



Japanese lightweight wrestlers have proved to be experts in carrying out the leg-lace technique and that was what eventually cost Amouzad in the final. Didn't you warn him against Kiyooka's skills prior to the matchup?

The leg lace was his main strength throughout the tournament. He had his unique style in performing the technique as he locked his head between the opponent's legs to roll him. The coaching staff had told Rahman all about the Japanese but he made the most of Rahman's lapse of concentration to secure the victory.

Were you aware of Hassan Yazdani's injury threat before the Olympics? Did you ever think of sending Kamran Qasempour to Paris instead of him?

We had a defined selection pro-

gram in place for the Olympics and Hassan was our priority in the 86kg class according to that process. He had secured the Olympic berth by winning the silver in last year's World Championships. His rival, whoever that was, should have won the domestic and Asian title to be given a chance in a head-to-head against Yazdani. Qasempour was not considered for the 86kg class in the first place as he was keen on taking a shot at the 97kg slot and Hadi Vafaei was ruled out of contention after he was beaten by a Kazakhstani opponent and failed to win the gold in April's Asian Championships. We sent Hassan to Budapest to see if he had fully recovered from the surgery on his shoulder. He looked fit and ready during the training sessions and when he eased to the gold medal in Hungary, we knew he would be our 86kg wrestler in the Olympics.

However, his shoulder was dislocated

in the worst time imaginable. There was nothing we could possibly do about it as injuries are part of the sports.

Did he show any signs of a recurring injury before the final?

Not at all. Some were critical of us for not taping his shoulder during the competitions, but Dr. Kayhani, Hassan's surgeon and the head of the medical team in Paris, saw nothing unusual about his fitness when he was in action on the first day. Hassan did not even complain about any kind of pain in his shoulder before the final.

Don't you think the Bulgarian was to be blamed for Yazdani's injury?

I don't think that was the case. From what I saw from the mat-side whatever the Bul-

garian did was not intentional. He was a true gentleman. He was an unknown wrestler and did not imagine winning an Olympic medal but restrained in celebrating his final victory when he saw Hassan's situation.

Some experts believe wrestlers can hardly recover from a shoulder injury and some of them are forced to call time on their careers. How do you think the recent setback may impact Yazdani's future?

That is true but there have been exceptions over the years. Turkey's Taha Akgül and Uzbekistani Zhamalov kept on wrestling despite facing the same problem.

Tazhudinov is also dealing with a shoulder injury and will have to undergo a surgery. I think the important thing about the injury is to have a full recovery process after the surgery. It was Yazdani's own decision to take part in the Games as he was eager to win a second Olympic gold, though the silver was quite a feat itself.

So, you mean Yazdani's to return to action was premature? Yes, as far as a proper rehabilitation was concerned.

Don't you think it would be better if his next surgery is carried out overseas.

All I know is that the Wrestling Federation, Sports Ministry, and the National Olympic Committee will have to provide him with best facilities to get the required treatment, whether in the country or overseas.

Does he have a chance to go to the next Olympics? Of course, why not.

Let's talk about Zare'. Did you ever predict him losing out the 125kg final in that fashion?

The Georgian didn't see in his wildest dreams to come out on top against Zare'. He had blown it in the last two seconds of the final in the Tokyo Games three years ago. As far as wrestling skills go, he was no match for Zare'. Let's put it this way, an Olympic title is a big deal. Zare' missed out on a huge opportunity. He might not realize it now, and it will take some time before it sinks in.

And then there was the Georgian's provocative celebration and the crowning gesture.

His behavior was really annoying and didn't sit well with me. Anyone can celebrate their own win, but he was rubbing it in Zare's face, which I didn't think was cool. He was gloating and it didn't go down well.

Zare' came out and said that the Georgian wrestler's move has fired him up to defeat him in the future encounters. What's your take on it?

Zare' is a top-notch wrestler, and, no matter how you sliced it, he was expected to come out victorious on that day. If these two were to go head-to-head 10 more times, Zare' would likely beat him with

ease, even if not on his best day.

As the head coach of the team, how many medals did you predict for the squad before heading to the Games?

I was confident Hassan and Amirhossein would win the gold. I knew the other three would have their work cut out for them, given the number of top wrestlers in their weight classes, though Rahman and Amir-Ali eventually finished on the podium.

How do you rate your team's performance in Paris?

That is not for me to say. The United World Wrestling declared Iran as the champion with 83 points, though it went unnoticed. The Iranian team could only win a silver and bronze in Tokyo but the tally was three silvers and a bronze this time around. If we compare the Olympic results with last year's World Championships in Belgrade, we'll see that our guys have stepped up their game and made significant progress. Last year, we had Milad Valizadeh in the 57kg weight class, who finished eighth, and as a result, we missed out on an Olympic spot in that weight class. However, in the 65kg division, Rahman turned it around this year, building on his fifth-place finish last year to take home the silver medal at the Olympics, beating two world champions along the way.

Younes Emami was beaten by Russian Zaurbek Sidakov and Serbia's Khetag Tsabolov and this year he fell to American Dake, who's been a top contender for years. Either way, Younes came up empty-handed on both occasions. Meanwhile, Hassan Yazdani bounced back from a tough situation at the Olympics to repeat his silver medal from last year in the 86kg. Mojtaba Goleij was eliminated in the 97kg division at the world event, but Azarpira, who was knocked out in the 92kg class last year, turned it around this year, taking bronze in the 97kg class. It's no easy feat to take down Kyle Snyder, but Azarpira pulled it off. All in all, no matter how you slice it, our team's results were better than last year, but we still need to step up our game because we've got some talented young wrestlers in the pipeline.

The good thing about our team was that we had a young squad. Rahman, Amirhossein, and Amir-Ali were just 22 or 23 and already making waves in the Games. Even Hassan Yazdani, despite his current form, still has a lot to offer in the future.

In Paris, the Iranian wrestling and taekwondo teams, both led by former champions as the head of the federation, stood out from the pack and delivered better results than the other teams. How much do you think their success can be attributed to having seasoned sports leaders at the helm?

It has defiantly been a game-changer to have former champions and athletes in charge of the federations. Hadi Saei, the chief of the taekwondo federation, has done a great job and the results speak for themselves. The same goes for the wrestling federation. It has been on top of its game, with solid planning and preparation across the board, from youth to senior levels, in both freestyle and Greco-Roman. Hopefully, we can all pull together to help these young talents bring home even more medals in the future.



Iranian Younes Emami (L) is seen in action against Italy's Frank Chamizo in the freestyle 74kg first round at the Paris Olympics on Aug. 9, 2024. IAWF

Iran's Rahman Amouzad (blue) goes for a takedown against Japanese Kotaro Kiyooka in the freestyle 65kg final at the Paris Olympics on Aug. 11, 2024. IAWF

Iranian Hassan Yazdani (blue) and Bulgaria's Magomed Ramazanov lock horns in the freestyle 86kg final at the Paris Olympics on Aug. 9, 2024. IAWF