



## Asian Wushu Championships:

# Iran's Kiani wins historic talou gold

### Sports Desk

Iranian Zahra Kiani made history on Friday by bagging a first individual talou gold for the country at the Asian Wushu Championships in Macao, China.

A two-time silver medalist at the Asian Games, Kiani scored 9.686 points to beat opponents from Hong Kong and Vietnam to the

ultimate prize in the women's jianshu form. This was a second medal for the Iranian girls on Day 2 of the 10th edition of the Asian Championships.

Helia Asadian had to settle for a bronze after a 9.676-point performance in the women's nandao event. Malaysia's Tan Cheong Min won the gold with Uzbekistan's Darya Latisheva taking the silver.

## AFC Champions League Elite preview:

# Persepolis to visit Al Ahli; Esteghlal hosting Al Gharafa

### Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League champion Persepolis will kick off its AFC Champions League Elite campaign with an eagerly-awaited clash against Saudi club Al Ahli in Jeddah's Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Stadium on Monday.

In Tehran, Reds' archrival Esteghlal will welcome Qatar Stars League outfit Al Gharafa to the Shahr-e Qods Stadium as the Asian club football is set for a new chapter through the revamped tournament.

Finalists in 2012, Al Ahli last qualified in 2021 and the three-time Saudi league winners is back for a 13th time to meet Persepolis on a fifth occasion.

Persepolis, which won a seventh Iranian top-flight title in eight seasons back in May, reached the final showpiece of the competition twice in recent years (2018 and 2020) and are appearing for a 12th time, holding the upper hand in their head-to-head record with two wins and one draw.

Monday's opponent, however, will provide a stern test for the Reds, who are unbeaten in three matches in the domestic league and won a first game under new Spanish head coach Juan Carlos Garrido – a 2-0 home triumph against Foolad Khuzestan – last time out.

Former Manchester City winger Riyad Mahrez will headline a star-studded Al Ahli squad, with Senegalese keeper Édouard Mendy, ex-Liverpool striker Roberto Firmino, Turkish in-

ternational center-back Merih Demiral, and Ivorian midfielder Franck Kessié all expected to start the game for German coach Matthias Jaissle.

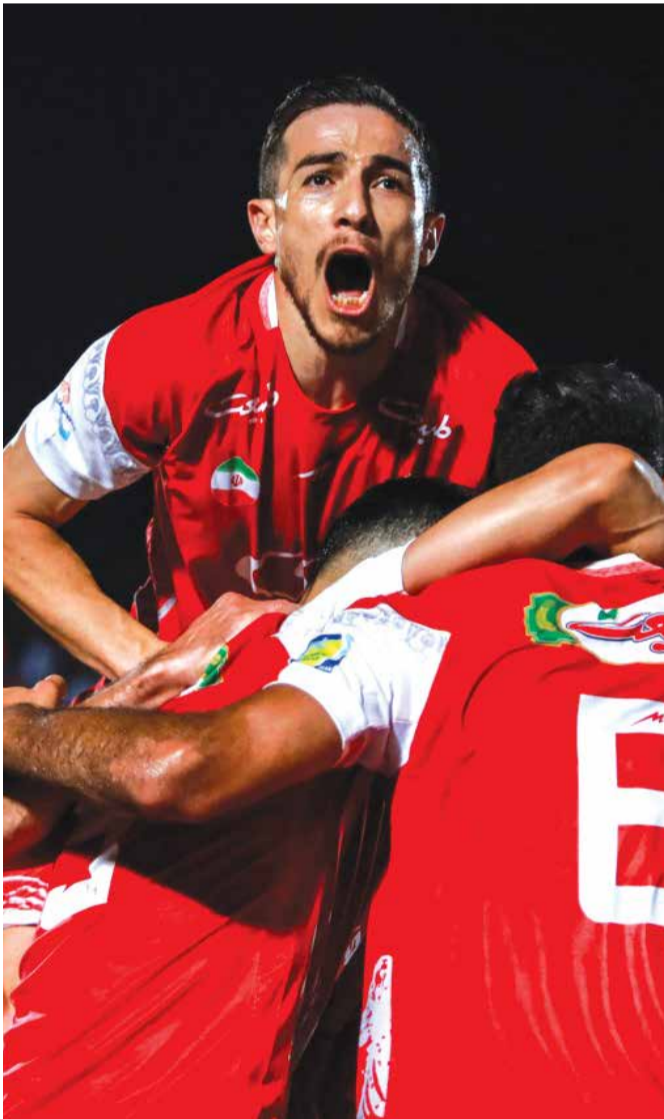
The match could also see Portuguese striker Lucas João make a first appearance in the Reds shirt after joining the club on a one-year deal from Qatari side Umm Salal this week.

Esteghlal, meanwhile, will be looking to bounce back from a 1-0 away loss to Esteghlal Khuzestan last time out in the league on its return to the continental event.

The defeat was followed by days of uncertainty swirling around the Blues' bench as numerous reports in the Iranian media suggested that head coach Javad Nekounam could be shown the exit door before the Al Gharafa game, though the club hierarchy eventually decided to stick with the current manager, who will be eager to prove he remains the right man for the job by an opening-day victory over Al Gharafa.

Seven-time Qatari league champion Al Gharafa came through the preliminary stage to take its place in the inaugural event – thanks to a home win against the UAE's Shabab Al Ahli – as the 2010 quarterfinalist will begin its 10th tournament involvement.

The most-decorated Iranian team in the competition with two titles, Esteghlal – back in the competition for the first time since 2021 – will eye a second win against Al Gharafa, having won once and drawn the other when the two sides squared off in the group stage in 2010.



IRNA



IRNA

## Wrestling U23 World Championships:

# Iran's world junior champions given a shot at glory in Tirana

### Sports Desk

Iranian gold medalists at the recently-finished Wrestling U20 World Championships will be rewarded with a place in October's U23 Worlds in Tirana, Albania, Ebrahim Mehrban, the secretary of the national governing body of the sport, confirmed.

A total of four gold medals across 10 weight classes helped the Iranian Greco-Roman team win a fifth world junior title in a row in Pontevedra, Spain, in early Sep-

tember, while the freestyle squad won three golds but missed out on the team crown for the first time since 2019, finishing second to Team USA.

Ali Ahmadi Vafa outmuscled American Isaiah Cortez for the Greco-Roman 55kg gold, with Mohammad Gholampour triumphant in the 60kg class thanks to a final win against Turkey's Servet Angi.

Ahmadreza Mohsennejad (67kg) and Alireza Abdevali (77kg) will also be given a shot at a second



UWW

age-group glory after walking away with the ultimate prize of their respective events in Spain, as Iran will eye a third Greco-Roman under-23 title on its return to the competition, having missed out on last year's edition – also hosted by Tirana – due to visa issues.

In the freestyle contests, Amirreza Ma'soumi was again in a league of his own in the junior superheavyweight class, bagging a fifth world age-group gold in three years, and will be the clear favorite to win a second world under-23 gold when

headlining the Iranian squad in the Albanian capital.

Ali Rezaei's gold-winning campaign also punched his Tirana ticket, but Ali Khorramdel – champion in the 65kg contests – will still have to take on fellow-Iranian Abbas Ebrahimzadeh in a domestic trial for a place in the team.

The Iranian freestyle team will be looking to improve on the runner-up finishes in the previous three involvements in the world under-23 event.