

Iran coach Kaveh pleased with Iran's 'decent' FS run in Paris

Sports Desk

Iran's freestyle head coach Mohsen Kaveh says he was satisfied with his men's performance at the wrestling competitions of the Paris Olympics, though he admitted that the results "could have been better."

The five-man squad collected three silver medals and a bronze, with Younes Emami leaving the Games empty-handed after a technical-fall defeat against American Kyle Dake in the 74kg quarterfinals, as Iran failed to grab a freestyle gold in a second successive Olympics.

Hassan Yazdani's quest for a second Olympic gold, which would have seen him become the most-decorated Iranian in the history of the Games, ended in vain following a 7-1 loss to Bulgaria's Magomed Ramazanov in the 86kg final – during which the wrestling sensation struggled with a recurring shoulder injury from the get-go, calling for treatment on several occasions throughout the six minutes of action.

"I think the Iranian squad had a decent run in Paris, though the outcome could have been better, had it not been for some misfortune and unexpected incidents in the final showpieces," Kaveh told IRNA.

"Yazdani's injury was a real shock. He showed great courage and dedication to wrestle with one hand for five minutes. He had a neck-and-neck battle against Dauren Kurugliev in the quarterfinals and showed no signs of injury," said the Iranian head coach, who believes Yazdani's return to competitive action might have been premature.



Iran head coach Mohsen Kaveh (R) makes instructions to 97kg wrestler Amir-Ali Azarpira during the freestyle contests at the Paris Olympics.
● IAWF

"Yazdani had been sidelined for eight to nine months [after last October's surgery] and worked so hard to make it to the Games, but the truth is that it takes one year for any wrestler to fully recover from the injury. I'm sure he would have easily won the gold if it wasn't for the problem in the final as Kurugliev was a much more formidable wrestler than Ramazanov." Heading to Paris as the reigning

world champion, Amirhossein Zare' was the ultimate favorite to win the superheavyweight gold but the Iranian came short against familiar foe Geno Petriashvili of Georgia in a thrilling 125kg final. Trailing 10-1 at the break, Zare' fought back to cut the deficit to a single point though it proved too little too late. "It was the worst day of his career as we expected Amirhossein

to win the gold. I think the match officials played a significant part in Zare's defeat. Petriashvili repeatedly hit Zare' in the face and stopped the bout time and again as he clearly ran out of steam in the second period. The referee should have cautioned him to keep him from using the dark arts," Kaveh said. Having finished fifth in last year's World Championships, Rahman Amouzad seemed to

be back to his ruthless form for the Olympics, crushing two world champions in American Zain Retherford and Hungarian Ismail Musukaev, as well as European gold medalist Islam Dudaev of Albania to reach the 65kg final.

However, the 2022 world champion was the third Iranian to suffer a final loss – stunned 10-3 by low-profile Japanese Kotaro Kiyooka.

"The 65kg event featured eight world-class wrestlers and Rahman did great to reach the final, given the tough draw he faced," Kaveh said, adding: "We knew Kotaro was not going to be an easy opponent for Rahman as he had beaten world and Olympic champion Takuto Otoguro in the Japanese Olympic trials. He did a magnificent job to keep Rahman at bay and made the most of his sloppiness in the first period to score the takedown. The defeat still takes nothing from Amouzad's impressive campaign."

Young prodigy Amir-Ali Azarpira was the surprise Iranian medalist in Paris, bouncing back from a first-round loss to eventual gold medalist Akhmed Tazhudinov to beat American great Kyle Snyder for the 97kg bronze.

"I think he even deserved to win the gold," Kaveh said of the 22-year-old Iranian, whose impressive run over the past 12 months convinced the Iranian coaching staff to pick him over two-time world champion Kameran Qassempour for the Iranian 97kg slot in Paris.

"His bout against Tazhudinov could have gone either way. Amir-Ali was unlucky to lose after being in front until the final 37 seconds."

Sepahan signs World Cup winner Nzonzi; Mohammadi joins Persepolis

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League club Sepahan signed French midfielder Steven Nzonzi a free agent.

A former player of Stoke City, Sevilla – with whom he won the UEFA Europa League in 2016 – and AS Roma, Nzonzi spent last season at Turkish top-flight side Konyaspor, scoring four goals in 36 appearances in all competitions.

Capped 20 times for the national team, Nzonzi, 35, was part of the French squad when Les Bleus lifted the World Cup trophy in 2018.

The central midfielder is the ninth player to join Jose Morais's side during a busy transfer window, following Javad Aqaepour, Mahdi Limouchi,

Mohammad-Amin Hazbavi, Saleh Hardani, Hossein Goodarzi, Mohammad Alinejad, Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi, and Vahdat Hanonov.

Having finished third in the league last season, Sepahan got off to a flying start in the new campaign, beating newly-promoted Chadormalou 3-1 at home on Friday.

Reds recruitment

Meanwhile, Iranian international fullback Milad Mohammadi joined Iranian champion Persepolis after terminating his contract with Turkish side Adana Demirspor.

Mohammadi's signing ends the Reds' desperate quest for an orthodox left back after parting ways with Ali Ne'mati and Qa-



tari Abdelkarim Hassan before the new season, new Spanish head coach Juan Carlos Garrido had to use left-footed winger Vahid Amiri in the back four during the preseason friendlies,

as well as the 1-1 home draw against Zob Ahan on the opening day of the league campaign. Mohammadi, 30, whose twin brother Mehrdad plays for Persepolis archrival Esteghlal,



has 62 international caps under his belt and represented the country at the 2018 and 2022 World Cups, while helping the team reach the 2019 and 2023 Asian Cup semifinals.

French midfielder Steven Nzonzi (L) and fullback Milad Mohammadi joined Persian Gulf Pro League clubs Sepahan and Persepolis respectively.



Jannik Sinner of Italy poses with the Cincinnati Open trophy after beating Frances Tiafoe in Cincinnati, OH, US, on Aug. 19, 2024.
● SUSAN MULLANE/USA TODAY SPORTS

Sinner beats Tiafoe to win Cincinnati Open

REUTERS – World number one Jannik Sinner beat Frances Tiafoe 7-6(4) 6-2 at the Cincinnati Open final on Monday, showing that despite recent health struggles he will still be the man to beat at the upcoming U.S. Open in New York. The 23-year-old, who has been struggling over the last couple months with a hip issue and who missed the Paris Olympics due to tonsillitis, was error-prone to start

the contest and came up limping after several points in the tight first set. Sinner's triumph at the Masters 1000 event follows his Grand Slam breakthrough at the Australian Open in January and is his fifth title of the year and first at the tournament in Ohio. Critically, Sinner has now shown that he can win even when not 100% healthy, an attribute he may

need to utilize at Flushing Meadows where defending champion Novak Djokovic and world number three Carlos Alcaraz are the other hot favorites. "It was a very difficult week, tough week. I'm very happy about today's match," Sinner said in his on-court interview. "It was very tough mentally... We both felt a lot of tension, but I'm very glad about the level I played,

especially in the important moments." Sinner said his sole focus now is on getting ready for the year's final major. "Now, for sure, it's important to recover, to be to be ready for New York," he said. "I'm very happy to be in a position where I am and just trying to keep going mentally with this hunger to keep playing."