

## Iran bags two bronzes on Asian junior judo return



IRNA

### Sports Desk

Iran finished its campaign at the Asian Junior Judo Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, with a couple of bronze medals. Representing the country in the men's -100kg contests, Mohammad-Hossein Yaqouti bounced back from a second-round defeat against South Korean Park Se-min to beat Mongolia's Battulga Altangerel in the repechage round before defeating the Chinese Taipei's Tsai Chieh-en in the third-place contest.

Amir-Abbas Movahed also left the event with a consolation bronze, thanks to a victory over Saudi Saud Manaie, having suffered a last-four defeat against Emir Khan Zholdoshkaziev of Kyrgyzstan.

This was a first appearance in the event in four years for the country after serving a suspension by the International Judo Federation, over and incident at the 2019 World Championships in Tokyo, where then-Iranian -81kg contestant Saeed Molaei was allegedly forced by the Iranian federation to withdraw from a bout against Belgian Matthias Casse to avoid a final showdown against Israeli Sagi Muki.

## Gavi suffers serious knee injury in Spain win



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BBC - Spain and Barcelona midfielder Gavi suffered a serious knee injury in the Euro 2024 qualifying win over Georgia.

The 19-year-old landed awkwardly after jumping to control the ball, and left the pitch in tears in Valladolid. Manager Luis de la Fuente said Spain must wait for tests amid concerns it could be an anterior cruciate ligament injury.

"This is the ugly part of football. This is the most bitter victory I have ever experienced in my life," he said. "It is a very difficult moment for Gavi, Barcelona, the national team and for me - it seems as if we have lost the game."

Spain, who had already sealed their place at next summer's European Championships, beat Georgia 3-1 to finish top of Group A.

## FIFA U-17 World Cup:

# Iran to continue fairy tale against Morocco as coach Abdi chases ultimate prize

### Sports Desk

Iran will be hoping to continue its impressive run at the FIFA U-17 World Cup when taking on Morocco in the last-16 round in Surabaya, Indonesia, today.

Hossein Abdi's side routed New Caledonia 5-0 last time out to finish third in Group C - equal on six points with the two previous champions of the competition in England and Brazil. Morocco, meanwhile, will step onto the pitch at the Gelora Bung Tomo Stadium on the back of a top-spot finish in Group A, thanks to victories over Panama (2-0) and Indonesia (3-1) either side of a 2-0 defeat against Ecuador.

Abdi's boys stole all the headlines when they scored three in the space of 19 minutes to overcome a two-goal deficit at halftime against Brazil and beat the defending champion and four-time winner 3-2 in what will go down as one of the biggest upsets in the history of the tournament.

The Iranian young guns then thought they had done enough for a point against England, only to be left heartbroken after Manchester City academy player Joel Ndala bagged a 90th-minute winner to complete a 2-1 comeback victory for the 2017 champion.

### Abdi's ambitions

A victory today will see Abdi's side match an all-time best result for the country in the under-17 World Cup - a last-eight finish six years ago in India - though the Iranian head coach insists his team had set sights on going all the way in Indonesia long before heading to the competition.

"When we started working together a year and a half ago, I came up with a roadmap for the players, in which the ultimate goal was to win the world title," Abdi said in an interview with the Iranian Football Federation website.

"You need to set yourself ambitious targets and give it all your best shot. That's how you would feel good about your efforts at the end," added the Iranian.

When Iran was drawn against England and Brazil, few in the country fancied Abdi's team to progress beyond the group stage, but the head coach says he always appreciated the opportunity to play against the football heavyweights.

"Everyone thought we would concede lots of goals against Brazil and England, but I always believed the experience of playing against strong opponents would help us grow as a team. The World Cup is where you get the chance to compete with the best," Abdi added.

"We played a decent football against Brazil, even when we conceded twice in the first half, and we were also brilliant in both halves against England."

A third-place finish in the group turned out to be a devil in disguise for Abdi and his boys as it saw Iran find its way into a rather easier half of the knockout draw.

The winner of today's game will face either Mali or Mexico - runners-up in their respective groups - on Saturday for a place in the semifinals.

"Every team at the World Cup has earned the right to be here. Football has developed throughout the world and no side is guaranteed the victory against any opponent prior to the game," Abdi said.

"I don't really care who we play in the tournament and I mean it. You saw how we played against the two world champions. When I went to congratulate Japanese head coach [Yoshiro Moriyama] for their victory over Senegal, he told me: 'I showed the film of your match against Brazil to my players and told them if Iran can beat Brazil, so can you.' Our results have earned reputation for the Asian football."

Abdi is best remembered for being an aggressive, hard-working player in the middle of the park during his Persepolis career in the 90s, and he believes that is the kind of attitude his team needs to succeed in Indonesia.

"The players and I are just duty bound to fight till the last breath and hope for the best to happen. With that mentality, it wouldn't really matter if you win or lose a game," said the Iranian coach.

FIFA



## Djokovic has 'highest ambitions' after record ATP Finals triumph

AFP - At 36 years old Djokovic is still tennis' number one player by some distance and he has racked up a host of new records this season, taking his Grand Slam tally to 24 and finishing top of the year-end world rankings for the eighth time.

He swept past young pretenders Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner on his way to triumph in Turin and is gunning for more glory in 2024, when Paris hosts the one major event where he has not won - the Olympics. Asked what else he can accomplish in tennis, Djokovic joked: "Well, you can win four Slams and Olympic gold".

"I have always the highest ambitions and goals. That's not going to be different for the next year, that's for sure. The drive that I have is still there," he added.

"Motivation, especially for the biggest tournaments in sport, is still present... For me, obviously those are Grand Slams and Finals, and next year hopefully also Olympic Games."

The Olympics take place over July 26-August 11 in the French capital, starting less than a fortnight after Wimbledon and finishing shortly before the US Open. It is a major career goal sandwiched into an already long, draining season, one which will take its toll on all the top players let alone one heading

towards his late 30s.

"It is definitely one of the major goals for next year, other than Grand Slams," said Djokovic. "It's going to be very



congested schedule with going from the slowest to the fastest surface in sport back to the slowest. Clay, grass, clay, then hard court. Obviously that's a very demanding, challenging stretch of the year."

Vanquished finalist Sinner hailed Djokovic as an "inspiration" during the trophy ceremony and is using the Serb as a model for his own bid for the sport's top honours.

Both Djokovic and his coach Goran Ivanisevic predicted that Sinner, who claimed four tour-level titles this season, will one day win Grand Slams and top the

world rankings.

And his performances at the Pala Alpitour have been cause for great optimism within Italian tennis.

"He's an inspiration because he worked throughout the whole years before, when he was younger, in the right way to get to this point. That's also one of my goals," Sinner told reporters.

"It's not only about watching one season. You watch this season, and you say, OK, I played good. But you have to play well every season, and you have to get to a certain age, which is 35, 36, 37, whatever, and you can still feel the body in the right way."

Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning the final against Jannik Sinner at the ATP Finals in Turin, Italy, on November 19, 2023.

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REUTERS