

Kiani bags silver at World Taekwondo GP



Iran's Nahid Kiani (blue) is seen in action against Canadian Skylar Park at the World Taekwondo Grand Prix in Taiyuan, China, on October 10, 2023.
● WORLD TAEKWONDO

Sports Desk

Iran's Nahid Kiani settled for a silver medal at the World Taekwondo Grand Prix in Taiyuan, China.

A gold medalist in May's World Championships in Baku, Kiani enjoyed an impressive run en route to the women's -57kg final on Tuesday, only to suffer a 2-1 defeat against Canadian Skylar Park and grab a second silver at this year's event following a runner-up finish in the first series in Rome back in June.

Having stepped into the competitions on the back of a shock

first-round exit at the Asian Games two weeks ago, the Iranian came out victorious (2-1) against American Faith Dillon before defeating Lo Chia-ling of the Chinese Taipei – a two-time world silver medalist and a bronze winner in Tokyo Olympics – by the same scoreline in the quarterfinals.

Kiani then came out on top against Russian Tatiana Minina – who won the silver in Tokyo and participated in the Taiyuan event as neutral athlete – for a place in the final showdown.

The silver medal was still enough for Kiani to retain her

fourth spot in the Olympic Kyorugi Ranking and edge ever closer to a quota for the Paris 2024 Games.

Mahdi Hajimousaei and Abolfazl Zandi were the other Iranians in action on Tuesday – both taking part in the men's -58kg contests – but finished their campaigns empty-handed.

Hajimousaei, a gold medalist in September's Series 2 in Paris, was knocked out by South Korean Park Tae-joon, while Zandi, runner-up to Hajimousaei in the French capital, fell to a last-16 defeat against Tunisian Mohamed Khalil Jendoubi, who went on to claim the gold.

Iran's Geraei suspended by UWW, faces Olympic ban

Sports Desk

Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Mohammad-Ali Geraei has been handed a provisional suspension from all international events by the United World Wrestling due to an incident at September's World Championships in Belgrade. The UWW decision came after the Japan Wrestling Federation lodged a complaint over the Iranian's misconduct during a 67kg bout featuring his younger Mohammadreza and Kyotaro Sogabe of Japan. Mohammadreza had a 10-9 advantage over the Japanese but

was clearly out of breath with 1:15 minutes left on the clock, when his older brother, who had been knocked out of the 77kg contests earlier, threw a bottle of mineral water on the mat to halt the bout, presumably buying the Iranian some time to restore strength.

A world and Olympic champion in 2021, Mohammadreza held on for an 11-10 victory but a technical-fall humiliation against Azerbaijani Hasrat Javrov in the quarterfinals saw the Iranian eventually settle for a bronze medal.

The international governing body of the sport has de-

manded explanation from the Iranian federation before announcing the final verdict, but the worst-case scenario could see Geraei be handed a lengthy ban and possibly miss the chance to take part in next summer's Paris Olympics.

A winner of three world bronze medals, Geraei, 29, was part of the Iranian six-man squad at the Tokyo Olympics two years ago – where, despite some impressive performances, he was unlucky to miss out on a podium finish after a defeat against Japan's Shohei Yabiku in the bronze medal contest.



● UWW

Meet Nasim Safaei an Iranian badminton player with Olympic aspirations



By Mahdiah Qazvinian
Staff writer

Iranian girl Nasim Safaei says she has set sights on securing a place in the badminton contests of next year's Paris Olympics.

"It's a dream for every athlete to take part in the greatest sporting showpiece of all," the 22-year-old Iranian told Iran Daily, adding: "I'm currently the top-ranked female player in Iran, so I'll be the favorite to represent the country in Paris."

Safaei, however, is fully aware of the daunting challenge facing her for a spot in the Games. "You need to have an accurate

four-year plan to succeed at the Olympics. I missed out on several international events due to the coronavirus restrictions over the past few years, which is why I fell down the global rankings. I'll have to compete in future events in the coming months to boost my chances for an Olympic berth," added the Iranian. Iran is not among the top badminton nations in the world, though Safaei believes the Iranians have what it takes to compete with the best of the sport. "Badminton has gained more public attention in the country in recent years. However, the Iranians are far from being considered top players on the global stage. It takes a lot of efforts to



reach that height. A player needs to have international experience, constant training sessions and

work with world-class coaches to improve. I'm sure the Iranian players have the potentials to

challenge the best in the game," added Safaei, a former doubles champion at the International Fajr Cup.

"Most of the top badminton players in the world are from the Asian countries – notably South Korea, Indonesia, China, and Malaysia – and that makes it even harder for the Iranians to progress in the continental events," said Safaei.

Of the top 20 players in the latest BWF World Tour women's singles rankings, 17 are from Asia, while Denmark's Viktor Axelsen (third) and Anders Antonsen (eighth) are the only non-Asians in the top 20 of the men's ranking. Iran was represented by Yeganeh Kermani in the new-

ly-finished Hangzhou Asian Games in China, where she suffered a first-round exit.

"Badminton is an expensive sport and we often have to use personal funding to prepare for the tournaments. The Iranian federation plays an integral part in developing badminton in the country. The federation's support helped Soraya Aqaei win a berth for the Tokyo Olympics. She was an inspiration for every Iranian female player."

Aqaei came out on top against Maldivian Fathimath Abdul Razzaq in Tokyo, before a loss to the two-time world bronze medalist He Bingjiao of China saw her finish second in the group and fail to reach the knockout round.



● LOREN ELLIOTT/REUTERS

Nadal to return at Australian Open, says tournament director

REUTERS – Rafa Nadal will return to Grand Slam tennis at the Australian Open in January, tournament director Craig Tiley announced on Wednesday, though the 22-times major champion's representative later said no timeline has been set for his comeback.

The 37-year-old former world number one has been sidelined since hurting his hip flexor in a second-round loss to Mackenzie

McDonald at the Melbourne Park major earlier this year.

The Spaniard was initially expected to miss eight weeks but underwent surgery on a hip muscle in June.

Tiley told Nine Network's "The Today Show" that Nadal had confirmed his participation in the Grand Slam.

"We can reveal exclusively here that Rafa will be back," Tiley said.

"He's been off for most of the year and in talking to him over the last few days he confirmed he will be back, which we're really excited about, the champion of 2022. That's awesome."

However, Nadal's representative Benito Perez-Barbadillo told Reuters via text from Shanghai that there was nothing to announce yet on the Spaniard's upcoming schedule.

"I can confirm to you that Rafa is

practising, as everyone saw on his last post on Instagram," Perez-Barbadillo said.

"But there is no date confirmed, scheduled or programmed yet for his comeback."

Tiley said Australian Nick Kyrgios could return in time to play at Melbourne Park after he had knee surgery in January and suffered wrist and foot issues in an injury-plagued 2023.