

# Aliakbari beats Bhullar, keeps ONE Championship streak going



## Sports Desk

Iranian mixed martial arts fighter continued his impressive run in the heavyweight division of the ONE Championship by beating Indian Arjan "Singh" Bhullar in ONE 166: Qatar in bizarre fashion, as the former world champion was disqualified for inactivity. Aliakbari moved for Bhullar's head all night long at Lusail Sports Arena, but the latter looked to be more interested in avoiding those hits rather than fighting back. The Indian was shown yellow cards in each of the first two rounds but that barely changed his approach. With the bout approaching the end of the third round, referee Herb Dean seemed to have had enough as he showed Bhullar the red card on the 4:15 mark. The result saw Aliakbari celebrate a fourth successive victory in the MMA promotion

Iranian Amir Aliakbari (R) lands a punch on Indian Arjan "Singh" Bhullar in a heavyweight MMA bout in ONE 166 at Lusail Sports Arena, Lusail, Qatar, on March 1, 2024. **ONE CHAMPIONSHIP**

– moving to 13-3 overall. Victorious over Italian Mauro Cerilli, Filipino Brandon Vera, and Canadian Dustin Joynson over the past 18 months, the former world Greco-Roman wrestling champion now hopes his latest triumph will earn him a shot at the world heavyweight title against Anatoly "Sladkiy" Malykhin, who made history in Friday's main event.

The unbeaten Russian defeated Dutch fighter Reinier de Ridder – taking his record to 6-0 since joining the promotion in 2021 – to claim the ONE middleweight MMA world championship and become the first man in the sport to win world titles across three different weight classes. In a rematch of the pair's light heavyweight showdown in December 2022, Malykhin repeated his victory over the Dutchman thanks to a technical knockout at the 1:16 mark of round three.

Aliakbari, who was knocked out by Malykhin in his second ONE outing in September 2021, said earlier this week that the winner of his fight against Bhullar would "deserve a title shot against the ONE heavyweight world champion."

## Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships: Iranian prodigy Vajer excels with five diving medals



15-17 age group contests, Vajer scored 382.45 points to walk away with the ultimate prize of the board level 3m event on Friday – a second gold for the Iranian following a board level 1m triumph on the preceding night.

Vajer also settled for a silver in the boys' platform contest with 357.30 points earlier in the 11th edition of the competition.

He was also part of the Iranian duo – alongside Kiumars Aslani – that grabbed the 3m synchronized springboard silver medal, while finishing on the third podium at the synchro board level final.

Aydin Nosrati was the other Iranian to win a diving medal in Capas, taking the silver in the boys' board level 1m event of the 13-14 age category.

Iranians had enjoyed a glorious campaign in the swimming competitions with an impressive eight medals.

Samyar Abdoli headlined the country's swimming run with a men's 50m freestyle gold in the over-18 class, and teamed up with Homer Abbasi, Mehrshad Afghari, and Matin Sohran for the 4X100m freestyle relay.

Meanwhile, Mohammad-Mahdi Gholami enjoyed a prolific campaign with five medals in the 13-14 age category despite failing to win a gold. The Iranian boy bagged 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.

He was in the Iranian bronze-winning team – also featuring Yashar Soleimani, Rayan Zare, and Shantia Nazari – in the 4X100m freestyle relay final.

## Sports Desk

Iranian boy Sam Vajer stole the headlines at the Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships by claiming the best diver award of his age class in the Filipino city of Capas. Representing the country in the

Iran's Sam Vajer poses with his medals and the best diver award at the Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships in Capas, Philippines, on March 1, 2024. **IRSF**

## Majidi sacked by Ittihad Kalba

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Iranian head coach Farhad Majidi was shown the exit door by Ittihad Kalba FC, the Emirati top-flight club announced on Friday. The 47-year-old coach leaves the UAE Pro League side "by mutual agreement", the club's statement read, after his team managed a single victory – a 3-0 win against second-tier outfit Dibba Fujairah in the UAE President's Cup in mid-February – in eight matches, suffering five defeats.

In Majidi's final game on the bench on Thursday, Ittihad Kalba took the lead against Al Bataeh at home through Mahdi Qayedi's sublime finish in the first half before the visitors bounced back to score twice and inflict an eighth league defeat on the home side. Having steered Esteghlal to a historic title in the Iranian Persian Gulf Pro League two years ago – going a whole campaign without a defeat – Majidi took charge in Ittihad Kalba for the start of the previous season and led the club to a best-ever ADNOC Pro League finish, when his side stood eighth in the table.

However, the tide turned for Majidi and his men in the ongoing season as a run of only three wins in 15 matches, the last of which came away to Emirates Club (4-2) on December 1, has left Ittihad Kalba struggling right above the relegation zone in the 14-team standing.

Citing an interview with his agent, sports news website Varzesh3 reported later on Friday that Majidi "has no intention of returning to the Iranian league in the near future" as he will be looking to continue his managerial career in the United Arab Emirates by joining a top-flight side "in the coming days."

