo is the league's top scorer this season with six goals, one ahead of former Liverpool forward Mane.



Al-Nassr's Cristiano Ronaldo (R) celebrates after scoring in a 5-1 victory over Al-Hazm in the Saudi Pro League in Buraidah, Saudi Arabia, on September 2, 2023.

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