

Mirzazadeh, Zare' throw down the gauntlet to world super heavyweights



Iran's Amin Mirzazadeh (L) and Amirhossein Zare' celebrate after winning the superheavyweight gold medals at the Wrestling World Championships in Belgrade, Serbia, in September 2023.

Sports Desk

Iranian duo Amin Mirzazadeh and Amirhossein Zare' have already emerged as the favorites for Olympic glory next year after capturing the statement superheavyweight golds at the Wrestling World Championships. Trailing a 2-0 deficit midway through the second period, Mirzazadeh scored a couple of stepouts, the last of which came with six seconds left on the clock, to beat Turkey's Riza Kayaalp on last-point criteria in the Greco-Roman 130kg final on Friday – days after his

fellow Iranian Zare' had won a second freestyle 125kg gold in three years, courtesy of a technical fall victory over Georgian Geno Petriashvili. This was a first triumph for Mirzazadeh in three encounters with the five-time world champion Kayaalp. The 25-year-old Iranian was unlucky to miss out on a medal in his maiden Olympic appearance in Tokyo, where he fell to a 7-3 loss to the Turkish in the third-place bout. Mirzazadeh then came short against Kayaalp in last year's world final after it finished 1-1.

"I started preparing for this tournament two weeks after last year's final and I'm happy that I was rewarded for all my efforts," Mirzazadeh said after his victory. "My family kept telling me for a whole year that I should go to the final and beat Riza Kayaalp," said the Iranian. An under-23 world champion in 2021, Mirzazadeh hopes the gold in Belgrade will only be the first of many in his senior career. "I'll try my best to improve day by day and become a better wrestler. I hope to win a gold in the upcoming Olympics," added Mirzazadeh.

However, the Iranian will still be facing a mammoth en route to the top podium in Paris as Kayaalp will surely come back stronger to chase a fourth Olympic medal, not to mention legendary Cuban Mijain Lopez will be after a record-extending fifth gold at the Games. Milestone for Zare'? The freestyle superheavyweight contest has been a three-horse race for the past three world events since the Tokyo Olympics, featuring Zare', Petriashvili, and another Turkish great in Taha Akgül. Zare' who won an impressive bronze in Tokyo on his

senior international debut, sharing the third podium with Akgül, went on to beat both the Turkish and Petriashvili – who have a remarkable 20 world and Olympic medals between them – to win the world gold in Oslo two years ago. The 22-year-old Iranian looked to be on his way to a second successive top-spot finish last year but a semi-final wobble against Akgül saw Zare' eventually settle for the bronze. Zare' bounced back in style this year as he defeated the two rivals without conceding a single point to leave the Serbian capital on a

high note last week, and will have the upper hand against the two in Paris in less than 12 months. Gable Steveson, who came out on top against Petriashvili in a thrilling final in Tokyo, embarked on a new career in professional wrestling after the Games but the prospect of a second Olympic gold could persuade the American to make a return to the mat next summer and pose a real threat to Zare's gold bid in Paris. Despite the World Championships being a campaign to forget for Iranian wrestling after relative setbacks

for gold hopefuls Hassan Yazdani, Rahman Amouzad, and Mohammadreza Gerai, the country will still hope to build on Mirzazadeh's and Zare's success when seeking a first-ever superheavyweight gold in the history of the Olympic Games. Retired wrestler Komeil Qassemi has an Olympic gold in his trophy cabinet, but he was only handed the ultimate prize of the 120kg category a decade after London 2012, thanks to positive doping test results for the initial top two Artur Taymazov and Davit Modzmanashvili.

Hangzhou Asian Games: Girls duo open medal account for Iran with rowing silver



Sports Desk

Rowing pair Mahsa Javer and Zeinab Norouzi got Iran off the mark in the medal table at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, by grabbing a silver medal in the women's double sculls event. The Iranian duo clocked 7:17.08 minutes in the Final A contest at Fuyang Water Sports Centre – finishing 13.67 seconds adrift of the host's Lu Shiyu and Shen Shuangmei. Thailand's Nuntida Krajangjam and Parisa Chaempudsa took the bronze on 7:21.70. Nazanin Malaei and Kimia Zarei were the other Iranian female pair in action at the rowing contests on Sunday but missed out on the podium after a fourth-place finish in the light-weight double sculls final. Later in the day, Iranian Marjan Salahshouri bagged a second medal for the country – a bronze in the women's individual poom-

sae of the taekwondo competitions. Salahshouri overcame opponents from Bangladesh and Malaysia before suffering a last-four defeat against Japan's Yuiko Niwa. Salahshouri registered 6.44 points against the Japanese's 6.86 to share the third podium with Ma Yun Zhong of the Chinese Taipei. Niwa, meanwhile, had to settle for the silver after a final loss to South Korean Kang Wanjin. Elsewhere in the Games, Iran got off to a flying start in the men's handball, thrashing Mongolia 50-16 in Group D of the preliminary round, while in the men's beach volleyball, there were a couple of last-16 victories for the two Iranian teams. Sina Shokati and Bahman Salemi teamed up to beat Japan 2-1 (21-16, 18-21, 15-6), with Abbas Pour-Asgari and Alireza Aghajani coming out victorious against the Thai duo in straight sets (21-15, 21-15).

Mahsa Javer (L) and Zeinab Norouzi celebrate winning the silver in the women's double sculls final at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, on September 24, 2023.