

Nokhodi grabs world wrestling bronze



UWW

Sports Desk

Iranian freestyle wrestler Mohammad Nokhodi finished his World Championships campaign with a joint bronze in Belgrade. With six-time champion Jordan Burroughs absent at this year's event, Nokhodi, beaten by the legendary American in the previous two finals, arrived in the Serbian capital as the favorite to walk away with the ultimate prize of the 79kg weight class.

Nokhodi got off to a flying start in the competitions, defeating Turkey's Ramazan Ishak Sari (9-4), but a last-eight 5-2 setback against Russian Akhmed Usmanov, participating as a neutral athlete, ended his hopes of a first world gold.

However, Nokhodi bounced back to beat North Macedonian Ahmad Magomedov 5-1 in the repechage before a 10-0 technical fall triumph over Azerbaijan's Orkhan Abasov secured a third successive world medal for the Iranian.

Nokhodi, who broke down in tears after his victory, shared the third podium with Vasy Mykhailov of Ukraine, while Usmanov went on to beat Georgian Vladimeri Gamkrelidze 4-1 for the gold.

This was a fourth medal for the Iranian 10-man squad in Belgrade.

Having beaten defending champion Taha Akgül of Turkey in the semifinals, Amirhossein Zare' out-muscled Georgia's Geno Petriashvili by an 11-0 scoreline on Sunday to capture a second 125kg gold in three years.

Hassan Yazdani, meanwhile, suffered a fifth defeat in a sixth head-to-head with David Taylor as the American pinned his familiar foe with two seconds left on the clock in the 86kg final.

Amirmohammad Yazdani, representing the country in the 70kg contests, also came short in a show-down with an American opponent.

Yazdani – a silver winner in 2021 – 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 Zain Retherford, falling to an 8-5 loss.

AFC Champions League:

Rahmati relishes in 'memorable' debut for Nassaji; Morais rues dropped points

Sports Desk

Nassaji Mazandaran boss Seyyed Mehdi Rahmati was thrilled to see his men leave India with a "memorable" victory on their Asian Champions League debut – a 2-0 win against Mumbai City in Group D.

Sepahan manager Jose Morais, meanwhile, was left regretting after his side conceded a late equalizer to share the spoils with Iraq's Air Force Club in a 2-2 draw in their Group C opener in Erbil.

In Pune's Balewadi Stadium, Ehsan Hosseini bagged a maiden goal for the northern Iranian side at the Asian elite clubs competition, finding the net with a cool finish in the 34th minute.

Mohammadreza Azadi tapped in a second goal in the 62nd minute to secure maximum points for the 2022 Iranian Hazfi Cup champion. "Today is a historic and memorable day for Nassaji club. Our players put all their strength and energy for the pride and success of this team and fans," Rahmati said afterwards.

"This was Nassaji's first game in the AFC Champions League; I thank God and thank my players for making our people and fans happy and getting the first three points in our history in the competition," added the former Esteghlal and Sepahan goalkeeper.

Rahmati, whose team took a surprise lead in the group – also featuring Saudi powerhouse Al Hilal and Uzbekistan's Navbahor – on Matchday 1, still said his team would not be carried away by the victory.

"We can be happy until tomorrow when we return to Iran and then we have to focus on the next games again," said the Iranian, adding: "From today, opponents will have a different level of respect for us."

Nassaji will next square off against



Nassaji Mazandaran players celebrate a goal during a 2-0 victory over Mumbai City in the AFC Champions League group stage at the Balewadi Stadium, Pune, India, on September 18, 2023.

AFC

four-time Asian champion Al Hilal at the Azadi Stadium on October 3. Al Hilal was held to a 1-1 home draw by Navbahor in Riyadh. Georgian striker Toma Tabata-dze netted 10 minutes after the break to silence the crowd at the King Fahd International Stadium, though Navbahor was left heartbroken after Saudi center-back Ali al-Bulayhi headed home in the 10th minute of stoppage time.

Pitiful draw

Having enjoyed a perfect start to the Iranian top-flight season, Sepa-

han was stunned with 26 minutes into the game at the Franso Hariri Stadium, when Ali Jasim's strike from inside the box took a deflection off Mohammad Daneshgar and went past Iranian international keeper Payam Niazmand. It took the Iranian giant four minutes to get back in level terms, courtesy of Daneshgar smashing home from close range.

Holding midfielder Mohammad Qorbani was an unlikely scorer for Sepahan, giving the visiting side the lead with a composed finish in the 67th minute but Jasim's ef-

fort from an acute angle with one minute from normal time shared the points.

"I did not expect this from the match beforehand. Air Force Club is a good team and had good players," Morais said after the game.

"We were ready for the match, but because they hadn't played in the league yet, we didn't know much about them, but they knew a lot about our team because we had played a few matches," added the Portuguese.

"In my opinion, we should have managed the difficult situations

we faced better, but the players gave their best.

"We were able to control the game most of the time. It's a pity that we conceded a goal, even though we were in control."

Next for Sepahan is a home game against Saudi side Al Ittihad at Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium on October 2.

Despite being without injured striker Karim Benzema, Al Ittihad cruised to a 3-0 home win against Uzbekistan's AGMK, thanks to a Haroune Camara's opener followed by a Brazilian Romarinho's brace.

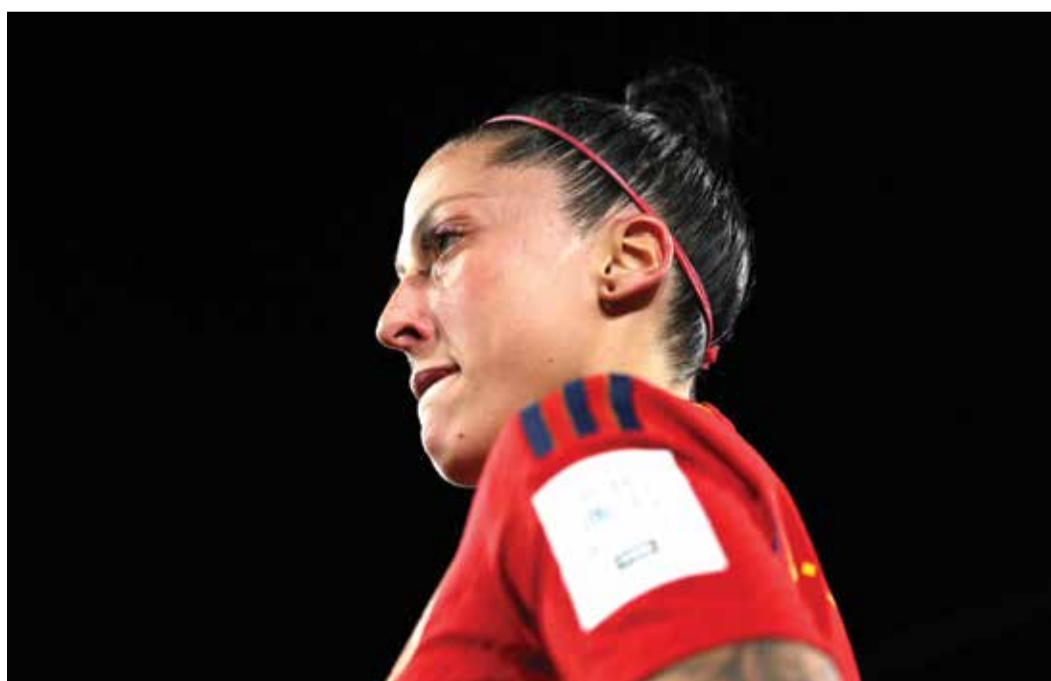
'Nothing has changed': Hermoso hits out over Spain squad call-ups

THE GUARDIAN – Jenni Hermoso said the decision to call up players who are boycotting Spain's women's team was proof that "nothing has changed" at the country's federation (RFEF) even after the resignation of its president over the Women's World Cup kiss scandal.

After most of Spain's World Cup-winning squad were selected on Monday for upcoming games, the players said they would continue their boycott, which came after Luis Rubiales kissed Hermoso on the lips during the trophy presentation ceremony in Australia.

Should the players refuse the call-up they could face fines of up to €30,000 (£26,000) and the suspension of their federation licence for two to 15 years under Spain's Sports Act. Victor Francos, the head of Spain's government national sports agency, told SER radio station if the players did not show up "the government must apply the law".

Hermoso, who was not called up, said the players had been "caught by surprise" by the call-



GETTY IMAGES

ups and were forced to react to "another unfortunate situation caused by the people who continue to make decisions within the RFEF".

"The players are certain that this is yet another strategy of division and manipulation to intimidate and threaten us with legal repercussion and econom-

ic sanctions," the 33-year-old striker said in a statement posted on X, formerly Twitter. "It is yet more irrefutable proof that shows that even today, nothing

has changed."

The RFEF did not respond immediately to a request for comment outside normal business hours. The federation said in an earlier statement it was convinced of the need for "structural changes" and had to clarify who was responsible for the behaviour the players had brought to light.

Montse Tomé, who has replaced Jorge Vilda as coach of the national team, suggested Hermoso was left out because of the intense media attention the player had received in the past month. "We stand with Jenni ... we believe that the best way to protect her is like this, but we are counting on Jenni," Tomé said.

Hermoso asked who she needed protection from. "A claim was made today stating that the environment within the federation would be safe for my colleagues to rejoin yet at the press conference it was announced that they were not calling me as a means to protect me," she said. "Protect me from what? And from whom?"