

Iranians bag four medals at Fujairah Open



● WORLD TAEKWONDO

Sports Desk

The first day of the Fujairah Open taekwondo competitions in the United Arab Emirates saw Iran's five-man squad collect four medals, including double golds.

Iranians dominated the men's -58kg contests in the Sheikh Zayed Sport City as Mahdi Hajmou-saei came out on top against Abolfazl Zandi - in a repeat of last September's all-Iranian Grand Prix final in Paris - to walk away with the ultimate prize.

Alireza Hosseinpour, a silver medalist in last October's Asian Games, had to settle for a consolation bronze in the weight class after a last-

four defeat against Zandi - sharing the third podium with Afghanistan's Mohsen Rezaei.

Meanwhile, Arian Salimi, also a silver winner in Hangzhou, came out victorious against Azerbaijan's Iranian-born Milad Beigi - a two-time world champion and an Olympic bronze medalist in 2016 - in the +87kg final to take the country's gold count to two.

Mir-Hashem Hosseini was the other Iranian in the heavyweight class but left Fujairah empty-handed following a second-round defeat against Roslan Zapparov of Kazakhstan.

More than 450 athletes had been taking part at the 11th edition of the four-day Fujairah Open.

Iran slams decision to exclude country from MuayThai World Fest



● IRNA

Sports Desk

Farid Naqdi, the head of Iran Muaythai Association, lamented the WBC MuayThai's decision to axe the country's 18-athlete squad from the 2024 Amazing MuayThai World Festival over a dispute between two members of the team and the organizers in Bangkok, Thailand.

The quarrel, which reportedly led to a physical altercation, involved Iranian men's captain Ali Takallou and head coach Jalal Mo'tamedi and a couple of organizing officials during a weigh-in session. "Takallou was deemed overweight in the initial weighing but had his name registered in the draw sheet after losing a couple of extra kilos," Naqdi said of the incident. "However, another of-

ficial apparently interfered to prevent Takallou from participation for unknown reasons which was met by Mo'tamedi's objection," added Naqdi. The Iranian denied any physical fracas happening after the coach's complaint, adding: "It was truly unfair to leave out a whole team for one person's misbehavior."

"The Iranians had worked hard to prepare for this competition and 14 members of the team had secured a medal after reaching the final show-downs of their respective weight classes," said Naqdi, insisting the country will lodge a complaint to the international governing body of the sport. Featuring 600 contestants from 58 countries, the global extravaganza came to an end in the Thai capital's iconic Lumpinee Boxing Stadium on Monday.

Mohebbi hails Taremi's tips in Japan victory



Iran's Mohammad Mohebbi celebrates after scoring the equalizer in a 2-1 victory over Japan in the AFC Asian Cup quarter-final win against Japan on Saturday despite the striker being suspended.

● AFC

AFC - Mohammad Mohebbi praised the role Mahdi Taremi played in Iran's 2-1 AFC Asian Cup quarter-final win against Japan on Saturday despite the striker being suspended. The 26-year-old Mohebbi was picked to replace Taremi in the starting line-up, scoring the equaliser that sparked Iran's comeback win at the Education City Stadium, with the FC Rostov player eager to share how his teammate motivated him. "I want to thank Mahdi Ta-

remi, who is not only one of the best in Iran but one of the best in Asia," said Mohebbi.

"He talked with me for about half an hour because he wanted to help bring out my best qualities. This showed the unity that we have within this national team.

"Special thank you to (head coach) Amir Qalenei and the staff for giving confidence and belief to me. Also the medical and masseuse team for the recovery that enabled us to

perform this well after the short time from the win over Syria."

Mohebbi came off the bench in Iran's earlier four matches but Taremi's red card against Syria meant a start for him against four-time champions Japan.

His goal in the 55th minute, off a smart pass from Sardar Azmoun, was not significant only for the match but also because it was the first goal Iran have ever scored against Japan at the AFC Asian Cup, with Team Melli unable to find a

way through in four previous meetings at the continental showpiece.

"I'm very happy for the win and the performance. This match highlights the high quality within Asian football. I want to thank my teammates, everyone in the stadium and everyone back home.

"Hopefully we can continue this form to become champions of Asia so that we can make all Iranian fans proud and happy." Iran will play Qatar in the semi-finals on Wednesday.

Lyles targets Bolt's records after stunning personal best

THE GUARDIAN - If you thought Noah Lyles's 2023 was impressive, wait till you hear what track and field's biggest star has planned for the Olympic year. After laying down an early marker for 2024 by winning the 60m at the New Balance Indoor Grand Prix in 6.44sec - a personal best by 0.07sec and the fastest time of the year - the American then set his sights towards the stratosphere.

For Lyles is targeting four gold medals this year, starting with the world indoors in Glasgow next month, followed by the 100m, 200m and 4x100m at the Paris Olympics.

"I didn't know I was in that good shape," said Lyles, after beating the Jamaican Akeem Blake by 0.01sec. "World lead, meet record. Now let's go out there and get a world indoor medal in Glasgow."

But that isn't the limit of his ambition. "Last year I went out there and won three gold medals," he then explained. "This year

I want to get four. And if I don't get four, I am going after three world records."

And yes, that means going after Usain Bolt's 100m and 200m world records, as well as Jamaica's in the 4x100m.

But he is undeterred. "If I don't succeed, I will try, try, try again," he added.



● AFP

Fans angry as Messi does not play in Hong Kong

BBC - Angry fans in Hong Kong booed Inter Miami during a pre-season friendly after Lionel Messi did not play.

The Argentina World Cup winner, 36, who had a hamstring injury, was left on the bench as Inter beat a local League XI 4-1 in front of almost 40,000 fans.

There were chants of "refund", while a speech by Inter co-owner David Beckham was drowned out by booing.

The Hong Kong government said Messi had been contracted to play at least 45 minutes.

Kevin Yeung, Hong Kong's secretary for culture, sports and tourism, said government officials were repeatedly told that Messi would play.

They were only informed that an abductor injury would prevent the former Barcelona star from featuring with 10 minutes of the match remaining.

Match organisers Tatler Asia may be paid less money as a result of Messi not taking the pitch.

"Regarding Messi not playing the match today, the government, as well as all



● SAM TSANG

football fans, are extremely disappointed about the organisers' arrangement. The organiser owes all football fans an explanation," the government's major sports events committee (MSEC) said. "The MSEC will take follow-up actions with the organiser according to the terms and conditions, which includes reducing the amount of funding as a result of Messi not playing the match."

The MSEC said it had granted 15m Hong Kong dollars

(£1.5m) for the event along with a grant of one million Hong Kong dollars for the venue.

"One of the key terms of our funding agreement with Tatler Asia was for Messi to participate in the match for at least 45 minutes, subject to fitness and safety considerations," Yeung added.

A near-capacity crowd of 38,323 at Hong Kong Stadium had each paid more than 1,000 Hong Kong dollars (£101) for a ticket.