

## Qasempour to switch weight class ahead of Olympics



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### Sports Desk

Iranian freestyle wrestler Kamran Qasempour will compete in the 97kg contests in the coming months as he will be looking to take part at next summer's Paris Olympics, the country's Wrestling Federation confirmed. Qasempour dominated the 92kg category by claiming back-to-back world golds in 2021 and 2022 – before missing out on September's event in Belgrade with a groin injury – but will now have to move up to the Olympic weight class with just over eight months until the Games in the French capital.

On his return to the wrestling mat, Qasempour will begin his quest for the Olympic berth with the participation in December's Iranian Championships. The winner of the 97kg contests will be "the first choice to represent the country at the Asian Championships [in April] as well as the Olympic qualification tournaments," the Iranian federation said.

The federation's announcement put a lid on speculations over the Iranian 86kg slot at the Olympics.

With Hassan Yazdani set to be sidelined for five to six months after undergoing a surgery on his injured shoulder, rumors in recent weeks suggested that Qasempour could be in contention to replace the nine-time world and Olympic medalist for the Paris Games.

Should Qasempour secure the Olympic quota, he will join the list of favorites for 97kg glory in Paris – including Russian-born Bahraini Akhmed Tazhudinov, who won the world gold in Belgrade, as well as Russian sensation Abdurashid Sadulaev and American Kyle Snyder, a four-time world and Olympic gold medalist.

The men's wrestling competitions will be staged across six freestyle and Greco-Roman weight classes apiece.

Amir-Hossein Zare' sealed a freestyle 125kg for Iran after cruising to the gold at the World Championships. Yazdani and Rahman Amouzad (65kg) also won the berths for the country after finishing runner-up and fifth in Belgrade respectively.

# FIFA U-17 World Cup: Iran heartbroken by late defeat but likely to progress to last 16

### Sports Desk

Iran was devastated to concede a late goal in the 2-1 defeat against England in their Group C encounter at the U-17 World Cup but remains on course for a place in the knockout stage of the tournament in Indonesia.

Having rallied from behind to beat defending champion Brazil 3-2 in the group opener, Hossein Abdi's boys looked set to pull off another upset when Abolfazl Zamani gave them the lead on the half-hour mark, only to see his goal canceled out by Reiss Denny's tame effort from behind the box in the 63rd minute.

Manchester City academy product Joel Ndala completed the comeback for England with a sublime first-touch effort from an acute angle in the 90th minute to send the 2017 champion atop the table with maximum points.

Iran is third in the group, equal on points with second-placed Brazil, which thrashed New Caledonia 9-0 earlier on Tuesday.

### Apologetic Abdi

"England was lucky to score two goals," Iran head coach Hossein Abdi said after the match, adding: "Of course they are [former] world champions but we had no fear today and could have won it. I have to apologize to the Iranian people for the result."

England enjoyed 62 per-



Iranian keeper Arsha Shakouri looks on as England striker Ethan Nwaneri hits the target during a Group C match at the FIFA U-17 World Cup in Jakarta, Indonesia, on November 14, 2023.

ALEX CAPARROS/GETTY IMAGES

cent of the possession and had 21 attempts against Iran's seven, though Abdi was unfazed by the stats at fulltime.

"We were comfortable and in control even after we scored. I don't care if they made a thousand passes

because we were after the victory but unfortunately, that did not happen," added Abdi, who also rued the heavy rain affecting the pitch at the Jakarta International Stadium.

"The English players are more used to playing in this

kind of weather, not to mention my players only had two days of recovery after the game against Brazil. We had to play the champions of the previous two editions in the space of three days, and it is important to get enough rest in those

circumstances. My players were clearly exhausted in the closing stages today," said Abdi.

"I wish we would have played New Caledonia for our second game, so that I could rest some of the players before the final

match." Iran will face New Caledonia on Friday, with a victory seemingly enough to see Abdi's side progress – at least as one of the four best third-placed teams across the six groups – to the last-16 round.

## Iran wins men's title at WT World Cup Team Championships Series



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### Sports Desk

Iran emerged as the men's champion at the WT World Cup Team Championships Series, thanks to a 2-0 victory over Australia in Wednesday's showdown in Goyang, South Korea. The Iranian trio of Mirhashem Hosseini, Amir-Mohammad Bakhshi, and Abolfazl Abbasi began their title run

with a 2-1 triumph over the host country at the KINTEX 2 Exhibition Center before defeating Brazil in straight rounds for a place in the final contest.

Morocco, Mexico, Côte d'Ivoire, and China were the other teams in the men's draw.

Iran was also represented by Melika Mirhosseini, Yalda Valinejad, and Tina Madanlou in the women's

contests, but suffered an early exit after a defeat against China.

South Korea came out on top against Morocco in the women's final, with China beating Mexico for the bronze.

Mirhosseini and Valinejad will team up with Hosseini and Abbasi in the mixed-gender competitions today.

## Iran to begin World Cup qualifiers against Hong Kong, Uzbekistan

### Sports Desk

Iran will begin its quest for a place in the 2026 World Cup – to be staged across Canada, Mexico, and the United States – with a game against Hong Kong at Tehran's Azadi Stadium today in Group E of the Asian qualifiers.

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee will have a final insight into his assets during this week's international break before the country heads to Qatar for January's

AFC Asian Cup.

The Asian powerhouse will then visit Tashkent to take on Uzbekistan at the Milliy Stadium on Tuesday.

Qalenoee will hope to have his prolific striker Mahdi Taremi back to his best form ahead of the event in Qatar, after the Porto talisman got off to slow start in the new season, scoring three in 15 appearances for the Portuguese giant in all competitions.

Sardar Azmoun also joined up with the rest

of the Iranian squad on Tuesday fresh from bagging his first goal for AS Roma in a 2-1 victory over Lecce in the Serie A less than a fortnight ago. Iran will again play Hong Kong in Group C of the Asian Cup, also featuring Palestine and the United Arab Emirates, as the three-time champion will be chasing a first trophy since 1976 – the last time Iran went past the semi-finals at the continent's flagship international tournament.



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