

Kiani to face Alizadeh in anticipated Olympic opener



A gold winner in last year's World Championships, Kiani will be aiming to become the second Iranian girl to win an Olympic medal in the 128-year history of the Games – a feat only accomplished by her last-16 opponent in Paris, who won a bronze when competing under the Iranian flag in Rio 2016.

However, Kiani looks to be in high spirits ahead of a second Olympic participation. "I had a bitter experience three years ago, but I'm still grateful God gave me another opportunity to take part in this sporting extravaganza," Kiani told Mehr News Agency on Saturday, adding: "I've been working so hard to be in my best form for the Games and I'm confident August 8 will be the sweetest day of my life. Now is the time to add the Olympic triumph to my medal cabinet."

The top two of the wight class in Tokyo, American gold medalist Anastasiya Zolotic and Minina, will not be present in Paris but Turkey's Hatice Kübra İlgün and Lo Chia-ling of the Chinese Taipei will be looking to improve on their bronze medals.

There will also be a number of high-profile contenders in the mix, including Team GB's two-time Olympic champion Jade Jones, Canadian Skylar Park, 2022 world champion Luo Zongshi of China, and South Korean Kim Yu-jin.

Seeking seventh

Kiani will be joined by three fellow-Iranians in chasing a seventh taekwondo medal for the country in the Olympic history.

Teenage sensation Mobina Ne'matzadeh will be in action today, taking on Lesotho's Michelle Tau – a winner of double bronzes in the African Championships – in the women's -49kg event.

A victory will see the Iranian – bronze medalist in last year's Asian Games – meet Spain's Adriana Cerezo Iglesias – runner-up in Tokyo – or María Sara Grippoli of Uruguay in the last eight.

In the men's draw, Mehran Barkhordari – world bronze winner in 2022 – will face Uzbekistan's Jasurbek Jaysunov in the -80kg contests on Friday, with the winner heading into a probable last-eight battle against Italian two-time world champion Simone Alessio, who will meet Ismael Coulibaly of Mali or Kazakhstan's Batyrkhan Toleugali in his opening bout. Iran's taekwondo campaign in Paris will come to end with the men's +80kg event on Saturday, when Arian Salimi steps onto the mat at Grand Palais against three-time world medal winner Nikita Rafalovich of Uzbekistan, with the winner meeting prominent Mexican Carlos Sansores or Paivou Johnouario Gomis of Guinea-Bissau for a last-four spot.

Sports Desk

Iran's Nahid Kiani will begin her quest for taekwondo glory at the Paris Olympics with a much-anticipated clash against Bulgarian representative Kimia Alizadeh in the women's -57kg contests on Thursday. A gold winner in last year's World Championships, Kiani will be aiming to become the second Iranian girl to win an Olympic medal in the 128-year history of the Games – a feat only accomplished by her last-16 opponent in Paris, who won a bronze

when competing under the Iranian flag in Rio 2016.

The two also squared off in the first round at the Tokyo Olympics three years ago, with Alizadeh – participating as a member of the Refugee Olympic Team – claiming an 18-9 victory before she was knocked out by Russian Tatiana Minina in the semifinals.

The winner of Thursday's bout will go head-to-head with either Faith Dillon of the United States or Tunisian Chaima Toumi in the quarterfinals.

In an interview with Varzesh3 in January, Kiani opened up about her mental struggles after the setback against Alizadeh in the previous meeting. "The bout was a one-off in the Olympic history and overcoming the unpleasant circumstances in the aftermath of the defeat was one of the hardest things I ever had to do in my life," Kiani said. "I was devastated by the fact that a part of my compatriots cheered my opponent's victory, which is why I had to seek professional help from a therapist"



Iranian Nahid Kiani (R) is seen in action against Kimia Alizadeh, representing the IOC the Refugee Olympic Team, at the Tokyo Olympics.
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Paris Olympics:

Duplantis breaks pole vault world record on way to gold

BBC – Sweden's Armand Duplantis set a new world record of 6.25m after winning gold in the men's pole vault. The 24-year-old, who had secured successive Olympic titles by clearing six metres, set an Olympic record of 6.10m with his next attempt.

And he improved his world best of 6.24m, that he set in April, by one centimetre at his third and final attempt, to the delight of the crowd in the Stade de France.

The two-time world champion has now broken the record on nine occasions. Duplantis, the first athlete to retain the pole vault title since American Bob Richards in 1952 and 1956, raced to his friends and family after breaking the world record.

"I haven't processed how fantastic that moment was," said Duplantis. "It's one of those things that you don't really feel is real. It's such an out of body experience."

"The biggest dream since a kid was to break the world record at the Olympics, and I've been able to do that in front of the most ridiculous crowd I've ever competed in front of."

American Sam Kendricks cleared 5.95m to take silver, while Greece's Emmanouil Karalis secured bronze on

countback with a best of 5.90m.

Elsewhere in the athletics event, Great Britain's Keely Hodgkinson dominated the 800m final to win gold and end her wait for a global title.

The 22-year-old had finished second at successive World Championships after claiming a stunning silver on her Olympic debut in Tokyo as a teenager in 2021.

Crossing the line in one minute 56.72 seconds, Hodgkinson could not hide her emotion as the magnitude of her achievement struck.

Ethiopia's Tsige Duguma (1:57.15) won silver while world champion Moraa (1:57.42) had to settle for third.

Gymnastics

US superstar Simone Biles said it was "just the right thing to do" after she and team-mate Jordan Chiles bowed down to Olympic gold medallist Rebeca Andrade after the floor final in Paris.

Biles had been hoping to win a fourth gold at these Games but a couple of mistakes meant she had to settle for silver behind the Brazilian.

However, the 27-year-old, who is the world's most decorated gymnast, was far from disappointed and instead joined Chiles in showing admiration to Andrade in one of the iconic images of

these Games.

The trio also made history as the first all-black podium in men or women's gymnastics at the Olympics.

"She's such an excitement to watch and then all the fans in the crowd were always cheering for her, so it was just the right thing to do," said Biles.

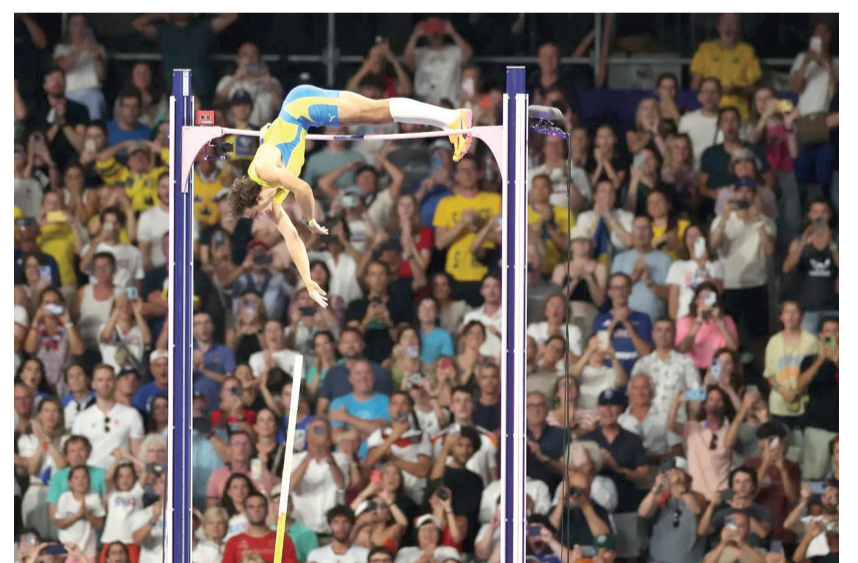
"It was an all-black podium so that was super-exciting for us, but then Jordan was like 'should we bow to her?' and I was like 'absolutely!'"

Football

Jean-Philippe Mateta scored twice as France fought back to beat 10-man Egypt 3-1 after extra time and reach the final of the men's football competition.

The result means Thierry Henry's side are guaranteed a first medal in the tournament in 40 years when they play Spain at the Parc des Princes on Friday. Mateta, 27, swept in a late equaliser from Michael Olise's pass to level the scores after Mahmoud Saber had powered in an opener for Egypt from close range in Lyon.

Crystal Palace forward Mateta headed the hosts in front nine minutes into extra time, after Omar Fayed had been dismissed for a second yellow card. Olise rounded off the scoring for



France, with Egypt now set to face Morocco in Nantes on Thursday in the bronze-medal match.

In the other semi-final, 2020 silver medallists Spain came from behind to beat Morocco 2-1 comeback, courtesy of goals by Barcelona's Fermin Lopez and substitute Juanlu Sanchez against tournament top scorer Soufiane Rahimi's penalty in the first half.

Swedish Armand Duplantis clears the pole vault world record height of 6.25m at the Paris Olympics in Stade de France, Saint-Denis, France, on August 5, 2024.

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