

Persian Wolf Choopan crowned at Arnoald Classic 2024

Sports Desk

Iranian bodybuilding superstar Hadi Choopan claimed yet another major prize on Saturday as he was crowned the Men's Open champion at the Arnoald Classic 2024.

Held in front of a sold-out crowd at the Battelle Grand Ballroom in Columbus, Ohio, the sport's premier event saw some top competitors from around the globe vie for the ultimate prize.

However, it eventually appeared to be a two-man race heading into the final day, as both Choopan – a Mr. Olympia champion in 2022 – and Samson Dauda, who was looking to defend his title, were featured in the first and final callouts during pre-judging on Friday.

The two favorites kicked off the first callout in another head-to-head with the commentary team filling Choopan's conditioning was the difference maker and predicted the Iranian would take the title from the defending champion.

The two were called out again in a third callout with the other top contenders in Rafael Brandao and Akim Williams.

At the end of the day, the 'Persian Wolf' dethroned the 'Nigerian Lion' to win the \$300,000 prize and earn some redemption, having felt hard done by to finish as the runner-up in the 2023 Mr. Olympia last November.

Presented with the trophy by Arnold Schwarzeneg-

ger, the 36-year-old Iranian was also awarded the Franco Columbu Most Muscular award.

"I used to spend a lot of money just to watch Arnold movies when I was a kid and my biggest dream was to meet him one day and take a picture with him," Choopan said when interviewed on the stage by Schwarzenegger.

"I feel so privileged to share the stage with him today. We're two Mr. Olympia champions. It's just a great honor to receive this award from an idol and the greatest bodybuilder in the world," added the Iranian who was accompanied by his high-profile coach Hany Rambod.

Schwarzenegger, meanwhile, was full of praise for Choopan, saying: "Congratulations on the great, great victory. You were without any doubt the best. You were the best yesterday in the prejudging and you were the best today. You were the most defined, the most cut, and the most muscular, [with] great posing and everything."

Choopan will return to Las Vegas, Nevada, for the 2024 Mr. Olympia in mid-October, where he will be considered the top contender to reigning champion Derek Lunsford.



● CHRIS BERNACCHI/GETTY IMAGES

Iran's Aminzadeh bags gold at Para Powerlifting World Cup

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Iranian para powerlifter Ahmad Aminzadeh clinched a second gold medal for the country at the Fazza 2024 World Cup in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates.

Participating in the men's +107kg contest, Aminzadeh registered successful 250kg and 260kg lifts in his first two attempts before a final lift of 267kg saw the Iranian claim a second major gold in five months following his triumph in last year's Asian Para Games.

With the event serving as part of the

qualification for Paris Paralympics, Saturday's victory leaves Aminzadeh in pole position to punch his ticket for the French capital in September, where he will be looking to emulate his late fellow-Iranian Siamand Rahman – a superheavyweight world record holder and two-time Paralympic champion, who passed away in March 2020.

Aminzadeh's teammate Mahdi Sayyadi was also part of the event on Saturday but narrowly missed out on the podium, despite a strong performance with 231kg, and settled for the fourth place.

Sayyadi had finished second to Aminzadeh at the Para Gamers in Hangzhou.

Earlier in the competition, Mohsen Bakhtiar delivered a record-breaking performance to win the gold in the 59kg event.

The Iranian lifted 186kg and then went on to overcome the 196kg weight and shatter the Asian record. More than 180 athletes from 32 countries have been taking part at the 13th edition of the competition. Hossein Tavakkoli, a gold medalist at Sydney 2000, is the head coach of the Iranian eight-man squad in Dubai.



● mokhtab24.ir

James becomes first NBA player to score 40,000 points

BBC – LeBron James became the first NBA player to reach 40,000 career regular-season points in Saturday's game against the Denver Nuggets.

But he described it as "bittersweet" after his Los Angeles Lakers side lost 124-114 to the defending NBA champions. "Being the first player to do something, it's pretty cool in this league," said the 39-year-old, who scored 26 points on the night.

"You just know the history, you know the greats that have come through."

James scored the historic basket with 10 minutes and 39 seconds remaining in the second quarter with a driving lay-up from the left side of the basket to give the Lakers a 37-32 lead.

The crowd gave James a standing ovation during a timeout and the ball he used to reach the milestone was removed from the game.

However, the Nuggets stretched their winning streak to six games thanks to 35 points from Nikola Jokic to leave James with mixed

feelings.

"The main thing is always the main thing and that's the win," he said. "And I hated that had to happen in a defeat especially versus a team that plays extremely well.

"We played some good basketball but weren't able to close it out, so [it's] bittersweet, but I enjoyed every moment on the floor."

James became the NBA's all-time leading scorer in February 2023, passing Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's long-standing record of 38,387 points.

The four-time NBA champion and four-time Most Valuable Player is in his 21st campaign and is the league's oldest active player.

James said he did not know if another NBA player could reach the 40,000-point milestone.

"You have to play the game quite a while and have some good luck with injuries and things of that nature," he said.

"You have to take care of your body. You have to be present on the floor and then you have to be productive as well."

F1 season opens with Verstappen in 'a different galaxy'

REUTERS – Max Verstappen could not have hoped for a better start to his bid for a fourth-consecutive Formula One title, with even rivals hailing his crushingly dominant display in Saturday's season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix as being in "a different galaxy".

The Dutch driver took the chequered flag 22.4 seconds clear of his team mate Sergio Perez driving a similar RB20.

He did it having started from pole, led every lap and with the fastest lap to complete a 'grand slam'.

"Unbelievable, I think today went even better than expected," said Verstappen.

"It's special to have these kind of days, where it all feels perfect and you feel at one with the car."

A close-run qualifying on Friday and a constant changing of the guard in practice, with three different teams occupying top spot in the three sessions and none of them Red Bull, had raised the prospect of a closer-run race on Saturday.

The seemingly untroubled ease of Verstappen's win in the first race of a record 24-round season swiftly dashed those hopes, instead giving way to a sense of



● Red Bull's Max Verstappen holds aloft the Bahrain Grand Prix trophy in Sakhir, Bahrain, on March 2, 2024.
● RULA ROUHANA/REUTERS

resignation and foreboding. The 26-year-old, barely breaking a sweat as he got out of the car, had similarly won last year's Bahrain season-opener from pole, which set the stage for Verstappen to sign off 2023 with 19 wins from 22 races.

With his Red Bull harder to catch, at least on the evidence of the 2024 season opener, there

is every possibility he could go better.

Rivals are not ruling out the prospect.

"Unfortunately, yes," Mercedes boss Toto Wolff said when asked if Verstappen could be uncatchable. "I think today Max is not in a different league but he's in a different galaxy — the performance is extraordinary."



● MARK J. TERRILL/AP