

Hangzhou
Asian
Games:

Ganjzadeh claims karate gold; Iranian women grab kabaddi bronze

Sports Desk

The penultimate day of the 19th Asian Games saw Iranian karateka Sajjad Ganjzadeh win a ninth gold for the country in Hangzhou, China. Meanwhile, the Iranian women's

quest for a second successive kabaddi gold in the Games came to an end in the semifinals as they settled for a joint bronze alongside Nepal after a 35-24 defeat against the Chinese Taipei. Iran's men's team, however, remains on course to win back-to-back golds of the event, thanks to a last-four 47-24 victory over the Chinese Taipei, and will take on India in today's showdown.

Karate kudos

Tokyo Olympic champion Ganjzadeh came out on top against opponents from Laos, Pakistan, and Thailand for a place in the men's kumite +84kg final against Kyrgyzstan's Adilet Shadykanov, who claimed a shock semifinal win against reigning

world champion Tareg Ali Hamedi of Saudi Arabia. A nail-biting showpiece saw Ganjzadeh come out victorious with a 4-2 scoreline to capture a second gold in a row at the Asian Games – a massive improvement for the Iranian on

July's Asian Championships, where he took the bronze. In the women's draw, Atousa Golshadnejad was unlucky to finish her campaign empty-handed after a 1-0 loss to Kazakhstan's Assel Kanay in the third-place bout of the -61kg class.

Rahman outclassed

Nicknamed 'Ruthless Rahman', Amouzad – a world champion last year and a two-time Asian gold medalist – stepped onto the mat on Friday on the back of below-par run in September's World Championships in Belgrade, where he only managed to secure a berth for next year's Paris Olympics by finishing fifth in the 65kg weight class.

The young Iranian beat wrestlers from Uzbekistan, Japan, and the host country and then showed no mercy against five-time world and Olympic medalist Bajrang Punia in the semifinals, easing past the high-profile Indian by a 8-1 triumph. However, Amouzad was a shadow of himself in the gold-medal contest against Mongolia's Tul-

ga Tumur-Ochir – whom the Iranian beat for the Asian gold in April – and was stunned inside 15 seconds after the break to suffer a 11-1 technical fall defeat. Ebrahim Khari also endured a disappointing run in the 57kg class, concluded by a last-eight setback against Indian Aman Sehrawat.



Iranian karateka Sajjad Ganjzadeh (R) is seen in action against Pakistan's Muhammad Awais in the men's kumite +84kg quarterfinals at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, on October 6, 2023.
● ISNA

Verstappen has done 'exceptional job', Hamilton says

BBC – Lewis Hamilton has praised Max Verstappen for doing "an exceptional job" as the Red Bull driver stands on the brink of a third consecutive title.

Verstappen will win the Formula 1 drivers' championship in today's sprint race in Qatar as long as team-mate Sergio Perez does not score at least six more points than him.

Hamilton said: "Max has been faultless and no-one can take that away from him."

"He has done an amazing job with the package he has."

Ahead of Verstappen's expected coronation this weekend, Hamilton added: "He and the team have been phenomenal. They've raised the bar." The winner of the sprint – a shorter race than a grand prix of about half an hour – earns eight points, with a sliding scale down to one point for eighth.

Verstappen will be champion once again if he finishes at least sixth in the sprint, no matter

what Perez does.

There is no avoiding that fact for Verstappen, but he is focused simply on winning this weekend.

The Dutchman, who has won 13 of the 16 races held so far this season, said: "We are having an amazing year and we just come into this weekend and want to win again."

"And of course I know if I win or whatever on Saturday I win the championship, but we are just very focused on the main job."

Verstappen said he had no feelings either way as to whether winning it in a sprint race would be an anti-climax.

"If it's Saturday or Sunday, I don't think it matters a lot," Verstappen said. "It's always nice to win it at the first possible opportunity."

"To win three championships in a row is never easy. You need a very good car, but I always try to be consistent and not to have too many mistakes."

"The car is in a really great window, except Singapore [last month], but all the other races it was really nice to drive. But it is still easy when driving on the limit to make mistakes and that is what I try to eliminate."

Verstappen was also lauded by a series of his rivals.

Perez, who has won just two races, said: "Max has done a tremendous job. He has driven on another level compared to anyone else."

Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso added: "An incredible season, breaking so many records, and when you win so many races – and they were not easy races, sometimes they were tricky with weather conditions we went through, June, July all the races were hit by rain – and when you make no mistakes and deliver the job every weekend, it is big respect."



● XPB IMAGES

Persian Gulf Pro League:

Tractor routs Iralco to go top

Sports Desk

Ex-Persepolis players Siamak Nemati and Mahdi Abdi were on target as Tractor walked away with an emphatic 4-0 victory at Iralco on Thursday to move atop the Persian Gulf Pro League table.

Nemati headed home from close range in the first half before Abdi's thumping effort from the edge of the box found the bottom corner 12 minutes from normal time.

Aref Rostami and Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh added a couple of late strikes as Tractor celebrated a fourth victory on the bounce – keeping a fourth successive clean sheet – after a disappointing start to the season, which had seen Paco Jemez's side suffer back-to-back defeats against Sepahan and Persepolis.

Elsewhere, Zob Ahan beat newly-promoted Shams Azar 2-1 to sit second in the table – one point adrift of Tractor.

Mohammad-Javad Mohammadi bagged a brace inside seven minutes in the first half for the visiting side, which went down to 10 men after center-back Nader Mohammadi received his marching orders in the 57th minute.

Substitute Issa Moradi pulled one back for the home side with 14 minutes left on the clock but Mohammad Rabiei's men held out a late scare for a third win of the campaign.

In Ahvaz, Saman Nariman-Jahan scored in the 90th minute to lead Paykan to a 1-0 away victory over Esteghlal Khuzestan.

The result left the home side second from bottom with a single point which saw head coach Sirous Pourmousavi step down from his role after the game.

Favorites in action

Tractor could still lose the top spot today should



Tractor players celebrate a goal during a 4-0 victory over Iralco in the Persian Gulf Pro League in Arak, Iran, on October 5, 2023.
● FARID RAHIMI/ISNA

Javad Nekounam's Esteghlal manage to leave the pitch with maximum points when playing away to Mes Rafsanjan.

Sepahan, meanwhile, will be back in action for the first time since the 2-2 draw at Iraq's Air Force Club on matchday one of the AFC Champions League group stage more than two weeks ago.

Having seen their clash against Saudi side Al Ittihad in the Asian club competition called off last Monday, Jose Morais's men will host San'at Naft Abadan, looking to continue their perfect start to the Iranian top-flight season.

The Isfahan-based club, however, is sixth in the table after being deducted four points by the Iranian football governing body due to a "budget cap violation" in the summer transfer window.

Persepolis, fresh from a massive 1-0 win at Al Duhail, will take on Golgozar Sirjan – unbeaten under new Greek manager Marinos Ouzounidis – at the Azadi Stadium on Sunday.

Nassaji, beaten 3-0 by Al Hilal on Tuesday, will visit Malavan FC.

England manager Southgate 'not a fan' of 2030 World Cup format

REUTERS – FIFA's decision to host the 2030 World Cup across six continents could lead to issues in sporting integrity, England manager Gareth Southgate said.

In a surprise announcement a year earlier than planned, world soccer's governing body allocated the 2030 World Cup to Morocco, Spain and Portugal but also said Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay would host three opening matches to

mark the tournament's centenary.

On Thursday, Argentine government officials and the local football federation said the country would "go for more" games, which could further increase travel for teams and fans.

"My big thing is I don't quite get the integrity of the competition," Southgate told reporters on Thursday.

"I'd need to see it all laid out but my understanding is

three matches played in South America, then those teams have to travel across the globe, change time zone again, and pick up the competition with home advantage in one part of the group and not another part."

The previous edition of the European Championships was also hosted across a number of different countries in Europe, but Southgate said the 2030 World Cup plans seemed "quite disjointed" in compari-

son to that tournament.

"From what I've seen, I'm not a fan," Southgate said.

"Argentina in Buenos Aires would not be great. Logically, you could play Argentina in Buenos Aires and have to travel back."

"There is a big difference between playing Argentina in Buenos Aires and playing them in Casablanca. That is a significant change to the competition."



● CARL RECINE/REUTERS