

Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships: Iranian boys shine with 16 medals



● IRSF

Sports Desk

Young Iranian swimmers finished their campaign at the Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships with an impressive 16 medals – including double golds – in the Filipino city of Capas.

On Thursday, Iranian diver Sam Vajer brought the curtain down on his glittering run at the event by scoring 339.8 points to grab the gold in the boys' board level 1m contest.

This was a fourth medal for the Iranian in Capas following a platform silver as well as the synchro board level bronze alongside Kiumars Aslani.

The Iranian duo then claimed the silver in the 3m synchronized springboard event with 233.64 points.

Aydin Nosrati was the other Iranian diving medalist, taking the board level 1m silver in the 13-14 age class.

Samyar Abdoli had won a first gold for the country in the competitions, thanks to a best time of 22.83 seconds in the 50m freestyle final of the over-18 age class.

Abdoli also teamed up with Homer Abbasi, Mehrshad Afghari, and Matin Sohran for a bronze in the 4X100m

freestyle relay final.

Mohammad-Mahdi Gholami was unfortunate to leave Capas without a gold but still enjoyed a prolific campaign with five medals in the 13-14 age category.

The Iranian boy had to settle for a couple of silvers in the 200m individual medley and 200m butterfly events, while taking the bronzes of the 50m backstroke and 100m backstroke contests.

Gholami was also part of the Iranian bronze-winning team – alongside Yashar Soleimani, Rayan Zare', and Shantia Nazari – in the 4X100m freestyle relay final.

Mohammad Qassemi and Ali Rashidpour added two silvers to Iran's medal haul in the 15-17 age group competitions.

Qassemi clocked 2:03.46 minutes in the 200m butterfly final, with Rashidpour finishing as the runner-up in the 50m butterfly event with 24.87 seconds.

Afghari and Soleimani, meanwhile, left the Philippines with the bronze medals of the 100m butterfly and 50m butterfly competitions respectively.

ASROMA.COM – Sardar Azmoun has won everyone over in AS Roma, thanks to his quality as a skillful, versatile forward on the pitch, as well as the kind, dignified personality off it.

He's slotted into the Giallorossi squad with ease and looks like someone he's been in Rome for years. And he wears a perennial smile. Even when he turns up for an interview, weary from the exertions of "a nice, long training session".

You seem to have settled into the group really well now. You're always joking around with everyone – both in real life and on social media.

Yes, I feel at home here. I get on well with everyone. In our dressing room we have World Cup winners and world-class players but everyone's down to earth. It's easy to get along with the others.

Against Torino you started your first game at the Olimpico. What was that like?

I looked at all those people at the stadium at 6:30 pm on a Monday and I wondered what job they have! But actually, I think the time is minor detail. We'd have had the same number of fans even if the match had been at 8 am.

Honestly, the fans here are incredible. They fill the stadium for every game, Inter, Torino or whoever, it makes no difference. They're always right behind us. All we can do is thank them and hope that they never stop.

They're so important to us.

What did the coach, Daniele De Rossi, ask you to do before the Torino game? He had plenty of praise for you afterwards.

When we look at the game with the match analyst, the boss gives us a few tactical pointers. It's up to us to take them on board and put them into practice during the game. It went well that time. We won the game and got the three points.

On the subject of match analysts, the Italian league is one of the most tactical around. You've played in Russia, Germany and now Serie A. What differences have you noticed between the various leagues?

Serie A and the Bundesliga are very competitive. There might be some differences in terms of physicality or speed, which is why some players might fare better in one or the other, but they're both top level.

Azmoun impressed by fans, 'sense of unity' in Roma



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You said you used to watch Roma games on TV in Iran when you were a boy. Apart from Francesco Totti and De Rossi, who were your favourite players?

Apart from Totti and De Rossi! Even my mum knows them and

she knows they were massive Roma legends. I liked Mirko Vucinic a lot too.

Any others?

My attention was always drawn to the strikers, as that's where I play.

[Edin] Dzeko and [Gabriel] Batistuta, although from different eras obviously, were two players I greatly admired.

And what's it like being coached by De Rossi, another Roma legend, as you said?

What surprises me most about De Rossi is that when you look at him from the outside, as a player, you saw a fighter, a battler who would spit blood on the pitch.

When you see him on a day-to-day basis, he's kind, polite, good-natured. It's nice to see and even better to have someone like that as a coach. He was the right choice. I also like the general feeling that's been created here.

What do you mean?

The sense of unity. The owners, Lina Souloukou and the management are always very close to the team. It helps a lot and makes it easier for us to obtain the results we're achieving now.

We saw [co-owner] Ryan Friedkin get off the bus at the Olimpico before the game against Feyenoord.

That's true but it happened other times as well, like against Torino. It's really nice. We want to keep going with the same spirit. We still have a lot of work to do, both in Serie A and in the Europa League. One step at a time, though. Starting with Monza on Saturday. We're preparing for it in training and that's all we're thinking about now.

Pogba 'heartbroken' by four-year doping ban



● GETTY IMAGES

THE GUARDIAN – The France and Juventus midfielder Paul Pogba has said he is "sad, shocked and heartbroken" after being handed a four-year ban from football for a doping offence that could signal the end of his career.

Pogba, who will be almost 35 when the ban ends, said he would appeal to the court of arbitration for sport over what he called an "incorrect" verdict and that the "full story" was not known.

The World Cup winner was provisionally suspended by Italy's national anti-doping body, Nado Italia, at a tribunal in September last year. Pogba tested positive for dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) – a banned substance that can raise testosterone – after Juventus's 3-0 league win at Udinese on 20 August, and a B sample confirmed the

positive result in October.

A Juventus spokesperson told the Guardian that "this morning we received the notice from the anti-doping agency that [Pogba] has been disqualified for four years". Pogba, who will be 31 in March, has a contract until 2026.

Pogba wrote on Instagram: "I have today been informed of the Tribunale Nazionale Antidoping's decision and believe the verdict is incorrect. I am sad, shocked and heartbroken that everything I have built in my professional playing career has been taken away from me. "When I am free of legal restrictions the full story will become clear, but I have never knowingly or deliberately taken any supplements that violate anti-doping regulations. "As a professional athlete I would never do anything to enhance my

performance by using banned substances and have never disrespected or cheated fellow athletes and supporters of any of the teams I have played for, or against. As a consequence of the decision announced today, I will appeal this before the court of arbitration for sport."

Pogba has endured a torrid second spell with Juventus since he returned to Italy on a free transfer from Manchester United in 2022, making only 12 appearances owing to knee and hamstring injuries. He had rejoined United, where he spent time in the academy and made his professional debut, from Juventus for a then world record €110m (£93.2m) in 2016.

Nado Italia said it was unable to comment on the case, citing Italian privacy laws.