

Asian Taekwondo Championships: Salimi captures decisive gold as Iran beats South Korea to men's crown

Sports Desk

A remarkable seven medals, including triple golds, saw Iran win the men's title at the Asian Taekwondo Championships in Da Nang, Vietnam. South Korea finished on the second podium thanks to double golds and silvers apiece, as well as a bronze with Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia in the following spots. There were further achievements for the Iranians as Majid Aflaki was named the best coach of the tournament, with young prodigy Mahdi Hajimousaei claiming the best male athlete prize after winning the -58kg gold. Aflaki's men and South Korea went toe-to-toe in the team title race before Arian Salimi's straight-round victory over Park Woo-hyeok in a thrilling +87kg final secured a fifth continental crown for Iran, ending the country's eight-year drought in the competitions. This was a third international medal for the Iranian over the past 12 months – following last year's world bronze in Baku and the silver at the Asian Games – and a morale-boosting triumph ahead of the Paris Olympics in July. Earlier on Saturday, Ali Khoshravesh, who was only named in the squad after Iranian captain Mirhashem Hosseini was injured days before the tournament, had an impressive run towards the men's -80kg final but had to settle for a runner-up finish

after a defeat against Jasurbek Jaysunov of Uzbekistan. Yalda Valinejad was the Iranian girl in action on Saturday but was unfortunate to see her campaign come to a finish after a first-round loss to South Korea's Kwak Min-ju. Hajimousaei and Mohammad-Hossein Yazdani had grabbed a couple of gold medals for Iran on Day 2 of the kyorugi competitions. Hajimousaei, 19, came out on top against fellow-Iranian Abolfazl Zandi in the semifinals before defeating South Korean Park Tae-joon 2-1 for the ultimate prize – a second continental medal for the Iranian following his silver-winning campaign in the Asian Games. Zandi shared the third podium of the weight class with two-time world champion Bae Jun-seo of South Korea. A second all-Iranian encounter on Friday saw Yazdani beat Mehran Barkhordari – a 2022 world bronze medalist – in the men's -87kg final. Both athletes enjoyed an emphatic campaign en route to the final showdown, with Yazdani overcoming former world champion Kang Sang-hyun of South Korea in the quarterfinals, while Barkhordari, who will be part of the -80kg class at the Paris Olympics, defeated his high-profile Uzbekistani opponent Nikita Rafalovich – the defending champion and a winner of three world medals – 2-1 in a last-eight clash.

Melika Mirhosseini was the only Iranian female medalist on Friday, taking the silver in the -73kg class. Mirhosseini beat opponents from the host country and Uzbekistan but fell short against South Korea's Myeong Mi-na in the final. Elsewhere in the women's draw, Mobina Ne'matzadeh was the second Iranian Olympian girl to finish the tournament empty-handed after reigning world champion Nahid Kiani had lost her first bout in the -53kg contests on the preceding night. Ne'matzadeh, Iran's -49kg representative in Paris, opened her campaign with a win against Tachiana Mangin of the Philippines but fell to a second-round setback against Vietnam's Thi Kim Tuyen Truong. Elham Haqiqi also suffered a second-round blow in Da Nang as she was beaten by back-to-back world bronze medalist Feruza Sadikova of Uzbekistan in the women's -62kg contests, while Amir-Sina Bakhtiari was knocked out of the men's -74kg event after a loss to Najmiddin Kosimkhoev – also from Uzbekistan. Saeideh Nasri (women's -46kg) and Matin Rezaei (men's -63kg) had won double bronze medals for the country on the first day of the kyorugi competitions. The 26th edition of the Asian Championships finishes with the para taekwondo event today.

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Majid Aflaki's men won seven medals, including triple golds, to end the country's eight-year title drought in the Asian event.



Iranian Arian Salimi (blue) won the +87kg gold to secure the men's team title for the country at the Asian Championships.
● taekwondo.ir

Ex-Iran international Dejagah announces retirement at 38



● INTAIKU PHOTOGRAPHY

Sports Desk

Former Iranian international midfielder Ashkan Dejagah announced his retirement from professional football on Friday, calling time on his career at the age of 38. An ex-player of German clubs Hertha BSC and VfL Wolfsburg as well as Premier League outfit Fulham and Al Arabi in Qatar had been without a team since making his last appearance for Foolad Khuzestan against Iralco on the final day of previous Persian Gulf Pro League season back in May. "After years of unforgettable moments on the pitch, it is time to say goodbye to football as a player," Dejagah wrote in an Instagram post. "Since the very first days that I played football on the streets, till representing my country on the biggest stages, football, more than being a game, was a love, a journey, and a path in life for me. "I'm so grateful to have had the op-

portunity to wear the shirt of some admirable clubs and my dear national team. Every game, every goal, and every victory will have a special place in my heart forever. "I want to thank all my teammates, coaches, and fans, who gave me their support through this unbelievable journey, from the deep bottom of my heart. Merci football." Dejagah, who moved to Germany with his family as an infant, came through the ranks at Hertha before joining Wolfsburg in 2007, where he bagged 20 goals in 160 games, lifting the Bundesliga trophy two years later. "A master player, a hooligan, and a Wolfsburg legend...Thank you for everything Asche!" the German club wrote on X later on Friday. Dejagah reunited with his Wolfsburg manager Felix Magath in Fulham in 2012 and netted six goals in 49 matches for the Cottagers. His first appearance in the Iranian top flight came for the start of the

2018/19 season, when he signed for Tractor – along with international teammates Masoud Shojaei and Ehsan Hajsafi – and went on to win the Hazfi Cup title the following season. A European under-21 champion with Germany in 2019, Dejagah made his senior international debut for Iran under Portuguese Carlos Queiroz in a World Cup qualifier against Qatar in 2012, scoring twice in a 2-2 draw in Tehran's Azadi Stadium. He scored 11 goals in 59 international caps and played an essential role for the country in the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and was again part of the squad in the 2018 showpiece, though he sat on the bench during all of the three games in Russia. Dejagah also represented the national team at the 2015 and 2019 Asian Cups and was named in the team of the tournament in the second occasion in Qatar, where Iran fell to a last-four defeat against Japan.

Foden named Premier League Player of the Season

BBC – Manchester City's Phil Foden has been named the Premier League's Player of the Season. Earlier this month the England midfielder, 23, was voted the Football Writers' Association Footballer of the Year. Foden has claimed a career-best 17 goals

and eight assists in the Premier League this season, before City's final game today. "To win this award is an achievement that I am extremely proud of," said Foden. "The Premier League is acknowledged as the greatest league in the world, and it is a pleasure to have been nominated with

so many other great players who have all enjoyed special seasons for their clubs." Only Erling Haaland (27) has scored more league goals than Foden for City, who will secure a record fourth straight English title if they win at home to West Ham on Sunday.

"Overall, I've been very happy with the way I have played this season and really pleased that I have been able to contribute with the goals and assists throughout the season," Foden added. "I'd like to thank all of the City staff, coaches and especially my team-mates

because without them this wouldn't be possible. And I would also like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who voted for me as the award means a lot." Chelsea midfielder Cole Palmer was named the English top flight's Young Player of the Season.