

Asian OG Qualifier: Kavianinejad, Mohmadi through as Iran secures full GR squad for Paris

Sports Desk



Iran's Amin Kavianinejad celebrates after the victory over China's Rui Liu in the 77kg last-four bout in the Asian OG Qualifier in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on April 21, 2024.

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Iran became the first country to complete a full set of six Greco-Roman wrestling quotas for the Paris Olympics.

Amin Kavianinejad and Alireza Mohmadi secured the remaining two slots for the country thanks to last-four victories in their respective weight classes in the Asian qualification event in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

In a repeat of a semifinal clash in last October's Asian Games, Kavianinejad – a silver winner in Hangzhou – came from behind to defeat China's Rui Liu 6-5 in a thrilling 77kg contest.

Liu got off to a flying start in the bid to avenge a criteria loss on home soil last year, as he completed a roll from par terre and was then awarded two points following the Iranian's leg blocking, but Kavianinejad cut the gap with a counter takedown before the break.

"Everything was under control, but unfortunately I got a two-point warning," Kavianinejad said, adding: "I believe there was no fault on my part but it made the it more difficult for me."

Kavianinejad received a passivity point after the break, though Liu popped out from par terre, leaving the Iranian trailing 5-3.

The three-time Asian medalist still kept his nerve and launched several stepouts to march to victory.

"I won the match in the Asian Games on criteria but today I was able to score more technical points despite being under a bit of pressure," added Kavianinejad, who is yet to be guaranteed a trip to Paris as Mohammad-Ali Geraei is back in fray for the 77kg slot after the three-time world bronze medalist had a one-year ban over an incident in last September's World Championships lifted by the international governing body of the sport.

Later on Sunday, world 82kg silver winner Mohmadi had to dig deep to beat Asian Games champion Jalgasbay Berdimuratov of Uzbekistan 3-2 in a cagy 87kg contest.

Berdimuratov could only manage a one-point stepout from a throw attempt out of par terre in the first period, while

Mohmadi bagged two from a throw in the same position after the interval.

"I'm so grateful to win the Olympic quota one year after the World Championships, especially when I had to go from 82kg to 87kg," Mohmadi said. "I'm confident that I could keep this weight and I hope I can defeat my opponents in the Olympics."

The Iranian added: "I'll be looking to fix my flaws and add some new techniques so I can deliver some perfect performances and excel in the Olympics."

Iran had already won four Paris quotas courtesy of top-five finishes across different weight classes at the World Championships.

Superheavyweight sensation Ali Mirzazadeh will be the Iranian gold hopeful after defeating Turkish great in the 130kg final in Belgrade, while reigning Olympic champion Mohammadreza Geraei (67kg) and Mohammad-Hadi Saravi (97kg) bagged a couple of bronzes and will be chasing a second medal in the Games in the French capital.

Mahdi Mohsennejad also booked his berth with a fifth-place finish in the 60kg contests. Sunday's triumphs came two days after Younes Emami (74kg) and rising star Amir-Ali Azarpira (97kg) took Iran's freestyle quotas to five in Bishkek.

Ahmad Mohammadnejad failed to reach the 57kg last four but Iran will still have a last chance for a complete six-man squad when the 2021 world silver winner Alireza Sarlak gets his campaign underway at the World OG Qualifier in Istanbul next month.



Iran's Alireza Mohmadi celebrates after winning the Olympic 87kg quota in the Asian OG Qualifier in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on April 21, 2024.

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'It's a disgrace': Xavi rebukes La Liga for not having goal-line tech

AFP – Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez blasted La Liga for not employing goal-line technology after his team's 3-2 Clasico defeat on Sunday left Real Madrid on the brink of the title. The coach was furious after Lamine Yamal had a shot which Barcelona said crossed the line not given as a goal after officials could not prove that it had using VAR. With the score level at 1-1 Yamal cleverly flicked a corner towards goal and Real Madrid goalkeeper Andriy Lunin

pushed the ball to safety, potentially after it had crossed the line. "It's a disgrace," said Xavi, complaining that the technology used in other top flights including the Premier League is not available in La Liga. "If we want to be the best league in the world we have to advance in this sense, you have to put in the technology." Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen agreed with his coach. "It's shameful for football, I don't have the words," said the Germa-

ny international.

"There's so much money in this world and there's no money for what's most important."

Jude Bellingham's late winner left champions Barcelona 11 points behind Real Madrid with six matches remaining.

"(Madrid) have had an extraordinary league, they have lost just one game, they've almost wrapped it up," admitted Xavi.

"I feel that with the game we played the normal thing would be that we would win.

"We competed very well,

I think we deserved the three points."

Xavi's counterpart Carlo Ancelotti said he was delighted with his Madrid side after they beat Manchester City on Wednesday on penalties to reach the Champions League semi-finals and then produced a late Clasico winner.

"I'm very proud, because they were two very demanding games," said the coach.

"Now we have to prepare for the final part of the season, but we are very well positioned."



Real Madrid keeper Andriy Lunin makes a save during a 3-2 victory over Barcelona in La Liga at the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium, Madrid, Spain, on April 21, 2024.

● THOMAS COEX/AFP



'It smells really bad': Vafaei criticises Crucible after crashing out to Trump

PA – Hossein Vafaei strongly criticised the conditions at the Crucible after crashing out of the World Snooker Championship in a 10-5 defeat by former champion Judd Trump.

The Iranian described the Sheffield venue as "smelly", compared its practice facilities to "like playing in a garage", and questioned the treatment of players in the course of the marathon 17-day event.

"Everything's so bad – if you ask me if I want to come back here, I would tell you no way," said Vafaei, who is no stranger to Crucible controversy after playing a rash break-off shot in his defeat by Ronnie O'Sullivan last year. "Forget the history, you want to go somewhere really nice as a player. You walk round the Crucible and it smells really bad. You go to other countries, and everything is shiny. But here it's completely different.

"The practice room – do you see anything special? I feel like I'm practising in a garage."

Speculation over the future of the Crucible, which has staged the tourna-



● RICHARD SELLERS/PA

ment since 1977, has been heightened since world No1 O'Sullivan suggested it should be moved to Saudi Arabia or China when the existing deal expires in 2027.

Vafaei, who made his debut in 2022, is clearly no fan and continued: "Look at the China venues, how fantastic they treat the players, a red carpet and an opening ceremony. The players are treated like stars. But here no one looks after the players, before and after the match

no one cares who you are. "If they don't want to lose the Crucible invest some money, make it shinier, make it nicer, make it more luxury for the people. If they make it cleaner and nicer, people will enjoy it." World Snooker Tour responded in a statement: "The Crucible is a historic venue and there are limitations given the size of the backstage areas. We work with the Crucible to make it as welcoming as possible for players."