

'Fifteen years in the making': Aminzadeh revels in coveted Paralympic gold

Sports Desk

Powerlifter Ahmad Aminzadeh was thrilled to see "years of hard work" pay off as the Iranian walked away with the last gold medal up for grabs at the Paris Paralympics.

Aminzadeh bagged a third powerlifting gold for the country in the French capital's La Chapelle Arena on Sunday, finishing atop the podium in the men's +107kg contests.

Also a gold medalist in last year's Asian Para Games, the Iranian began his campaign with a 253kg lift and then went on to register 258kg and 263kg efforts to finish 12 kilograms clear of Ukrainian silver medalist Anton Kriukov, with Akaki Jintcharadze of Georgia taking the bronze with 250kg.

"This gold medal was 15 years in the making. I have been through a lot to get to this point. Thank God all those years of hard work and dedication were worth it," an emotional Aminzadeh said.

"I suffered an injury in the chest area during a training session in Paris and I have to thank [team physician] Dr. Barati, as well as my coaches Hossein Tavakkoli and Ahmad Mollahosseini for helping me make it to the event," added the Iranian, who also grabbed the gold in the 2021 World Championships.

"My personal best is 280 kilograms and I won the gold in March's World Cup in the UAE by a 25kg margin. I'm sure I would have repeated my records, had it not been for the untimely injury. I'm still grateful to have landed the gold," said Aminzadeh, dedicating his medal to "the great people of my country who deserve the best."

Aminzadeh's superheavyweight gold in the Paralympics was a first won by an Iranian since 2016, when late powerlifting legend Siamand Rahman lifted a remarkable 310kg – a world record intact to date – in Rio de Janeiro.

"There have been some great Iranians in Kazem Rajabi, Siamand Rahman, and Mansour Pourmirzaei in the class over



Iranian powerlifter Ahmad Aminzadeh celebrates after winning the men's +107kg gold medal in the Paris Paralympics on September 8, 2024. GETTY IMAGES

the previous Paralympics and I'm glad to bring the superheavyweight crown to the country again," added Aminzadeh.

Record haul

Aminzadeh's triumph, coupled with fellow-powerlifter Aliakbar Gharibshahi's gold earlier on the final day of the Games, rounded off the sporting extravaganza for Iran with 25 medals – an all-time high for the country since the first participation in Seoul 1988.

Joining the two powerlifters in winning a gold medal for Iran over 11 days of action were Rouhollah Rostami, also a powerlifting champion in the -80kg class, shooting sensation Sareh Javanmardi, who won a third successive women's 10m air pistol title, as well as Saeid Afrooz (men's javelin throw F34), Yassin Khosravi (men's shot put F57), Amirhossein Alipour (men's shot put F11), and the men's sitting volleyball team, which won a magnificent eighth crown, as Iran

finished 14th in the overall medals table – dropping by a spot from the previous Games in Tokyo, where the Iranians won 12 gold medals.

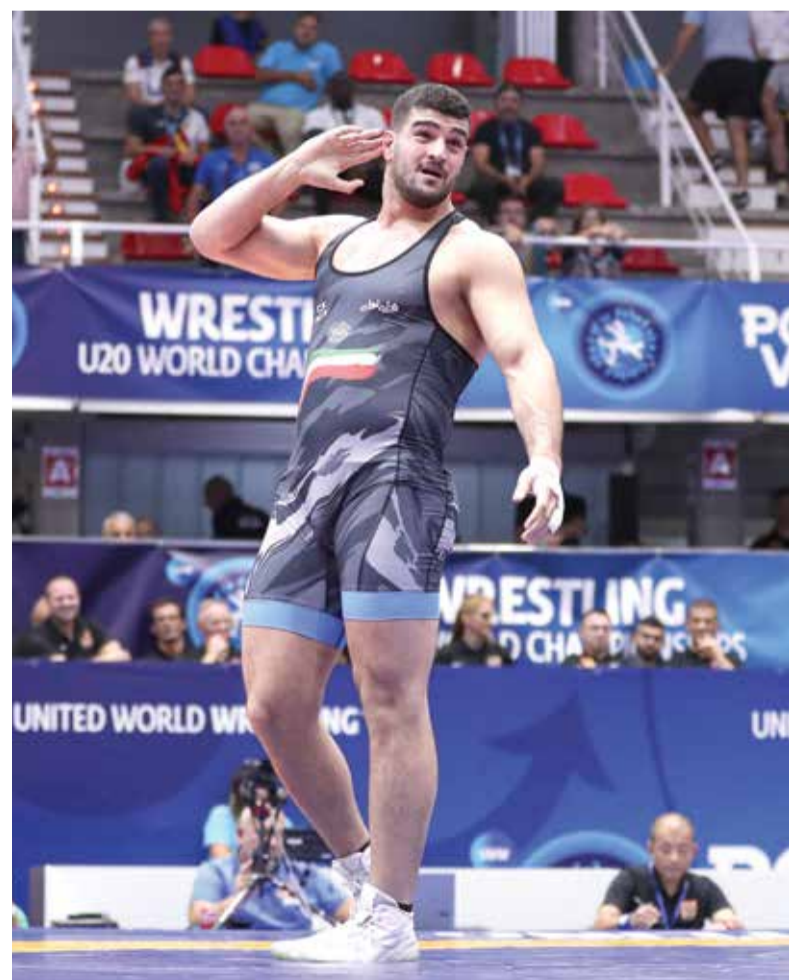
The para athletics event was again the most productive one for Iran with 12 medals, including three golds, though the number would have been even better, had Sadegh Beit Sayyah not been stripped of the javelin throw F41 gold for celebrating with a religious flag, which was deemed a violation of the Games'

code of conduct.

Zahra Rahimi (taekwondo, women's 52kg), Parastoo Habibi (women's club throw F32), Fatemeh Hemmati (women's individual compound open) won silver medals in their respective events – with the latter also part of the silver-winning mixed duo in the team compound contest – and Elham Salehi won a javelin throw F54 bronze as the girls took credit for seven of Iran's medals in the French capital.

Wrestling U20 World Championships:

Ma'soumi, Rezaei collect golds but Iran finishes freestyle runner-up



Iranian Amirreza Ma'soumi gestures towards the crowd after winning the freestyle 125kg final at the U20 World Championships in Pontevedra, Spain, on September 8, 2024. JAKE KIRKMAN/UWW

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Amirreza Ma'soumi and Ali Rezaei won double gold medals on the final day of the Wrestling U20 World Championships in Pontevedra, Spain, but Iran missed out on the freestyle team title for the first time since 2019, settling for the runner-up place behind Team USA.

Elsewhere on Sunday, Ebrahim Khari suffered a technical fall against Japanese Masanosuke Ono in the 61kg final, while Abolfazl Rahmani defeated Italian Gabriele Niccolini 9-2 for a consolation bronze in the 86kg contests, as the Iranian 10-man squad tallied 160 points thanks to three golds and bronzes apiece as well as one silver.

Ali Khorrdel had walked away with the ultimate prize of the 65kg event on the preceding night, courtesy of a 10-2 victory Makoto Hosokawa of Japan, with Ali Karampour (70kg) and Mahdi Yousefi (79kg) finishing their campaigns with two bronze medals in their respective classes.

The Americans won a single gold, through Luke Lilledahl (57kg), across 10 weight classes – plus four silver and bronze medals apiece – but still managed to claim the team title

with 175 points.

Four medals, including double golds, saw Japan finish third with 90 points.

Ma'soumi retains dominance Ma'soumi might be behind fellow-Iranian Amirhossein Zare' in the pecking order for the 125kg spot of the senior national team, but the super-heavyweight prodigy again proved to be in a league of his own when it comes to age-group world championships. Standing between Ma'soumi and a third world under-20 title in the 125kg final was American Benjamin Kueter, who won the 97kg gold in the event in 2022.

Having conceded a single point on his way to the final, Ma'soumi took a 4-0 lead with a takedown, a point for Kueter's passivity and a stepout, before the American caught the deficit to two in the final 30 second, though it was too little too late as the Iranian teenager bagged a fifth world age-group gold in three years.

"My opponent in the final is a high-profile wrestler as he won the world gold two years ago," Ma'soumi said. "He had taken a year off from wrestling but had improved a lot since then. He's a skilled and accomplished wrestler. Thank God I

was able to use my knowledge of him to wrestle smartly and win."

While he won his four bouts outscoring his opponents 32-3, Ma'soumi had only one technical superiority win. In 2022, when he won both the U20 and U23 world titles, he won all but one of his matches via superiority.

"I had an injury in my hand and it was broken, so I tried to be careful with it," he said. "Otherwise, I'm always aggressive and a fighter."

Ma'soumi insisted he remains fixated on making the Iranian senior team.

"In the match against Amirhossein Zare' in Croatia, I lost," he said of his 5-0 loss to the Olympic silver medalist in January's Ranking Series event in Zagreb. "Some might say that I have settled, but no, I'm not satisfied at all. I'm preparing myself for the World Championships in Zagreb, aiming for the national team selection." Earlier on Sunday, Rezaei came from behind to beat American Ladarion Lockett – a world U17 champion last year – on criteria in a thrilling showdown, becoming the first world U20 champion from Iran in the 74kg class in 15 years.

Lockett was leading the final

3-1 after scoring a takedown in the second period and Rezaei, who won a silver medal last year, needed at least a takedown to win.

It came in the fifth minute of the bout when Lockett missed a sweep single and Rezaei showed exceptional speed to get him a bodylock and finish with a takedown.

Last year, Rezaei dropped the 70kg final against American Meyer Shapiro 11-6 and was desperate to make up for the setback this time around.

"I've been waiting for this moment for about a year and a half, and thankfully, in the final, my opponent was again an American, and I managed to beat him. This journey continues."

The freestyle runner-up finish came after the Iranian 10-man squad had dominated the Greco-Roman competitions last week. Ali Ahmadi Vafa (55kg), Mohammad-Mahdi Gholampour (60kg), Ahmadreza Mohsennejad (67kg), and Alireza Abdevali (77kg) pocketed four golds, while Abolfazl Fat'hi took the 130kg silver and Erfan Jarkani won a 63kg bronze, as Iran tallied 147 points for a fifth world under-20 title in a row, with Kazakhstan (100pts) and Turkey (98pts) in the following spots.