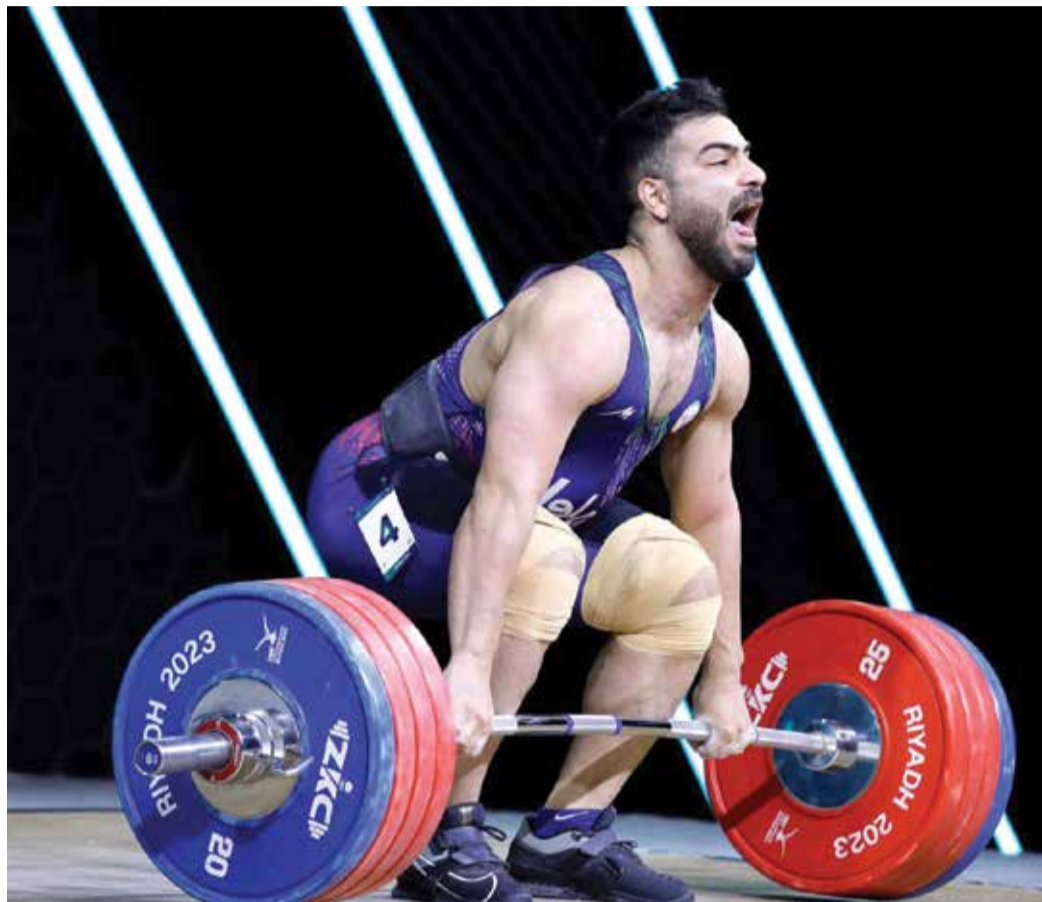


Will Paris Olympics yield another weightlifting glory for Iran?



Iranian weightlifter Mirmostafa Javadi, seen in action in last year's World Championships, will take part in the men's 89kg contest in the Paris Olympics.
● IWF

Sports Desk

Iranian duo Mirmostafa Javadi and Ali Davoudi will chase a 10th Olympic weightlifting gold for the country when the Paris Games get underway in less than three weeks' time. More than seven decades after weightlifter Ja'far Salmasi wrote his name into history books by grabbing a first Olympic medal for Iran – a men's 60kg bronze in London 1948

– the sport remains the second-most prolific one for the country over the past 29 editions of the event. Weightlifting has been one of the two sporting events – along with wrestling – to exceed double figures in the all-time Olympic medals table for Iran, yielding nine golds, six silvers, and five bronzes. Distinguished Mohammad Nasiri won a first weightlifting gold for Iran in Mexico 1968 but the country had

to wait until the turn of the century for another Olympic glory, when Hossein Tavakkoli and superheavyweight sensation Hossein Reza zadeh walked away with the ultimate prizes in Sydney 2000.

Reza zadeh repeated his success four years later in Athens, with Behdad Salimi, Kianoush Rostami, Sohrab Moradi, Saeed Mohammadpour, and Navab Nasirshah – the current head coach of the national team – also among the gold medalists, though the latter two's triumphs in London 2012 were only confirmed years later due to initial winners' testing positive for banned substances.

And now, Javadi and Davoudi will be keen on entering the elite list when walking onto the stage in Paris Expo Porte de Versailles on August 9 and 10.

Javadi will head to the French capital as the reigning world 89kg champion, having bagged the clean & jerk and total golds last September in Riyadh to add to his double silvers and a bronze in the 81kg event in 2021. The 24-year-old Iranian will face stiff competition from Colombian Yeison López – the world snatch record (182kg) holder of the class – and Bulgaria's Karlos Nasar, who were both absent in the World Championships but shared the top spots between them in April's IWF World Cup in Phuket.

Nasar enter the 89kg contest as the world C&J record holder with 223kg, while Venezuelan Keydomar Vallenilla – a winner of two bronzes in Riyadh – Italian Antonino Pizzolato and Marin Robu of Moldova will also fancy their chances for an Olympic medal.

Georgian's territory

Meanwhile, the +102kg class is likely to remain Lasha Talakhadze's terri-

tory in Paris as the Georgian great – the undisputed world superheavyweight champion for the past nine years – will be chasing a third successive Olympic gold in the French capital.

Meanwhile, Iranian Davoudi, the reigning Olympic silver medalist, will have to be up against an even harder test to repeat his Tokyo medal as Bahraini Gor Minasyan, who beat Davoudi to the Asian Games gold last year, and Varazdat Lalayan of Armenia – triple World Cup gold winner – will be eager to stand alongside the Georgian on the Paris podium.

The clean & jerk contest could be Davoudi's trump card in Paris though the 252kg record in his latest outing in Phuket would hardly guarantee an Olympic medal for the Iranian.

Lalayan registered 253kg for the C&J gold in Thailand, while his 210kg tally was eight kilograms better than the Iranian's in the snatch event.

Weightlifting has been one of the two sporting events to exceed double figures in the all-time Olympic medals table for Iran, with nine golds, six silvers, and five bronzes.

Iran's Ali Davoudi, pictured in the Tokyo Games, will chase a second successive Olympic medal in the superheavyweight event in Paris.
● AP



Portugal's Euro exit likely to herald Ronaldo's international retirement



REUTERS – Defeat for Portugal at the European Championship on Friday likely brought down the curtain on the extraordinary international career of Cristiano Ronaldo.

While Portugal's totemic forward has made no pronouncements on his future with the national team, the 39-year-old struggled to revive former glories at the tournament in Germany and departed Euro 2024 without scoring apart from in shootouts.

Portugal lost 5-3 to France on penalties in their quarter-final after a goalless stalemate in which Ronaldo missed a glaring chance in extra time but converted one of the kicks in the shootout.

"It's too soon and raw after the match to talk about that and there have been no individual decisions made," coach Roberto Martinez said when asked if it had been Ronaldo's last game



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo looks dejected during a last-16 defeat against France in Euro 2024 in Hamburg, Germany, on July 5, 2024.
● ANNEGRET HILSE/REUTERS

in a Portugal jersey. There will forever be debates

about where he sits among the greatest footballers – in or be-

hind the exulted company of three-times World Cup winner Pele or the extraordinary talent of Diego Maradona or long-time rival Lionel Messi.

All of them won the World Cup, which Ronaldo has not, but in terms of statistics in national team colours the 39-year-old is out there on his own.

Friday's loss to France at the Volksparkstadion was Ronaldo's 212th cap, significantly ahead of Messi who won his 185th for Argentina against Ecuador in the Copa America on Thursday. Ronaldo's 130 goals for his country is also way out on its own at the head of most scored in international football, with Messi recently moving second on the list with 108.

"Cristiano is in the national team of Portugal because he deserves to be," Martinez had said earlier in the tournament. In terms of longevity few can

match Ronaldo, who debuted for Portugal in 2003.

He was 18 years-old when he came on at halftime to replace Luis Figo in a friendly against Kazakhstan in front of roughly 8,000 in Chaves. Days earlier he had signed for Manchester United, convincing manager Alex Ferguson of his potential after tormenting the team's defence in a pre-season friendly. By the next year he was a regular for Portugal as they hosted Euro 2004, upset in the final by Greece.

He is the first to play at six European Championships and his 14 goals in 30 matches is also a Euros record. He won the trophy in 2016 when Portugal beat hosts France in the final.

Ronaldo's tears

Ironically, in Portugal's Euros triumph Ronaldo went off early in the decider in Paris in tears

with a knee injury.

If you add in his goals in Euro qualifying, Ronaldo has scored 55 times in the competition, with Harry Kane next on 29.

At the World Cup, Ronaldo has played 22 times, scoring eight goals, in five tournaments, while Messi has played four times more and has the appearance record.

In the 21 years Ronaldo has played for Portugal, they have not missed out on qualifying for the World Cup, with a semi-final place in 2006 their best return. That year, Ronaldo netted the decisive penalty to beat England in the quarter-finals.

It has been an extraordinary career, highlighted by five Ballon d'Or awards, and it is not over yet ... certainly not at club level. Ronaldo top-scored with 35 goals in the Saudi league last season and has another year's contract at Al Nassr.

Alcaraz stretched, Sinner sublime at Wimbledon

REUTERS – Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz was stretched to the limit en route to the Wimbledon fourth round but world number one Jannik Sinner, his likely semi-final opponent, was unruffled as he advanced in ominous fashion. The 21-year-old Alcaraz, bidding for his fourth Grand Slam

title, ran into inspired American Frances Tiafoe in a repeat of their thrilling semi-final the 2022 U.S. Open.

Just as in New York, the two players traded blows in a match sprinkled with spectacular exchanges but once again it was Alcaraz who boasted the greater firepower – racking up 55 winners to Tiafoe's

39 in a 5-7 6-2 4-6 7-6(2) 6-2 win.

"I'm playing with the statistics that I have just lost one match in the fifth set. That's an advantage for me. That's why in those situations I play at my high level," the Spaniard said. Alcaraz's day got even better as he finished in time to watch Spain beat Germany at Euro

2024, although he insisted he had not asked the schedulers for an early time slot.

Meanwhile, after being pushed hard by compatriot and 2021 runner-up Matteo Berrettini in the first round, a clinical Sinner ran riot against Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic, winning 6-1 6-4 6-2 in a little over one and a half hours.

