

Wrestling World Championships: Zare' regains superheavyweight throne, puts lid on woeful day for Iran

Sports Desk

Iran's Amirhossein Zare' defeated Georgian Geno Petriashvili in emphatic fashion for the freestyle superheavyweight gold at the Wrestling World Championships in Belgrade – a second world title for the young gun in three years.

Zare's triumph was a consolation for the country by the end of a miserable second day of the event, which saw four Iranians fail to reach the last four of their respective weight classes before Hassan and Amirmohammad Yazdani came short against the American foes in two evening final show-downs.

It was always going to be a three-horse race – featuring Zare', Petriashvili, and Turkish Taha Akgul – for the 125kg gold, and the 22-year-old Iranian proved to be the dominant force of the division by beating the latter two – who have a remarkable 20 world and Olympic medals between them – en route to the top podium.

Having avenged last year's semifinal defeat against Akgul this time around, Zare' stormed to an 11-0 technical-fall victory on the 4:48 mark against a frustrated Petriashvili in a repeat of the 2021 final.

Sunday's gold also means Zare' – a bronze winner at the Tokyo Olympics – will be the favorite to walk away



Amirhossein Zare' celebrates with the Iranian flag after winning the freestyle 125kg gold medal at the Wrestling World Championships in Belgrade, Serbia, on September 17, 2023. UWW

with the ultimate prize in next year's Games in Paris. Zare' said he would give his full dedication to the success in Paris "right from tomorrow when I wake up in my hotel room."

Second best
A fifth setback in six battles against American David Taylor was probably the

worst of the lot for Hassan Yazdani as he suffered a pin with two seconds left on the clock to take the 86kg silver. The defeat – third in a fourth successive final against the American – still extended Yazdani's personal tally to a national record of nine major medals, though he might need a change of tactics in

his meetings with Taylor if he fancies his chances of a second Olympic gold next summer.

The Iranian thought he had a 5-1 lead in the first period, only to see a successful challenge by the Americans change the scoreline into 5-3 in Taylor's favor. Taylor scored a key take-

down early in the second period to take a 7-3 lead and then clamped down when Yazdani attempted a late headlock throw to make it 9-3 before securing the fall for his third world title.

"It's so many micro-adjustments, it's amazing. I have a plan, he has a plan, then you go out there and your plan

works for about 20 seconds. When I wrestle him, it's like organized chaos, there's just so much happening," Taylor said after winning a third gold of the day for Team USA.

Also victorious against Yazdani in the Tokyo Olympic final, Taylor said the key to keeping the Iranian star

at bay was to neutralize his dangerous underhooks.

"He's so good in that position, and it's forced me to get better," Taylor said. "For me, the more action always benefits me. I feel like our matches had a lot of action... People will do the best they possibly can to slow me down, my job is to become a dynamic scorer and find ways to continue to score and that was what I was able to do."

Taylor's sole loss to Yazdani was a 6-2 decision in the 2021 final in Oslo.

"He is an aggressive, fearless competitor," Taylor said. "In Oslo, I gave him an inch and he took a mile. I learned my lesson the hard way in that match. Every time I have to try to stay one step ahead."

In a first Iranian-American final of the day, Zain Retherford – a silver medalist last year – came out on top against Amirmohammad Yazdani in the non-Olympic 70kg class.

Yazdani, who won a silver in Oslo, looked to be in exhilarating form on his way to the final but clearly ran out of steam toward the end of the contest against Retherford, who put together a solid 8-5 win.

Retherford used counters and a low single to score three takedowns and two stepouts, while Yazdani had two slick takedowns, but otherwise offered little resistance in having to settle for the silver.

IWF World Championships: Iran finishes men's third but work needs to be done for Paris

Sports Desk

Iranian weightlifting men's team tallied 458 points to finish on the third podium at the IWF World Championships in Riyadh.

Still, there was little to cheer about for the country through the 14-day event, as eight members of the 10-man squad left the Saudi capital empty-handed, indicating the massive scale of the task facing the Iranians at the Paris Olympics in less than 12 months.

Armenia won the men's title with 522 points, with China in the runner-up spot on 492 points.

On Sunday, Tokyo Olympic silver medalist Ali Davoudi lifted a personal-high 249kg to take the clean & jerk bronze of the +109kg weight class, finishing fourth in total with 452kg. Davoudi was desperately close to taking the C&J gold but failed with his final attempt at 255kg.

Double Olympic champion Lasha Talakhadze was clearly far from his best, mostly owing to a wrist problem, but still managed to bag a routine triple of golds for a sixth successive year. The Georgian sensation made 220-253-473 ahead of Armenian Varazdat Lalayan on 212-248-460 and Bahrain's Gor Minasyan on 213-246-459. "The others are closing in on Lasha. The standard he showed today will



Iranian weightlifter Ali Davoudi competes in the men's +109kg contests at the IWF World Championships in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on September 17, 2023. IWF

not be enough anymore," Georgian coach Giorgi Asanidze said. "He was not at his very best here, but the only thing that mattered today was for him to be champion again. He will have to regain top form next time." Ayat Sharifi was the other Iranian in the superheavyweight class, though he bombed out after three failed attempts in the C&J event while strugg-

ling with a knee injury. Davoudi's bronze saw Iran end in the 10th place of the medal table. Mirmostafa Javadi had stunned Chinese duo Li Dayin and Tian Tao to claim the C&J and total golds in the 89kg contests earlier in Riyadh. China dominated the standings with a remarkable 33 medals – including 20 golds, with Thailand (9) and Egypt (7) in the following spots.

Sweden's Duplantis breaks own pole vault world record

REUTERS – Sweden's Armand Duplantis made the extraordinary look almost routine yet again as he broke his own pole vault world record, clearing 6.23 metres at the Eugene Diamond League finale on Sunday.

The performance shaved one centimetre off his previous best set in France in February.

It was the seventh world record for the back-to-back world champion, who soared over the rest of the field at the season-ending meeting as EJ Obiena of the Philippines finished second with 5.82 and American Sam Kendrick took third with 5.72.

The fans at Hayward Field held their breath as the Olympic champion Duplantis nudged the bar when he cleared the record height, before erupting with cheers. With his family there to witness the occasion, jumped up and down in joy before sprinting to his team, who hoisted him into the air. "I knew that when I was



AFP

over the bar just to not panic because I knew I was going to have to squeeze over a little bit. I don't know, I just looked up and the bar was still there – I don't know, it's hard to explain," Duplantis said in televised remarks. The record-breaking performance was exactly how he wanted to end his extraordinary season after he tried and failed to clear his own record

mark at the world championships in Budapest. He is expected to be one of the biggest attractions in athletics at the 2024 Paris Olympics. It was the second world record that the crowd in Eugene witnessed on Sunday, after Ethiopia's Gudaf Tsegay smashed the women's 5,000 metres world record with a run of 14 minutes 00.21 seconds.