Yazdani hit by recurring injury as milestone gold proves elusive

Sports Desk

Wrestling sensation Hassan Yazdani will have to wait another four years to write his name into history books of the Iranian sport after a final heartbreak in the Olympic freestyle competitions in Paris.

A victory over Bulgaria's Russian-born Magomed Ramazanov in the 86kg showdown would have seen Yazdani overtake taekwondo great Hadi Saei as the most-decorated Iranian over the 30 editions of the Games with double golds and a silver, but an old shoulder injury flared up again at the worst time imaginable to keep him at bay throughout the six minutes of action.

Pushed forward by the Iranian supporters at the Grand Palais Éphémère, Yazdani had to call for treatment on several occasions but still showed great resilience to see out the contest, though the 7-1 defeat meant Ramazanov is only the third opponent – after Russian Magomedrasul Gazimagomedov and familiar foe David Taylor, who has a 4-1 record against the Iranian in world and Olympic finals – to have claimed victory over Yazdani at major international tournaments since his senior breakthrough at the 2015 World Championships.

"He clearly had problems during the bout, which is why I'm not much delighted by the victory,"

said Ramazanov, adding: "He was injured and couldn't deliver his maximum performance. It was really tough for him, although he was still a great fighter with one arm."

"He is a true legend. That's what I told him at the end. I always wanted to wrestle him," added the former European silver medalist, who only began competing under the Bulgarian flag in January.

A gold medalist in Rio 2016 and silver winner four years later in Tokyo, Yazdani was in obvious discomfort from the get-go, signaling for a timeout almost immediately after the start, clutching his upper right arm.

However, he managed to keep the score close, and even tentatively led 1-1 on criteria in the second period.

Ramazanov put the pressure on and tripped Yazdani for a takedown while trapping the Iranian's foot underneath him at an odd angle, keeping him in a sitting position. That allowed the Bulgarian to use a crossface to tilt Yazdani backward for two exposures and a 7-1 lead.

With 30 seconds left, Yazdani conceded the defeat, putting his hands on his knees as the seconds ticked down to the inevitable, before he gave Ramazanov a hug of plaudit.

Having been sidelined for eight months after a surgery on his shoulder last October, Yazdani

looked to be back in his dominant form en route to the final showpiece, defeating Australian Jayden Lawrence by superiority before comfortable victories over Dauren Kurugliev of Greece and San Marino's Myles Amine.

"He had minor pain before the final which is normal after the surgery, but his shoulder was dislocated four to five times against the Bulgarian," said Yazdani's sur-

geon Dr. Sohrab Kayhani, who was in the venue to watch the bout.

"The first incident was enough to send any athlete to the hospital and he showed true determination to keep going for six minutes."

Iranian wrestler Hassan Yazdani (blue) struggles with a shoulder injury during the freestyle 86kg final against Bulgaria's Magomed Ramazanov at the Paris Olympics on August 9, 2024.
● *IAWF*

Impressive Barkhordari settles for taekwondo silver

Iran's Mehran Barkhordari poses with his silver in the men's taekwondo -80kg contests at the Paris Olympics on August 9, 2024.
● *SARA ABDOLLAHI/ BORNA NEWS*

Sports Desk

Iranian Mehran Barkhordari grabbed a prestigious Olympic medal in Paris after a straight-round defeat against Tunisian Firas Katoussi in the men's taekwondo -80kg final.

A 2022 world bronze medalist, Barkhordari started on the front foot in the French capital's Grand Palais and drew the first

blood with a two-pointer early on, but the towering Tunisian bounced back in the final seconds to equalize and then added another two points to win the first round.

Stepping into the showdown without conceding a single round, Katoussi took the lead after the restart, landing a lightning, close-range crescent kick to the head for three points, and never looked behind to take the round 5-1 and add the Olympic gold to the world bronze he won two years ago.

This was a third taekwondo medal for Iran, which left the Tokyo Games empty-handed

three years ago, in Paris following a silver and a bronze in the women's competitions.

Nahid Kiani made history by becoming the first Iranian girl to ever reach an Olympic final showpiece in any sport, before a setback against South Korean Kim Yu-jin in the -57kg final, while teenage prodigy Mobina Ne'matzadeh rounded off an impressive run in the -49kg class with a win against Saudi Dunya Abutaleb in the third-place bout.

Despite the final defeat, Barkhordari will have every reason to be proud of his Olympic campaign, as he came out on top

against some formidable opponents.

The 24-year-old Iranian began the day with a comeback victory over reigning Asian gold medalist Jasurbek Jaysunov and then came from behind to beat high-profile Italy's two-time world champion Simone Alessio.

Barkhordari again had to rally from behind to defeat South Korean Seo Geon-woo in a thrilling last-four clash to secure a first men's Olympic final spot for the country in the taekwondo event since Mohammad Baqeri-Mo'tamed won a silver in London 2012.

Ethiopia's Tola wins men's marathon, Kipchoge drops out

AFP- Ethiopian Tamirat Tola delivered a masterclass in solo front running to win the Olympic men's marathon in Paris on Saturday as Eliud Kipchoge's bid for a third gold went up in smoke.

Tola clocked an Olympic record of 2hr 06min 26sec for victory, finishing 21 seconds ahead of Belgium's Bashir Abdi, whose silver marked an upgrade from his bronze garnered at the Covid-hit Tokyo Games three years ago.

Kenya's Benson Kipruto, winner of Tokyo, Boston and Chicago marathons in recent years,

rounded out the podium, a further 13sec adrift.

"Thank you, Paris!" said Tola, the 2016 Olympic 10,000m bronze medallist.

"I'm happy today, I was 2022 world champion and now I'm Olympic champion.

"It's the greatest day in my life. This was my goal."

Tola, a late call-up to replace injury-hit Sisay Lemma, won gold at the 2022 world championships in Eugene.

More recently he finished third at last year's London Marathon and won the New York City Marathon in a course record of

2:04.58.

"I was the reserve in the Ethiopian team, but when Sisay had injuries, then I had a chance to represent him," Tola said.

"I was fully prepared and knew I could fulfil my dream. This is the Olympics and it is not easy to win the Olympic Games, not at all. I am very proud, very happy."

Former world record holder Kipchoge won golds in the 2016 Rio Games and in Tokyo in 2021, but the 39-year-old Kenyan pulled up late in the race with back pain.

He dropped out just after the 30km mark, at which point he

was 71st, more than eight minutes off the pace.

It put an end to his ambitious attempt at a third consecutive win.

"Today was a tough day at the office," said Kipchoge. "It's like boxing. You can go to a training camp for five months and be knocked out in two seconds. But life will continue.

"This is my worst marathon. I have never done a DNF (did not finish). Like a boxer, I have been knocked down, I have won, I have come second, eighth, 10th, fifth – now I did not finish. That's life."

Tamirat Tola crosses the finish line to win the men's marathon at the Paris Olympics on August 10, 2024.
● *ISABEL INFANTES/REUTERS*