

Iranian Choopan runner-up in Mr. Olympia 2023



Iranian bodybuilder Hadi Choopan poses during the Men's Open contest in the 2023 Mr. Olympia in Orlando, FL, US, on November 4, 2023.
● GETTY IMAGES

Sports Desk

Iranian bodybuilder Hadi Choopan failed to defend his Mr. Olympia crown, finishing second in the prestigious event of the sport in Orlando, Florida.

A close competition in Saturday's final callout at the Orange County Convention Center saw American Derek Lunsford – runner-up to the 'Persian Wolf' last year – beat Choopan to the Sandow Trophy and walk away with the \$400,000 prize money.

An Olympia 212 winner in 2021, Lunsford is the first-ever bodybuilder to secure titles across multiple Olympia divisions.

The American also received the People's Champion title and belt — an award voted by the fans.

Choopan wrote his name into history books last year when he became the first Iranian to be crowned Mr. Olympia, having finished third and fourth in 2019 and 2020 respectively. Choopan's second-place finish was still impressive, as his performance clearly impressed the judges despite not being enough to top Lunsford this time around.

Choopan settled for the \$175,000 prize, with Nigerian Samson Dauda – a 2023 Arnold Classic winner – standing third in the Men's Open class.

Dauda also delivered a commendable performance as the 31-year-old improved on a sixth-place finish in 2022.

Following the top three in the standings were the 2019 champion Brandon Curry and Andrew Jacked in fifth place.

AFC Champions League preview:

Persepolis eyeing double over Istiklol; Sepahan looking to bounce back after AFC ruling

Sports Desk

Matchday 5 of the AFC Champions League will see Persian Gulf Pro League clubs Persepolis, Sepahan, and Nassaji Mazandaran back in action in the group stage today and tomorrow.

Iranian top-flight champion Persepolis will be after a second successive victory over FC Istiklol when playing away to the Tajikistani club in Dushanbe's Central Republican Stadium on Tuesday.

Saeed Sadeqi scored in each half as the Tehran Reds walked away with a 2-0 win in the corresponding fixture two weeks ago to stay second in the Group E table with six points – three adrift of Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr, which will be looking to continue its perfect start in the Asian elite clubs competition at Al Duhail. Yahya Golmohammadi's side will step into the contest on the back of Thursday's 2-2 home draw in the Iranian league against San'at Naft Abadan – courtesy of a stoppage-time equalizer for the 10-man visiting side.

The game in Dushanbe will be the first in a hectic fixtures list for the injury-hit Persepolis across five weeks, which will also feature away games at Sepahan, in the domestic league, and Al Nassr and home matches against Al Duhail and Havadar, as well as a Tehran Derby against Esteghlal before mid-November's international break.

In Group C, Sepahan will have to play the first of the three home matches away from Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium, facing Uzbekistan's AGMK FC in Tehran's Azadi Stadium today, after being hit with an AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee ruling on Thursday.

Sepahan was also handed a 3-0 de-



Persepolis midfielder Saeed Sadeqi (1) celebrates with head coach Yahya Golmohammadi after scoring his second during a 2-0 victory over Istiklol FC in the AFC Champions League at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on Oct. 24, 2023.
● MOHAMMADREZA BOLANDI/ISNA

feat against Saudi side Al Ittihad, while being fined \$200,000, after their game was called off minutes before the kickoff on October 3, due to the Iranian club "displaying a military and/or political statue in the area surrounding the field," which was described by the Asian football governing body as Sepahan's failure to "act in a politically neutral manner." When Sepahan and AGMK squared off in Olmaliq a fortnight ago, in-form fullback Ramin Rezaeian bagged a double, with Reza Asadi also on the scoresheet, as the Isfahan-based club claimed a 3-1 victory. The AFC verdict, however, left Sepahan third in the table – equal on four points with second-placed Iraqi side Air Force Club – with Al Ittihad on top with maximum points, making

today's game a must win for Jose Morais's men, if they are to keep their hopes for a place in the knockouts alive.

Portuguese head coach Jose Morais will hope to see his side improve on a recent poor run in the Iranian league, after a 1-1 draw at Nassaji and a shock 3-2 loss to Malavan at home on Thursday ended the club's five-game winning streak in the start of the new season.

Meanwhile, Nassaji will host Uzbekistan's Navbahor, eager to end a run of six games without a win, in which Seyyed Mahdi Rahmati's side was beaten on five occasions – including a 3-0 away loss to Tractor last time out in the domestic league.

The northern Iranian club felt unlucky to leave Namangan on Match-

day 4, when a Saber Hardani's straight red in the second half was followed by Mehrdad Abdi's OG deep into stoppage time, which led the Uzbek side to a 2-1 comeback victory. Nassaji is third in Group D with three points, with Saudi giant Al Hilal and Navbahor the top two in table with seven points – separated by goal difference.

Rahmati's side might face an uphill battle in securing a last-16 spot, but today's result against Navbahor could still prove decisive in the other two Iranian clubs' quest for progress as the runners-up in their respective groups.

The five group winners in the West Zone will be joined by three best second-placed teams in the round of 16 of the competition.



Anthony Gordon (2nd 1) scores Newcastle United's winner in a 1-0 victory over Arsenal in the Premier League at St James' Park, Newcastle, Britain, on Nov. 4, 2023.
● SCOTT HEPPELL/REUTERS

Furious Arteta slams VAR over Newcastle winner

THE GUARDIAN – An incandescent Mikel Arteta labelled Arsenal's 1-0 defeat at Newcastle "a disgrace" after Anthony Gordon's winning goal stood despite VAR checks for three possible problems.

It was Arsenal's first Premier League loss of the season but Arteta had no doubt he and his players were the victims of an outrageous miscarriage of justice. It was ultimately decided that there was no proof that the ball had gone out of play before Joe Willock crossed it, and the ruling was that Joelinton had not committed a foul while

challenging Gabriel, and Gordon was judged not to be offside.

"Embarrassing, it's an absolute disgrace, that's what it is: a disgrace," Arteta said. "There's so much at stake, we've put in so many hours to compete at the highest level and you cannot imagine the amount of messages we've had saying this cannot continue. It's embarrassing. "It's not acceptable, there's too much at stake. I don't want to be in the hands of these people. I don't know how to feel. I'm wasting my time, we are wasting our time. It's difficult enough to compete against Newcas-

tle – they are a really good team, but we have to talk about how the hell this goal stood. It's an absolute disgrace it was allowed. For more than one reason it should not be a goal.

"I have been in this country more than 20 years and [the officiating] is nowhere near the level of the best league in the world. I feel sick to be part of this. I feel sick. It's not a goal, it's not a goal!" Eddie Howe affected mild surprise.

"Maybe Mikel has seen something I haven't," said Newcastle's manager. "I had no idea what was going on with the VAR checks. You're in the

lap of the Gods. It was bizarre to have three."

While Arsenal were unhappy about Bruno Guimaraes's clash with Jorginho not being considered a red card, Howe claimed Kai Havertz should have been sent off for a first-half challenge on Sean Longstaff. "My initial thought was that it was a red," he said. "I thought it was high and dangerous but I would need to see it again.

"We're in a difficult moment with a lot of injuries but I'm really proud of my players. They've really stepped up."

Tatum makes Boston history in defeating Nets

Jayson Tatum scored 32 points on Saturday night as the Boston Celtics pulled away midway through the fourth quarter to remain unbeaten in the NBA with a 124-114 victory over the Brooklyn Nets in New York. The Celtics did not lead by more than 14 and appeared sluggish at times before improving to 5-0 for the first time since starting the 2009-10 campaign with six straight victories.

Tatum reached the 30-point mark for the fourth time this season and

also reached 10,000 career points by converting a three-point play in the second quarter. At 25 years, 246 days old, Tatum became the youngest player in Celtics history to reach the 10K milestone.

Tatum made 10 of 20 shots, hit six of Boston's 15 3-pointers and collected 11 rebounds. Jaylen Brown added 23 points while Kristaps Porzingis had his way inside against Brooklyn's smaller lineup and contributed 22 to help the Celtics get 52 points in the paint.

Playing the second night of their first back-to-back, the Nets shot 43 percent and saw a three-game winning streak end. Cam Thomas led Brooklyn with 27 points while Spencer Dinwiddie and Mikal Bridges added 19 apiece.

Elsewhere, Joel Embiid supplied 26 points and 11 rebounds as hosts Philadelphia 76ers beat short-handed Phoenix Suns 112-100.

Kelly Oubre Jr. added 25 points, but Tyrese Maxey virtually put the game away, canning a pair of triples in a

1 1/2-minute span midway through the fourth quarter that ran the Sixers' lead to 104-86. He finished with 22 points and 10 assists.

Kevin Durant netted a game-high 31 points for Phoenix, which was without star guards Devin Booker (ankle) and Bradley Beal (back).

Nikola Jokic had 28 points, 16 rebounds and nine assists, Michael Porter Jr. scored a season-high 27 points and NBA champions Nuggets defeated the Chicago Bulls 123-101 in Denver.



Celtics forward Jayson Tatum (0) dunks during an NBA victory over the Nets in Brooklyn, NY, US, on Nov. 4, 2023.
● WENDELL CRUZ/USA TODAY SPORTS