

U23 Wrestling World Championships: Iran lifts historic freestyle trophy, completes team title double

Sports Desk

A haul of seven medals, including three golds, saw Iran clinch a first freestyle title at the U23 Wrestling World Championships in Tirana, Albania.

Pejman Dorostkar's 10-man squad collected 158 points to stand atop the table with 158 points – 56 clear of runner-up Japan – with Azerbaijan finishing third with 100 points.

The freestyle triumph meant Iran made a clean sweep of titles in Tirana – following last week's Greco-Roman crown – taking the country's tally to a remarkable 15 age-group team trophies in five years.

Mahdi Yousefi, who won a world under-20 bronze in September, rounded off his campaign in Tirana in style by grabbing the 79kg gold on Sunday.

Stepping into the final showpiece on the back of four superiority wins, Yousefi continued his dominance against China's Feng Lu, marching to a 12-5 victory.

Mahdi Hajilouei, meanwhile, enjoyed an impressive run to reach the 97kg final but had to settle for a silver after a 11-6 loss to high-profile Rizabek Aitmukhan of Kazakhstan.

There was little to separate the two wrestlers in the opening stages, with Aitmukhan holding a criteria advantage (2-2) at the break before he pulled away in the second period to add the under-23 glory to his world senior title in 2023, while the Iranian took a second world medal fol-



Mahdi Yousefi (R) celebrates with the Iranian flag after winning the freestyle 79kg title at the U23 Wrestling World Championships in Tirana, Albania, on October 27, 2024.
● UWW

lowing his 2021 junior silver. Elsewhere on the final day of the competitions, Ali Mo'meni and Abbas Ebrahimzadeh added a couple of bronze medals to Iran's medal count. Mo'meni recovered from a last-four 4-3 defeat against Kyrgyz-

stan's Abdumalik Karachov to outmuscle American Maxwell Gallagher 8-0 for a third-place finish in the 57kg event – alongside Lunus Iavbatirov, who was part of the individual neutral athletes' team. India's Chirag Chikkara defeated

Karachov 4-2 in the final. In the 65kg weight class, Ebrahimzadeh – beaten 11-7 in the semifinals by Japanese Kaiji Ogino – had an easy job in the third-place bout against Turkey's Abdullah Toprak, winning 15-4. Bilol Sharip Uulu of Kyrgyzstan

took the other bronze, while Russian Ibragim Ibragimov made a quick work of Ogino (14-2) to defend his title. Sunday's results came after Iran had won three freestyle medals on the preceding night at the Feti Borova Sports Hall.

Amirreza Ma'soumi didn't concede a single point in his four wins by superiority, including the final showdown against European under-23 champion Alen Khubulov of Bulgaria, to walk away with the ultimate prize of the 125kg contests – a sixth world age-group gold for the superheavyweight prodigy in two years.

A former world cadet and junior champion, Amirhossein Firouzpour claimed his second under-23 title in emphatic fashion, defeating American Jacob Cardenas 11-4 in the 92kg final.

Ebrahim Khari left Tirana with a consolation bronze, thanks to a 4-3 win against Armenia's Levik Mikayelyan in the 61kg event. Last Wednesday, the Iranian Greco-Roman squad had lifted a third team trophy in five years, courtesy of seven medals.

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 bronze, as Iran topped the standing with 149 points, followed by Georgia (121pts) and Armenia (93pts).



● AFC

Iran heads into U17 Asian Cup finals

Sports Desk

Iran came from behind to beat Jordan 4-2 on the final day of the AFC U17 Asian Cup qualifiers and book a place in next April's finals in Saudi Arabia.

Iran still had Hong Kong to thank for beating Syria 2-1 to help Abbas Chamanian's boys finish second to North Korea in Group A and progress as one of the five best runners-up.

Iran started on the front foot in Zarqa's Prince Mohammed Stadium and took the lead through host captain Karzq Shadi Alqasem's 15th-minute own goal.

Already eliminated after suffering three defeats, Jordan fought back to draw level through defender Nour Aldeen Amro in the 37th minute with forward Mohammad Mustafa Aburomeh putting the home side ahead three minutes later.

Iran, however, managed to turn things around late in the game, with defender Abolfazl Kazemi netting the equalizer in the 71st minute.

Salman Ghaffari restored Iran's lead six minutes later before Mehرداد Aqa Mohammadi's spot-kick deep into stoppage time confirmed the points for Chamanian's side.

Later in the day, Abdurrahman Dinawai put Syria in front in the 64th minute, only to see his strike canceled out by Hui Siu Chung a minute later.

Midfielder Jeffery Chin struck the decisive winner in the 88th minute. Iran began its qualification campaign with a 7-1 rout of Hong Kong but fell to a shock loss to North Korea, which went on to win the group with a clean sweep of four wins.

Chamanian's boys bounced back to beat West Asian champion Syria 1-0 before Sunday's triumph to conclude the qualifiers with nine points.

Quality Salah the difference-maker for Liverpool, Slot says

REUTERS – Quality players like Mohamed Salah are crucial in big games, Liverpool manager Arne Slot said after the Egypt international's late strike secured a 2-2 draw against Arsenal in the Premier League on Sunday.

Salah, who said last month he was poised to leave Liverpool after this season, also scored in last weekend's 2-1 win over Chelsea, after netting the winning goal from the penalty spot at Wolverhampton Wanderers.

"I think that's one of the things that top players have, that they are always available and they show up

in the big games," Slot told reporters.

"That's also what you need if you are a big club, like we are and like Arsenal is, then you need these quality players because if you don't have them, it's going to be quite difficult to get your results.

Salah, who is tied with Robbie Fowler as Liverpool's eighth-highest goalscorer of all time with 163 strikes, has scored six goals in the league this season. Salah was on the scoresheet in five of Liverpool's seven league wins.

"It's something you need to have as a club, to have these players that can make the difference for you,

and Mo was that today offensively," Slot added.

Liverpool, who have 22 points from nine matches, are one point behind leaders Manchester City. Slot's team play Brighton & Hove Albion twice this week, away in the League Cup on Wednesday followed by a home league game on Saturday.



Mohamed Salah celebrates after scoring Liverpool's second equalizer during a 2-2 draw against Arsenal in the Premier League at the Emirates Stadium, London, Britain, on Oct. 27, 2024.
● XINHUA

