

Iranian wrestler Zare' tops UWW superheavyweight ranking

Sports Desk

Freestyle wrestler Amirhossein Zare' is the only Iranian to stand atop his respective weight class in the latest United World Wrestling Rankings.

The reigning world champion Zare' pipped Georgian great Geno Petriashvili – beaten by the Iranian in last September's world final – to the top spot of the 125kg class, with American Mason Parris and Taha Akgül of Turkey following the top two respectively.

A glorious five months saw Zare' add the Asian Games gold to his world crown in October before he came out on top against fellow-Iranian Amir-Reza Ma'soumi in the final in the season-opening Zagreb Open Ranking Series event in January to secure his place in the country's squad heading to the Paris Olympics in August. Zare' is widely regarded as

the favorite to walk away with the ultimate prize of the 125kg contests in the French capital, which would be a second Olympic medal – after his bronze-winning campaign in Tokyo – for the decorated 23-year-old Iranian, who has been the dominant force of the freestyle superheavyweight wrestling over the past three years with double world golds and a bronze. Meanwhile, Mohammad Nokhodi – a bronze winner in the UWW Worlds – stood second in the 79kg ranking – next to Russian Akhmed Usmanov, who defeated Nokhodi in the world quarterfinals before going all the way to beat Georgian Vladimeri Gamkrelidze in the final. Gamkrelidze is third in the ranking with Azerbaijan's Orkhan Abbasov in fourth. Rahman Amouzad has endured an under-par run over the past year – failing

to defend his world title before being pinned in the Asian Games final – but still managed to stand fourth in the 65kg ranking – behind Armenian Vazgen Tevanyan, world silver winner Sebastian Rivera of Puerto Rico, and Hungarian world champion Iszmail Muszuka-jev. Amir-Mohammad Yazdani is fourth in the 70kg ranking, with Armenia's Arman Andreasyan, American Zain Retherford – victorious over Yazdani in the world final – and Bulgaria's Ramazan Ramazanov completing the top three. Hassan Yazdani, who is yet to recover from a surgery on his injured shoulder in October, is fourth in the 86kg standing. Yazdani's familiar American foe David Taylor sits above the ranking, followed by San Marino's Myles Amine and Azamat Dautbekov of Kazakhstan.



● UWW

Iran wins futsal gold in Winter Deaflympics



● IRNA

Sports Desk

The Iranian futsal team was crowned the men's champion at the Erzurum 2024 Winter Deaflympics in Turkey.

Alireza Mokhtar-Abadi bagged a hat-trick as Reza Davarzani's men defeated Japan 3-1 in the Tuesday's final showpiece. Iran overcame Italy and the

Netherlands before playing to a stalemate against the host to finish atop the group and progress to the quarterfinals. A last-eight victory over Algeria sent Iran into the

semifinal clash against Brazil, where goals from Mokhtar-Abadi, Ali-Asghar Mahboubi, and Ali-Akbar Ahmadvand secured a 3-0 win for Davarzani's side.

Al Hilal set world record for consecutive victories with 28th win

REUTERS – Saudi Pro League side Al Hilal have set a world record for consecutive victories by a top-flight team after beating Al-Ittihad 2-0 in the AFC Champions league quarter-finals on Tuesday for a 28th straight win. Jorge Jesus' side beat the previous record of 27 consecutive victories by Welsh Premier League champions The New Saints (TNS) from the 2016-17 season. TNS had beaten Ajax Amsterdam's 26-game winning streak, a record that had stood for 44 years.



● AFC

"This is truly an incredible achievement and I want to thank everyone at the club for their part in this momen-

tous winning record," said manager Jesus. "As I have said throughout this period, however, records

do not matter as much as trophies. It is up to everyone at Al Hilal to ensure that we close out the season as Roshn Saudi League champions and meet our targets in the cup competitions. Only then can we truly celebrate." Jesus' side lead the Saudi league with 65 points, 12 ahead of Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr, who were eliminated from the Asian Champions League on Monday after a penalty shootout loss to Al Ain. Al-Hilal, the 2022 runners-up, will face Al Ain in the semi-finals. Jesus's side can extend their winning run when they host Damac in the league on Saturday.

Arsenal's defeat of Porto can fuel English title bid

REUTERS – Arsenal's penalty shootout victory against Porto on Tuesday not only snapped their Champions League last-16 jinx but could also fuel their belief as they try to hold off Liverpool and Manchester City in the English league title race. David Raya's two penalty saves ensured Arsenal reached the quarter-finals for the first time in 14 years after a tense tie against the two-time European champions ended 1-1 on aggregate. It maintained the momentum that Mikel Arteta's squad have built up with eight successive Premier League victories and keeps them chasing silverware on two fronts. As the emotion poured out inside the Emirates it felt like a psychological turning point for Arsenal as they ended a run of seven successive last-16 exits in the Champions League. With no FA Cup involvement this weekend and then the international break, Arsenal will not play again until March 31 when they go to Manchester City in a crunch title clash. But after overcoming a crafty Porto

side they will now head to City with renewed belief. "The energy that it brings amongst the squad, amongst the club it's really powerful," Arteta said. Forward Bukayo Saka said the result sets Arsenal up perfectly for the rest of the season. "Right now, we're top of the league and we're into the quarter-finals of the Champions League, and we're going into the international break," the England international said. "This result gives us a lot of momentum, a lot of belief that we can go to the Etihad and get a good result." Former Arsenal defender Martin Keown said Arsenal's progress to the quarter-finals of the Champions League will be a huge confidence boost in the run-in. "It would have been a downer if they had lost this tonight and gone into the City game, of course they are out of the FA Cup, but now this keeps it ticking along beautifully," he said. "The players grow from it, there's a lot of confidence now."



Arsenal players celebrate after the shootout victory over Porto in the UEFA Champions League last 16 in the Emirates Stadium, London, Britain, on March 12, 2024. ● HANNAH MCKAY/REUTERS