

# Greco-Roman triumph in Tirana as Iran keeps excelling in age-group wrestling

## Sports Desk

It might be a decade since Iran last won a team title at the Seniors World Championships but the Greco-Roman under-23 crown in Tirana, Albania, on Wednesday night marked the latest episode in the country's ongoing success in age-group wrestling.

Iranian young guns notched up triple gold medals and four bronzes to lift a 14th team trophy in five years for the country across different youth-level world championships.

Fardin Hedayati brought down the curtain on yet another glorious campaign for the Iranians by walking away with the 130kg crown.

The 21-year-old rounded off his dominant run with a 6-0 victory over Russian Dmitrii Baboryko, participating as a neutral athlete, in the superheavyweight final.

Hedayati won three of his five bouts by technical superiority, while Mykhailo Vyshnyvetskyi of Ukraine was the only opponent to score against the Iranian, though he eventually fell to a 12-4 defeat.

With last year's world junior title also under his belt, Hedayati, who stole the headlines when he stunned Turkish great Riza Kayaalp in June's Ranking Series event, will now set his sights on further success in the seniors' competitions, though standing between him and a place in the national team is Amin Mirzazadeh, the reigning world champion and a bronze medalist at the Paris Olympics.

Ali Ahmadi Vafa won a first gold medal for Iran on the final day of the Greco-Roman contests, adding the 55kg glory to his world under-17 and under-20 golds. Ahmadi Vafa was up against Rashad Mammadov of Azerbaijan in the final and fought back from a 3-0 deficit in the first period to outclass the European silver medalist after the break, with a sensational four-pointer on the edge sealing a 11-3 win for the Iranian teenager. Ahmadi Vafa credits his training this year and his study of his opponents as the major factors for his improvement after suffering close losses in the age-group World Championships last year.

"I spent a full year in training camp and put in a lot of effort. A thorough analysis of all my opponents with the coaching staff contributed to this achievement. I was able to reap the rewards of all my hard work over the past year," said Ah-



madi Vafa, who trained with the senior team in the 45-day break between the U20 and U23 World Championships.

"A few days after we returned to Iran, we went to the senior camp," he said. "We were under a lot of physical strain, so the coaching staff decided to make our training sessions a bit lighter than the others."

"Our bodies responded well. I always felt deep inside that I could do it. I always say that I'm the best in my weight class."

"The decision of the coaches is that I have to move up to the 60kg category, which will be a lot tougher. But I need to work harder to be able to win the gold at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics." Elsewhere on Wednesday, Erfan Jarkani

and Ali Oskou added a couple of bronze medals to Iran's Greco-Roman haul in Tirana.

Representing the country in the 63kg contests, Jarkani bounced back from a last-eight 3-2 loss to eventual gold medalist Vitalie Eriomenco of Moldova to defeat Armenia's Arman Vardanyan 8-0 and share the third podium with Polish Mairbek Salimov.

Oskou, also beaten by a Moldovan wrestler in Alexandrin Gutu, eased past opponents from Colombia and the host country in repechage before coming out victorious (6-4) against Uzbekistan's Doniyorxon Nakibov for a joint bronze in the 77kg event – alongside Khasay Hasanli of Azerbaijan – while Gutu went on to beat German Samuel Bellscheidt

in the final.

Wednesday's results came after Mohammad Naqousi, Danial Sohrabi, and Shayan Habib-Zare' had won three medals at the Feti Borova Sports Hall on the preceding night.

Naqousi, who was only handed a place in the Iranian team when world U20 champion Alireza Abdevali suffered an eye injury, defeated American Beka Melelashvili 4-3 for to claim the 82kg crown.

A 67kg gold medalist in the competition in 2022, Sohrabi recovered from a fall defeat against Armenian Shant Khachatrian in the quarterfinals to finish with a consolation bronze in the 72kg class, thanks to an emphatic victory (9-0) over Georgios Barbanos of Sweden.



Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Fardin Hedayati makes his entry for the superheavyweight final at the U23 World Championships in Tirana, Albania, on October 23, 2024.

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Habib-Zare' began his 97kg campaign in despair, falling to an 8-0 defeat against Abubakar Khaslakhanau, but made the most of his second chance when the Belarusian reached the final, beating Estonian Richard Karelson 8-5 in a thrilling third-place bout.

Hassan Rangraz's men collected 149 points to stand atop the team table – 28 points clear of runner-up Georgia – with Armenia finishing third on 93 points.



## Asian Youth Beach Handball Championship:

# Iran beats Thailand to win men's title

## Sports Desk

Iran lifted the men's trophy at the Asian Youth Beach Handball Championship in Bangkok, Thailand, thanks to a final-day victory over the

host. Stepping into the game on the back of five successive wins, Iranian boys defeated their crown in emphatic fashion, coming out on top in straight sets against

Thailand – the champion in the inaugural edition of the competition in 2016.

Iran began its campaign in the third edition of the competition with a 2-1 win against Oman.

Iranian boys went on to beat Jordan (2-0), China (2-1), and Qatar (2-1) before defeating Indonesia in straight sets on the penultimate day of the event. Iran had already secured a place in next year's

World Championship with a place in the top three of the competition's seven-team table. Iran defeated France to win the men's bronze in the 2022 World Championship in Greece.

## Mancini out as Saudi Arabia coach after 14 months in charge

REUTERS – Roberto Mancini has left his role as coach of Saudi Arabia after his contract was ended by mutual agreement, the national team announced on Thursday. The 59-year-old Italian took the helm of the Saudi national team in August 2023, replacing Herve Renard.

Under Mancini, the Saudis were knocked out of the Asian Cup in the last 16 earlier this year after losing in a penalty shootout to South Korea. "The Saudi soccer federation's Board of Directors and the national team coach, Italian Roberto Mancini reached a joint agreement

on Thursday to end the contractual relationship," the national team posted on social media platform X. The Saudis are third in Group C of Asia's third round of World Cup preliminaries with five points. They are five points adrift of group leaders Japan after four matches. They lost 2-0 at home to Japan

on Oct. 10 before being held to a scoreless draw by Bahrain five days later.

The top two in each group advance automatically to the World Cup while the third and fourth-placed sides go into another round of preliminaries with the bottom two finishers eliminated.



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