

Fasihi, Taftian punch Paris tickets as Iran seals 40 Olympic berths

Sports Desk

Iranian sprinters Farzaneh Fasihi and Hassan Taftian secured their places at the upcoming Paris Olympics, taking the country's slots at the sporting extravaganza to 40.

The final World Athletics Rankings before the Games – starting July 26 – were released on Tuesday, with Fasihi and Taftian obtaining wild cards for the women's and men's 100m contests respectively through the IOC's Universality Places program, which allows any country with no male or female qualified athlete or relay team enter its best-ranked athlete in either the 100m, 800m or marathon events.

This will be a second Olympic participation for Asian silver medalist Fasihi, who was part of the Iranian mission in the Tokyo Olympics three years ago, while Taftian will head to a third successive Games.

The two sprinters will be joined by 28 male and 10 female Iranians in 13 other sports in Paris.

While the two freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling squads are expected to lead the country's quest for glory, there could be a couple of Iranian dark horses emerging in other sports.

Aiming to become the most-decorated Iranian in the Olympic history, Hassan Yazdani (86kg) as well as reigning world champion Amirhossein Zare'

(125kg) will headline the five-man freestyle wrestling team – also including Rahman Amouzad (65kg), Younes Emami (74kg), and Amir-Ali Aazarpira (97kg).

Having beaten Turkish great Rıza Kayaalp to the world 130kg gold last year, Amin Mirzazadeh will be the Iranian to watch in the Greco-Roman contests, with Mohammad-Hadi Saravi (97kg) keen to improve on his Olympic bronze in Tokyo.

Mahdi Mohsennejad (60kg), Saeed Esmaeili (67kg), Amin Kavianinejad (77kg), and Alireza Mohmadi (87kg) are the other members of the GR squad. In taekwondo, Iran will fancy a first medal since Kimia Alizadeh's bronze in Rio 2016 when Nahid Kiani (women's -57kg), Mobina Ne'matzadeh (women's -48kg), Mehran Barkhordari (men's -80kg), and Arian Salimi (men's +80kg) on August 7.

Iranian girls Haniyeh Rostamian, Shermineh Chehel-Amirani, and Fatemeh Aminipajouh, as well as male prodigy Mohammad Beiranvand will be part of the shooting competitions, while Mobina Fallah will be the sole Iranian archer in Paris.

Mahsa Javer, Zeinab Norouzi, and Fatemeh Mojallal will take part in the women's rowing, with Mohammad-Nabi Rezaei and Ali Aqamirzaei participating in the men's canoe contests, though it is hard to believe any of the five Iranians will leave Paris with a medal.

The four-man saber team – comprising Ali Pakdaman, Mohammad Rahbari, Mohammad Fotouhi, and Farzad Baher – will be hoping to grab a historic fencing medal for Iran, while Pakdaman will still chase a last-gasp individual quota through the FIE World Rankings. Weightlifter Mirmostafa Javadi will step into the men's 89kg event as the reigning world champion and Ali Davoudi will be eager to add to his superheavy-weight silver in Tokyo, though Georgian sensation Lasha Talakhadze remains the ultimate favorite to win the +109kg gold.

Alamian brothers, Nima and No-shad, will be looking to build on their medal-winning runs in last year's Asian Games when contesting in the men's table tennis, with Neda Shahsavari vying for a decent campaign in the women's draw.

While Mahdi Ol-fati (artistic gymnastics – men's vault), Ali Labib (cycling – men's road race), and Samyar Abdoli (swimming – men's 50m) will be looking to improve their personal records in Paris, former world champion Reza Alipour will be full of hopes for a first-ever medal in the men's speed climbing.



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Iran settles for mixed silver in Taekwondo World Cup

Iran finished as the runner-up in the mixed contests of the WT World Cup Team Championships Series in Chuncheon, South Korea, following a final defeat against China.

The Iranian team came out victorious in straight rounds against the host for a place in the final showpiece but surrendered a first-round win (140-90) and lost 175-135 and 195-45 in the next

two rounds against the Chinese opponents.

The runner-up finish came after Iranian girls – Melika Mirhosseini, Yalda Valinejad, Mahla Mo'menzadeh, and Saghar Moradi – had beaten Morocco 2-1 (180-175, 120-145, 145-79) to walk away with a maiden women's trophy for the country in the competition. The Iranian four-man team – comprising Mahdi Abedini,

Mohammad-Hossein Yazdani, Ali Khoshhravesh, and Abolfazl Zandi – had also marched to the men's title, thanks to a straight-round victory over South Korea in the final.

Iranian Olympians Nahid Kiani, Mobina Ne'matzadeh, Mehran Barkhordari, and Arian Salimi skipped this year's event to stay in Tehran and continue preparation for the upcoming Games in Paris.

Turkey ride 'best save' and wave of emotion into Euros quarters

AFP – Turkey are turning their second home into a fortress at Euro 2024 as a blistering start and a stunning save from Mert Gunok at the death engineered a 2-1 win over Austria to reach the quarter-finals.

Austria boss Ralf Rangnick complained some games at the tournament had sent him to sleep. There was no chance of nodding off amid the cacophony of noise in Leipzig as Germany's Turkish diaspora descended once more to dominate three-quarters of the stadium.

Merih Demiral lit the fuse for an explosive atmosphere by smashing home the fastest ever goal in the knockout stages of a European Championship after just 58 seconds. The Al-Ahli centre-back, who had scored just two international goals in 47 caps before Tuesday, then remarkably bulleted in a header for his second of the night on the hour mark.

Michael Gregoritsch quickly pulled a goal back to set up a grandstand finish that produced arguably the most remarkable

save in the competition's history.

Christoph Baumgartner seemed certain to be Austria's hero in the 94th minute with a downward header that skipped off the slick surface and bounced up towards the far corner, only for Gunok's flying stop to turn it round the post.

The Besiktas goalkeeper wheeled around, to face the Turkish fans, roaring in celebration at his career-defining moment.

"I couldn't believe it," said Demiral. "Maybe one of the best saves I saw with my own eyes."

The save has drawn comparisons with England goalkeeper Gordon Banks' iconic stop from Pele in the 1970 World Cup.

"It is difficult when they have Gordon Banks in goal," beamed Rangnick when asked if Gunok's was the best he had ever seen.

Austria had emerged as dark horses for the tournament after winning a group that contained France and the Netherlands to end up on the perceived easier side of the draw.

Instead, it is Turkey who will now roll into Berlin on the weekend backed by a huge following with eyes on defeating the Dutch to match their best ever run at a Euros.

Five of Vincenzo Montella's squad were born in Germany, which is home to nearly three million people with Turkish roots.

"We are playing this tournament like we are playing at home," added Demiral.

"We are going to Berlin and we know there will be even more Turkish fans in the stadium so we are very excited."

Turkey's limitations were exposed in a 3-0 defeat to Portugal in the group stage despite the backing of a deafening support in Dortmund.

However, they are one of just three teams, along with Spain and Germany, to have won at least three of their four games at the tournament.

Captain Hakan Calhanoglu will return for the last eight after missing the Austria game due to suspension and they have one of the young stars of the tourna-



ment in Arda Guler. "I saw Turkish heart today and that's what I love about this country," said former Italian international Montella. "This passion and love is very visceral. I'm very happy to give

the Turkish people here in Germany, back home and all over the world this pride. "This support we constantly feel it but you can only embrace these dreams if you work really hard."

Turkey's goalkeeper Mert Gunok makes a save in the dying seconds of a last-16 victory over Austria in Euro 2024 in Leipzig, Germany, on July 2, 2024.

EBRAHIM NOROOZI/AP