

# U23 Wrestling World Championships: Firouzpour, Ma'soumi cruise to freestyle golds



Amirhossein Firouzpour (l) and Amirreza Ma'soumi celebrate with Iranian flag after winning the gold medal of their respective freestyle class at the U23 Wrestling World Championships in Tirana, Albania, on October 26, 2024. UWW

## Sports Desk

Amirhossein Firouzpour and Amirreza Ma'soumi dominated their respective weight classes as Iran collected three freestyle medals at the U23 Wrestling World Championships in Tirana, Albania.

Ebrahim Khari added a bronze to Iran's haul on Saturday, when he bounced back from a last-four defeat (12-2) against Russian defending champion Bashir Magomedov – participating as a neutral athlete – to rally past Armenia's Levik Mikayelyan 4-3 and share the third podium with Indian Abhishek Dhaka in the 61kg contests.

"A bronze was nothing more than I deserved here. It could have been a more colorful prize, though I am still glad I won a first medal for the Iranian freestyle squad in Tirana," Khari said. "The Armenian opponent was a decent wrestler and I had fight hard to come from behind in the final minute," added the Iranian, who won three bouts by technical superiority before the semifinal setback. Magomedov went on to beat Ruslan Abdullayev of Azerbaijan 4-0 in the final.

## Double domination

Ma'soumi and Firouzpour might be second in the pecking order

of the seniors' national team but the two proved to be the ones to beat when it comes to world age-group competitions. Firouzpour, who fell short against Kamran Qasempour in the Iranian team trials for the upcoming Seniors World Championships, claimed his second world under-23 title in style, outmuscling American Jacob Cardenas in the final showpiece of the 92kg event. The American held the criteria advantage, 4-4, at the break but it was all Firouzpour and his under-hook offense in the second period as the Iranian walked away with a 11-4 triumph.

A former world cadet and junior champion, Firouzpour began

his campaign with a 13-1 rout of Moldovan Ion Demian and then came out on top 3-1 against Greek wrestler Gkivi Bliatze for a place in the semifinals, where he defeated Turkey's Fatih Altunbas 8-2.

"I suffered from a minor elbow injury before the tournament and was far from my best form yesterday. I rode my experience to make it to the final," said Firouzpour, also a two-time Asian senior champion, adding: "Thank God I could raise my level for today's final and delivered my best performance against the American wrestler."

Ma'soumi, meanwhile, was again in a league of his own in the su-

perheavyweight class.

Chasing a sixth world age-group title, the 20-year-old made a quick work of India's Anirudh Kumar, Russian Abdulla Kurbanov, and American Lucas Stoddard to progress to the 125kg final, not conceding a single point in the superiority wins against all three. It was also a one-way traffic in the final, as the Iranian pulled in yet another masterclass in under-hooks and aggressive wrestling to demolish European champion Alen Khubulov of Bulgaria 11-0 and clinch a third world under-23 gold.

Ma'soumi's emphatic triumph in Tirana was a testament to his merit for a shot at seniors' glory,

though he will still have to see off reigning world champion and Olympic silver medalist Amirhossein Zare' for the national team berth.

Saturday's results came after the Iranian Greco-Roman squad had lifted a third team trophy in five years last week in the Feti Borova Sports Hall.

Ali Ahmadi Vafa (55kg), Mohammad Naqousi (82kg), and Fardin Hedayati (130kg) notched up three golds, while Danial Sohrabi (72kg), Shayan Habib-Zare' (97kg), Erfan Jarkani (63kg), and Ali Oskou (77kg) finished with a consolation bronze, as Iran stood atop the team table with 149 points – 28 clear of runner-up Georgia.

## Persian Gulf Pro League:

# Mosimane given reality check in start to Esteghlal tenure

## Sports Desk

Esteghlal's miserable start to the Persian Gulf Pro League season continued with a 3-1 thrashing at the hands of newly-promoted Kheybar Khorramabad, a defeat that laid bare the daunting task facing the Tehran Blues' new head coach Pitsso Mosimane. Mehrdad Qanbari gave the home side, which also had a new coach in Saeid Daqiqi on the bench, the lead with 10 minutes into the game but Ramin Rezaeian's header pulled Mosimane's men level in the 55th minute.

Masoud Mohebbi slotted home four minutes later to restore the lead for Kheybar before Mohsen Sefid-Choghaei's smashing strike deep into stoppage time sealed the maximum points for Daqiqi's side. Esteghlal, which has now lost five in six outings across all competitions, remains 12th in the table with eight points – three clear of the relegation zone – and with the domestic and continental games coming thick and fast, Mosimane is left with much to do to turn his side's fortunes around.

Esteghlal will take on Tractor in a highly-anticipated game in the Iranian top flight at home on Thursday before visiting Riyadh to face Saudi heavyweight Al Hilal in the AFC Champions League Elite next Monday. Elsewhere on Sunday, Persepolis celebrated a fifth successive victory in the league by defeating Shams Azar 2-0 in Tehran.

Ali Alipour bagged his third goal of the season from close range in the 11th minute, smuggling in a Soheil Sahraei's low cross, before Vahid Amiri's sensational lob from

outside the box in the 91st minute sealed the win for Juan Carlos Garrido's side. Persepolis will be back in league action against Esteghlal Khuzestan in Ahvaz on Wednesday and then chase a much-needed first victory in the Champions League when playing Qatari club Al Gharafa in Dubai next week.

Kheybar's Faraz Emam-Ali (9) and Esteghlal's Ramin Rezaeian go up for a header during a Persian Gulf Pro League game in Khorramabad, Iran, on Oct. 26, 2024. FFIRI



# Renard reappointed Saudi boss after Mancini exit

BBC – Herve Renard has been reappointed manager of Saudi Arabia following Roberto Mancini's departure. Frenchman Renard took charge of the Saudi men's team from July 2019 to March 2023 and led them to a remarkable victory over eventual tournament winners Argentina in the group

stage of the 2022 Qatar World Cup.

The 56-year-old left the role to lead France's women at the 2023 World Cup and on home soil at this year's Olympics. He was replaced at the Saudi helm by Mancini, who he now succeeds after the Italian agreed with the Saudi Arabian

Football Federation to end his contract.

Mancini, 59, left his role as Italy head coach and became Saudi Arabia manager in August 2023, but he endured a difficult time in charge.

"I am back," Renard said in a video, external posted on the Saudi national team's X account.

"I did not intend to leave, but when your country knock on your door, you have to respond. I did not finish my story with Saudi yet."

Renard's second spell in charge will begin with World Cup qualifiers away to Australia and Indonesia in November.