

U23 Wrestling World Championships: Naqousi wins gold, Iran bags three Greco-Roman medals

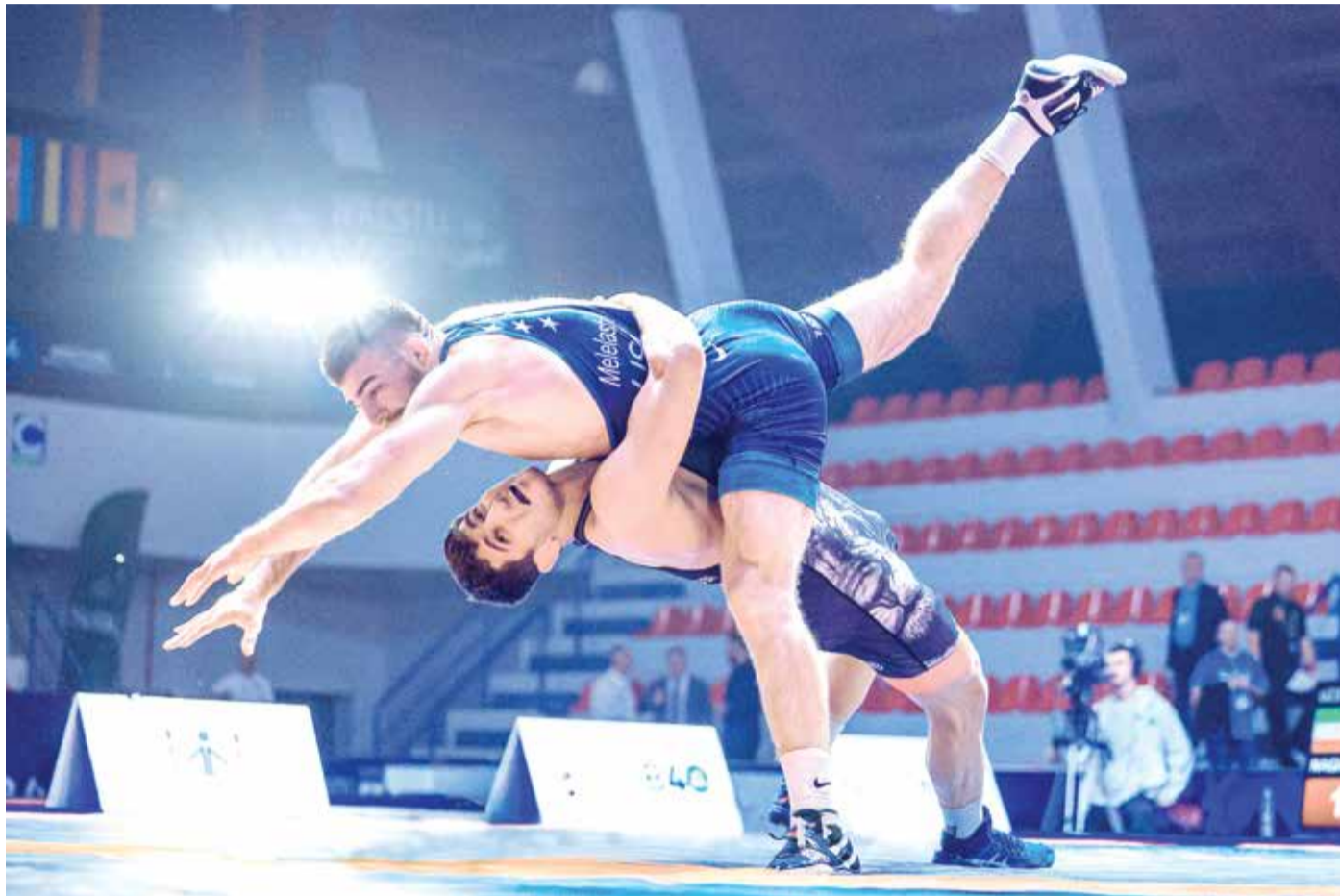
Sports Desk

Iranian Greco-Roman wrestlers collected three medals, including a gold, across five weight classes at the U23 World Championships in Tirana, Albania.

Mohammad Naqousi defeated American Beka Melelashvili for the ultimate prize of the 82kg contests, while Danial Sohrabi and Shayan Habib-Zare' added a couple of bronzes to Iran's medal haul. Naqousi jumped out to a 3-0 lead against the Georgian-born wrestler, courtesy of a passivity point and a correct throw without exposure. Melelashvili fought back in the second frame with a passivity point of his own. The duo traded a pair of two-point maneuvers with action stemming from par terre. Melelashvili had the final minute from neutral to find a score, but Naqousi held strong defensively to secure a 4-3 victory and claim a second world age-group gold, following his under-20 triumph in 2019.

Melelashvili, meanwhile, became the first Greco-Roman medalist for the United States in the history of the competition.

In the 72kg contests, Sohrabi recovered from a fall defeat against Armenian Shant Khachatryan in the quarterfinals to finish with a consolation bronze. A 67kg gold medalist in the competition in 2022, Sohrabi first



Iranian wrestler Mohammad Naqousi (red) is seen in action against American Beka Melelashvili in the Greco-Roman 82kg final at the U23 Wrestling World Championships in Tirana, Albania, on October 22, 2024.
● UWW

defeated Swiss Michael Portmann by superiority (8-0) in the repechage before outmuscling Georgios Barbanos of Sweden in emphatic fashion (9-0) to share

the third podium with neutral athlete Imran Aliev. Khachatryan went on to settle for the silver after a 3-1 loss to Georgian Giorgi Chkhikvadze in

the final. Habib-Zare' began his 97kg campaign in despair, suffering an 8-0 defeat against Abubakar Khaslakhnanu, but was given a

second chance when the Belarusian, also representing the individual neutral athletes' team, made it to the final showdown. The Iranian beat Georgia's La-

sha Tvildiani 3-0 and then came out victorious 8-5 against Estonian Richard Karelson in a thrilling third-place bout.

Hayk Khloyan defeated Khaslakhnanu 11-6 for the gold medal of the class, with Magomed Murtazaliev winning the other bronze.

Mohammad-Mahdi Gholampour was the other Iranian in action on the first day of the event, finishing empty handed in the 60kg contests following a 10-5 defeat against Azerbaijan's Nihad Guluzade in the quarterfinals.

Alisher Ganiev of Uzbekistan won the 60kg gold, thanks to an 8-4 win against Dinislam Bamatov, with Guluzade and Pridon Abuladze of Georgia taking the bronze medals.

Ahmadreza Mohsennejad was to represent Iran in the 67kg event but will leave Tirana without a bout after a weigh-in failure.

Razzak Beishekeev of Kyrgyzstan came out on top against Diego Chkhikvadze of Georgia in the final showpiece, while Daniil Agaev and Polish Arslanbek Salimov won the two bronze medals of the class.

AFC Champions League Elite:

Ronaldo kept at bay, but Laporte leaves it late as Al Nassr edges Esteghlal

Sports Desk

Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo again failed to find the net against Iranian teams, but an Aymeric Laporte's late header proved enough for Saudi giant Al Nassr to edge out Esteghlal 1-0 in the AFC Champions League Elite on Tuesday.

Ronaldo, who was on the score-sheet from the spot when Portugal beat Iran in the 2006 World Cup, has now been without a goal in four meetings with teams from the Middle East country - including the 2018 World Cup encounter where he had a penalty saved by goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand. The Portuguese still played his part in Al Nassr's match winner as his goal-ward header from Miroslav

Brozovic's corner was pushed high into the air by Blues keeper Seyyed Hossein Hosseini, before Spanish international Laporte rose to steer the rebound home on the far post with nine minutes left on the clock. Meanwhile, South African Pitso Mosimane, who was named as the Tehran Blues' new head coach last Friday and watched the game from the stands in Dubai's Rashid Stadium, was treated to a glimpse of the task on his hands when taking over from interim coach Sohrab Bakhtiarizadeh for Saturday's game at Khaybar in the Iranian Pro League. For all their defensive struggles throughout the season, Esteghlal players put in a solid performance to stifle Al Nassr's formidable front-line, also featuring former Liverpool striker Sadio Mane, before

the Spanish center-back made the difference at the end.

Bakhtiarizadeh was pleased with his team's display, but lamented the chances his men missed on the break.

"I believe we saw a very good game from a technical standpoint. Both teams started with different plans, aiming to score, and we focused on playing behind the opponents, knowing they had creative and experienced attackers. Our goal was to close the spaces and limit their chances while looking to strike on counter-attacks," said the interim coach.

"Defensively, we performed well except for a lapse that led to their goal. We had good chances to score on the counter, but we didn't capitalize.

"Even after conceding, we had opportunities to equalize but failed to take advantage. Our strategy was based on the resources we had, not on whether it was a home or away game. We believed this approach could neutralize Al Nassr's stars like Ronaldo and Mane while hurting them on the break. Unfortunately, we didn't make the most of our chances, which cost us the result."

As if Esteghlal fans needed more reason to rue a second successive defeat in the competition, instrumental winger Mehrdad Mohammadi faces a lengthy layoff after leaving the pitch seven minutes into the game with a leg injury.

The result left Esteghlal in the sixth place of the West Zone's 12-team table with three points, while Al Nassr is fourth with seven points.



● FFIRI



● SUSANA VERA/REUTERS

Ancelotti lauds 'rare and extraordinary' Vinicius after Dortmund win

REUTERS- Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti praised the 'extraordinary' Vinicius Jr on Tuesday after the Brazilian forward scored a second-half hat-trick to help them fight back from two goals down and thrash visitors Borussia Dortmund 5-2 in the Champions League.

Ancelotti told a press conference he was convinced that the 24-year-old Vinicius would win the Ballon d'Or award for the best player in the

world on Monday.

"What I can say is that it's rare to see a player who plays a second half like Vinicius did. And not because of the three goals but because of his character; he's extraordinary," Ancelotti said.

"Vinicius is going to win (the Ballon d'Or), not for what he did tonight, but for what he did last year. These three goals are already going to count for next year's Ballon d'Or, that's for

sure. He is a player who gets whistled at because he can make a difference." In a rematch of last season's final, Ancelotti said there was no panic in the changing room after Real went into the halftime break two goals down, and that his side had the maturity and experience to understand what they needed to do to come back.

"We lived it calmly, calmly (over the break). We changed the system and came back playing more intensely,"

Ancelotti said.

"Talking about scoring three goals might have seemed utopian, so we talked about small details like passing well, winning duels... We had to win the dynamic of the game and from there you start to win the game. "We were timid in the first half, we weren't intense on the ball and in the second half we did better with more quality, more pressure. It was the best second half of the season."