

Iranian climbers keen on Paris heights despite World Cup boycott

Sports Desk

Three Iranians will be looking to secure a sport climbing quota in next summer's Paris Olympics despite the boycott of the World Cup in the United States hampering their preparations for the qualifiers.

"Iranian athletes missed out on the world events in the United States over the past two years after being denied entry visas by the Americans," Reza Zarei, the head of the sport's governing body in the country, said last week, adding: "That is why we decided not to apply for next year's World Cup as I believe it will be a waste of time and money."

The three-day IFSC Climbing World Cup will kick off in Salt Lake City, Utah, on May 3.

The International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) recently announced the list of eligible athletes for the Olympic qualification series.

Iranian speed duo Reza Alipour and Mahya Darabian as well as women's boulder & lead climber Elnaz Rekabi have been given the green light to take a shot at a place in Paris, starting with the Olympic Qualifier in Shanghai, China, Series on May 16.

The trio will then head to Budapest, Hungary, for the second series of the qualifiers from June 20-23.

A former world record holder in the

men's speed, for which he was nicknamed 'The Persian Cheetah' and the 'Usain Bolt of climbing', Alipour bagged a second Asian Games gold in October, with the Olympic glory remaining the only prize missing in his already illustrious trophy cabinet - featuring a gold (2018), silver (2016), and bronze (2014) at the World Championships, plus the ultimate prize of the 2017 World Games and six top-spot finishes in the IFSC World Cup.

His latest triumph came in mid-December's IFSC Asian Cup in Riyadh, where he clocked 5.33 seconds in the final to stand on the top podium.

Rekabi, meanwhile, is eager to prove there is more to her career than the off-the-wall controversy in last year's Asian Championships in Seoul - regarding her hijab removal in the boulder & lead final. The Iranian girl was unlucky to leave the Hangzhou Asian Games empty-handed after the final showdown was called off due to severe weather conditions but managed to claim the Asian Cup boulder bronze in the Saudi capital, while finishing fifth in the lead final.

For Darabian, an Olympic berth in August might be a daunting task, given her mediocre results in international outings over the past couple of years, but the 21-year-old girl will still be looking to build on her promising age-group performances - which saw her win an Asian youth gold in 2019 before grabbing the world junior bronze two years later - when chasing a surprise spot in the Iranian delegation heading to the French capital.



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Doncic lights up Suns for 50 on historic night

REUTERS - Luka Doncic recorded 50 points, 15 assists, six rebounds, four steals and three blocked shots and also went over 10,000 career points while leading the Dallas Mavericks to a 128-114 victory over the host Phoenix Suns on Monday night. Doncic reached 50 for the sixth time in the regular season and made eight 3-pointers as Dallas won its second straight after losing four of its previous five contests. Derrick Jones Jr. added 23 points, Dereck Lively II had 20 points and 10 rebounds and Tim Hardaway Jr. scored 18 points for the Mavericks.

"I'm feeling good," Doncic said postgame on ESPN. Then referencing the fact that Lively was just back in the lineup after an injury absence, he added, "We missed Lively for (four) games, we missed (Irving) I don't know how many games, so we are far away from our potential. ... But 'next-man-up' mentality, and I can't wait until (Irving) comes back."



Mavericks' Luka Doncic (77) shoots during an NBA victory over the Suns at Footprint Center, Phoenix, AZ, US, on December 25, 2023.

CHRISTIAN PETERSEN/GETTY IMAGES

Phoenix's Grayson Allen scored a season-high 32 points and matched his career best of eight 3-pointers. Chimezie Metu had career bests of 23 points and 19 rebounds for the Suns, who have lost nine of their past 12 games. Devin Booker contributed 20 points and 10 assists, Kevin Durant scored 16 points and Eric Gordon had 14 for the Suns.

Doncic topped 10,000 points by draining a 34-foot, straightaway 3-pointer with 4:52 left in the first quarter. He reached 10,000 points in 358 games, matching Hall of Famer Bob McAdoo for seventh fastest in NBA history. Wilt Chamberlain holds the record of 236 games.

The Mavericks were without Kyrie Irving (heel) for the ninth straight game.

Dallas connected on 53.6 percent of its field-goal attempts and was 16 of 44 (36.4 percent) from behind the arc.

Phoenix shot 44.4 percent from the field, including 14 of 41 (34.1

percent) from 3-point range.

The Suns trailed by 13 early in the third quarter but moved ahead behind Allen, who exploded with 19 points on 7-of-9 shooting in the period. He made five 3-pointers in the quarter. One of Allen's treys gave Phoenix its first lead of the night at 84-82 with 3:38 left in the third. Allen knocked down another one exactly one minute later and the Suns eventually took a 92-91 edge into the final quarter.

Phoenix led by six early in the fourth quarter before Doncic made two 3-pointers in 68 seconds during a 15-5 burst to help the Mavericks lead 106-102 with 8:08 remaining.

Hardaway's steal and dunk made it 124-112 with 1:32 remaining. Doncic hit a short jumper with 29.5 seconds left to reach 50 as the Mavericks closed it out.

Doncic had more points (24) in the first half than the combined output of Booker (11) and Durant (nine) as Dallas led 64-54 at the break.

Chelsea's league-high 56 bookings not down to indiscipline, claims Pochettino

THE GURDIAN - Mauricio Pochettino has denied Chelsea have a discipline problem despite racking up the most yellow cards in the Premier League and having Raheem Sterling and Cole Palmer suspended for tonight's match at home to Crystal Palace.

The pair were among six Chelsea players cautioned at Wolves on Christmas Eve as the team lost a fourth successive away game in the Premier League and were beaten for the 19th time in

2023, the most defeats in the English top flight. Chelsea have had 56 yellow cards in the league this season, not including two to members of the coaching staff. At Wolves Sterling was cautioned for allegedly diving, and Palmer, Malo Gusto and Nicolas Jackson were booked for dissent in the space of six minutes shortly after Mario Lemina put them 1-0 down. Pochettino does not believe this is representative of a lack of discipline. "No - it's

representative of the fact that we play for Chelsea, we are a big club and you feel the pressure," he said. "When you are frustrated and lack a bit of experience, it's [something on] we can improve."

"It's Palmer's first season in the Premier League and it is normal. He is playing for Chelsea. Of course, it's frustrating. But the players care, the players want to win. It's not about a lack of discipline, it's about having the ability to read the situation of the game."

Palmer was given his Premier League debut by Manchester City in August 2021 and made 19 appearances for them in the league, albeit only three from the start, before joining Chelsea. Pochettino has highlighted the youthfulness of his squad, on which more than £420m was spent last summer, and believes he will have the right blend of youth and experience once he is over an injury crisis that means Chelsea have had at least eight players missing for

each match.

Pochettino hopes to have Moisés Caicedo back tonight from the fever that ruled him out on Sunday but Enzo Fernández is still due to be missing with a hernia problem.

"To have all of the players fit is the moment when we will find the right balance," the manager said. "At the moment we are trying to compensate as we always have eight, 10, 12 players out, so we have to adapt to find the balance and find solutions."



Chelsea's Nicolas Jackson is booked during a Premier League defeat at Wolves on Dec. 24, 2023.

ANDREW BOYERS/REUTERS