

## Asian Karate Championships: Abazari wins sole gold as Iran finishes with 11 medals



### Sports Desk

Saleh Abazari saved Iran's campaign at the Asian Karate Championships in Hangzhou, China, as his last-gasp kumite triumph made sure the country would not leave the event without a gold for the first time in the new millennium.

Iran's haul of 11 medals was the highest in the 20th edition of the competitions, though the country still had to settle for an under-par sixth place in the medals table, following Japan, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Hong Kong, and China. Representing Iran in the men's +84kg contests, Abazari defeated Japanese Kyo Hirata – Asian champion in 2022 – 6-0 for the ultimate prize, an eighth Asian medal for the Iranian, who also won the kumite gold of the weight class in 2018.

The first final showpiece featuring Iranian and Japanese karatekas on Sunday saw Mahdi Khodabakhshi suffer a loss

to Rikito Shimada and take the -84kg silver.

Earlier on the final day, six Iranians finished their campaigns with a consolation bronze.

Former world champion Bahman Asgari claimed his eighth Asian medal thanks to a 10-2 victory over Tong Yu-cheng of Hong Kong in the men's -75kg third-place bout, while Behnam Dehghanzadeh – a gold medalist last year – defeated Uzbekistan's Dilmurod Kamoliddinov 8-2 for the -55kg bronze.

In the women's draw, Atousa Golshadnejad, also an Asian champion in the previous edition, bounced back from a last-four heartbreak against reigning world champion Gong Li of China to beat Malaysian Zakiah Adnan in the -61kg contests.

Mobina Heidari (-68kg) and Taravat Khaksar (-55kg) also bagged a couple of kumite bronze medals for Iran, with Fatemeh Sadeghi beating Macao's Sou Soi Lam (40.5-38.6) to the women's kata bronze.

Sunday's results came a day after Iran had collected three team bronzes in Hangzhou.

The Iranian men's kumite team missed out on the Asian gold for the first time since the 2021 edition, but still managed to beat Kuwait 3-0 – courtesy of victories for Morteza Ne'mati, Mahdi Ashouri, and Mahdi Ganjzadeh – to win the bronze.

The trio of Ali Zand, Abolfazl Shahrjerdi, and Milad Farzadmehr defeated Saudi Arabia for a third Asian bronze in the men's team kata, while Sepideh Amini, Melika Ezzati, and Zeinab Hosseini came out on top against the Philippines to finish on the third podium in the women's event.



*Iranian Saleh Abzari won the men's kumite +84kg gold at the Asian Karate Championships in Hangzhou, China.*  
● ikf.ir

## Iranian handball set for new era under Spanish coach Guijosa

### Sports Desk

Iranian handball national team will be looking to embark on a new chapter under Spanish head coach Rafael Guijosa.

The 55-year-old Spaniard, who took over from Majid Rahimizadeh last week, returns to the role for a second spell after a decade, having steered Iran to an Asian bronze in 2014, and a maiden appearance at the World Championship the following year, though his two-year stint came to an end before the finals in Qatar.

"I'm really happy to come back to Iran to work as the head coach and the sport director of the national team," the Spanish coach said after being reappoin-

pointed to job last week.

"Ten years ago, I never thought I would go back to Iran again, though I always followed Iranian handball in all these years," added the ex-coach of Qatari club Al Arabi.

"I'm so excited to work again with the Iranian handball, fight for medals and help the national team reach the World Championship," said Guijosa, a former World Player of the Year, who was part of the national team that won back-to-back Olympic bronzes in 1996 and 2000.

A sixth-place finish in January's Asian Championship in Bahrain saw Iran miss out on next year's global showpiece – cohosted by Denmark, Norway, and Croatia – but Alireza Pakdel, the chair-

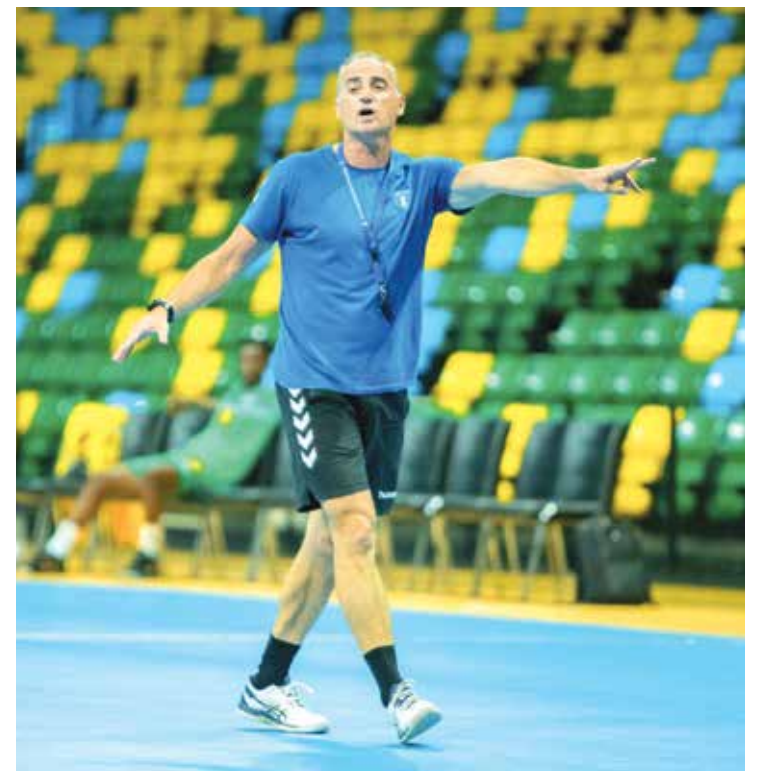
man of the Iranian Handball Federation, said the country has already set sights on glory in the future events.

"We have the Asian Championship next year and then the Asian Games in Aichi and Nagoya. That's why we couldn't afford to wait much time and decided to go after a coach who is familiar with the Asian handball," Pakdel said upon appointing Guijosa to the role.

"We're looking for a new style of play for the national team. In Guijosa, we have hired a high-profile coach with a decent record. The Iranian federation had a 10-man shortlist for the job, but Guijosa best fitted the bill among all candidates. He is a relatively young coach and

will surely help develop the next generation of Iranian players," added the head of national governing body of the sport.

Meanwhile, top Iranian keeper Mohammad Siavashi believes Guijosa has all the right attributes to succeed in his new role. "He is a top-notch coach. Spanish coaches are best known in the world for their tactical acumen, and, in behavioral terms, they are pretty similar to the Iranians. He will have a better understanding of Iranian players, which I'm sure will be a major boost for us in the future competitions," said Siavashi, who was part of the team, when Iran celebrated a first World Championship qualification under the Spaniard.



● RG

## Joshua future in doubt after mauling by dominant Dubois



**BBC** – Daniel Dubois sensationally dismantled fellow Briton Anthony Joshua in five rounds to catapult himself into global sporting stardom in front of 96,000 fans at Wembley Stadium.

The 27-year-old dropped Joshua multiple times to retain the IBF heavyweight title and leave his domestic rival's career in ruins. Londoner Dubois stopped Joshua, 34, with an incredible counter right hook to secure the biggest win of his 24-fight career.

"I'm a gladiator. I am a warrior to the bitter end. I want to get to the top level of this sport and reach my potential," Dubois said post-fight.

Joshua's bid to become a three-time champion and return to the division's top table ended in the most dramatic and unexpected fashion.

AJ – who won his first world title more than eight years ago – suf-

fered a fourth loss in his 32nd bout, but hinted he will continue in the sport and has a clause to trigger a rematch with Dubois.

"You know I'm ready to kick off in the ring but I'm going to keep it respectful," he said.

"Before I came here, I always say to myself I'm a fighter for life. You keep rolling the dice."

An ecstatic Dubois, meanwhile, enjoyed the crowning moment which had eluded him after he was elevated to world champion when Oleksandr Usyk vacated the belt.

After one of British boxing's biggest shocks, Joshua's future is under scrutiny, despite him suggesting he may continue in the sport.

The rebuild mission since losing a second consecutive fight to Usyk in 2022 was going smoothly, fuelled by a desire to join legends such as Muhammad Ali, Evander Holyfield, Lennox Lewis and Vitali

Klitschko as a three-time champion.

But Joshua came up against a fearless and younger fighter determined to prove his worth on the world stage.

"I had a fast and sharp opponent, a lot of mistakes from my end," he admitted afterwards.

The lure of the long-awaited and even longer-mooted super-fight with Fury also suffered a major blow, even if the 'Gypsy King' loses to Usyk in December's world-title rematch.

Dubois' future, in contrast, is gleaming brightly.



*Anthony Joshua (white) is knocked down by Daniel Dubois during an IBF heavyweight title fight in Wembley Stadium, London, Britain, on September 21, 2024.*  
● REUTERS