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The future of Hassan Yazdani's career has been the main talking point in the Iranian media since the freestyle wrestler sensation underwent surgery on his injured shoulder a couple of weeks ago.

Coming days after the Iranian's gold-winning campaign at the Hangzhou Asian Games, the operation on the torn meniscus is believed to keep the 28-year-old away from action for five to six months.

A winner of a national-record nine world and Olympic medals, Yazdani had to struggle with the injury through September's World Championships in Belgrade, where he had yet another disappointing finish, by his own standards, suffering a fall defeat against his familiar foe David Taylor, which gave the American a 3-1 lead in the head-to-head battles with the Iranian wrestler in the recent four major finals – including the showdown at the Tokyo Olympics.

A third world silver was still enough to secure a freestyle 86kg berth at the 2024 Summer Olympics – starting July next year in Paris – for the Iranian, meaning the Rio 2016 gold winner will not have to be involved in the qualification events for the Games.

While Yazdani has promised to "come back with a 100-percent fitness in the

near future", last week's comments by the chairman of the Iranian Wrestling Federation Alireza Dabir – a gold medalist in Sydney 2000 – raised doubts over the wrestler's form ahead of his quest for a third Olympic medal.

"No wrestler in Iran has fully recovered from a shoulder injury over the past 20 years. That's what happened to me as my career came to an end when I was 25. Hassan showed great passion and resilience to participate at the World Championships and win a medal there but he just couldn't continue like this. I hope he will be the first wrestler to overcome the problem," Dabir said. Many believe the decision to send Yazdani to two major events in quick succession contributed to his worsening conditions but Dabir said it was the Iranian's "own choice to go to Hangzhou."

Veteran Iranian Mansour Barzegar, the head coach of the national team in the 90s, shares Dabir's opinion, saying: "From what I've seen over the years, no wrestler has ever been able to wrestle again after a shoulder injury."

Some experts view, however, have offered optimism over Yazdani's shape on his return.

Orthopedic surgeon Professor Sohrab Kayhani, a member of the Iranian Wrestling Federation's presiding board, said: "All I can say is that Hassan is not an ordinary person. We're



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talking about a wrestling great here and his mental and physical attributes are different from other people. I'm positive he will be back stronger after spending his recovery time."

Yazdani's surgeon, Dr. Hamidreza Aslani, says the Iranian had a successful surgery but insisted that "his recovery process" will play a decisive role.

"It will all depend on Yazdani's determination from now on as it is important for him to adhere to his rehabilitation program," said Dr. Aslani.

The timeframe for Yazdani's return means the Iranian will only have two to three months to prepare for the Olympics.

Mohsen Kaveh, Dabir's deputy in the Iranian freestyle

team, says the period will be enough for Yazdani to head to the French capital as a favorite for glory.

"He is in a league of his own. I'm sure he'll put in all his efforts to make it to the Games," said Kaveh, though he added there are other alternatives for Yazdani, should he fail in the race against time for a proper challenge in Paris.

"Our priority will definitely be Yazdani but Ali Savadkouhi has recently moved up to the 86kg class and could be in contention for the Olympics, along with [former world silver and bronze medalist] Alireza Karimi as well as Hadi Vafaeipour," Kaveh said.

Kamran Qasempour, a world 92kg champion

in 2021 and 2022, who missed the September's Worlds with an injury, may also join the list of the contenders for the Iranian 86kg singlet in Paris in the coming months as he is eager to add an Olympic medal to his trophy cabinet. Only time would tell which Iranian will pose a threat to Taylor's title defense in Paris.

## LeBron stars as Lakers beat Suns



BARRY GOSSAGE/GETTY IMAGES

BBC – LeBron James claimed 32 points and 11 rebounds as the Los Angeles Lakers ended a three-game losing streak with a 122-119 win at the Phoenix Suns.

Kevin Durant scored a game-high 38 points for Phoenix in what was both teams' in-season tournament opener. The Suns led 96-89 at the end of the third quarter after Durant scored nine points in a span of 71 seconds. But the Lakers opened the fourth quarter with an 11-0 run to take the lead and ultimately held on.

After missing Wednesday's game at Houston with a hip injury, Anthony Davis added 18 points for the Lakers, who won on the road for the first time in six tries.

Both teams now have a 4-5 record this season, with the Suns having played without Devin Booker (cal) for the sev-

enth time in eight games.

Elsewhere, Luka Doncic scored 44 points on 17-of-21 shooting as the Dallas Mavericks beat the visiting Los Angeles Clippers 144-126. Kyrie Irving added 27 points for Dallas, who are now 7-2.

The Philadelphia 76ers enjoyed a seventh straight win as Joel Embiid had 33 points and 16 rebounds in a 114-106 win at the Detroit Pistons.

Jaylen Brown scored a game-high 28 points to help the Boston Celtics end a two-game losing streak with a 121-107 home win against the Brooklyn Nets, with Jayson Tatum adding 23 points.

Karl-Anthony Towns scored 29 points as the Minnesota Timberwolves came from behind for their fifth straight win, beating the San Antonio Spurs 117-110, despite 29 points from number one draft pick Victor Wembanyama.

## Iranian seven-man football side crowned Asia-Oceania champion

### Sports Desk

Iranian seven-a-side team lifted the men's trophy at the IFCPF Asia-Oceania Championships in Melbourne, Australia.

Moslem Mehrabian and Abbas Torabi were on the scoresheet as Iran defeated the host 2-0 in Saturday's final showdown to book a place in next summer's IFCPF World Cup in Madrid.

There further glory for the Irani-

ans after the final as Torabi finished as the leading marksman of the event, while Vahid Navab was named the Best Goalkeeper in the men's competition.

Japan defeated Thailand 3-0 to stand on the third podium.

Iran began its title run with a 3-0 win against Japan, before victories over Australia (3-1), Thailand (5-0), and India (6-0) sealed a top-spot finish in the group for the country.



FOOTBALL AUSTRALIA



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