

Iranian weightlifter Yousefi keen to shatter world C&J record

Sports Desk

Iranian weightlifter Alireza Yousefi has set his sights on a massive goal for the next month's IWF World Championships in Manama: Breaking the seniors clean & jerk world record.

Yousefi, 21, has been the dominant force of the juniors' super-heavyweight class for the past two years.

A triple world gold medalist in 2022, Yousefi repeated the achievement to help Iran win the men's title at the World Junior Championships in Guadalajara, Mexico, last year.

However, his most sensational performance perhaps came in the 2023 Asian Seniors Championships in Jinju, South Korea, where the Iranian young gun set a new world junior C&J record of 246kg to win a precious silver medal behind Gor Minasyan of Bahrain.

Having been named in the Iranian provisional 12-man squad for the world event last week, Yousefi is confident of setting yet another benchmark in the Bahraini capital.

"I have been preparing well and improved my personal records in training. I'm sure I will have some decent results [at the World Championships] if I keep going like



● IWF

this," said Yousefi, who is with the rest of team in a training camp on the Kish Island before the final squad is announced for the Manama visit.

"My primary gold will be to win

a medal at the World Championships, but at the same time, I'll be focused on breaking the world clean and jerk record in the seniors age class. I'm confident the feat is within my reach,

given my recent lifts in training sessions," said the Iranian.

Yousefi, however, will face a daunting task in setting a new clean & jerk high as legendary Georgian Lasha Talakhadze is

the current world record holder of the category with a remarkable 267kg – set in the 2021 World Championships in Tashkent.

The good news for Yousefi and

all of the +109kg contenders is that Talakhadze, who won a third successive Olympic gold in August, was absent in the IWF's entry list for the world event on Friday.

The Georgian's absence sets the stage for the tightest race for the superheavyweight crown in years, with Armenian Varazdat Lalayan, and Minasyan – Olympic silver and bronze winners respectively – as well as Iranian Ali Davoudi, who won the silver at the Tokyo Games but missed out on the podium in Paris, all in the mix.

"The World Championships are taking place just a few months after the Paris Games, which means all the Olympic contestants might be far from their peak of fitness, though I'm still going to focus on my own performance in the in Manama," said Sharifi, who has been dealing with a ligament injury for a while and will have to undergo a knee surgery after the upcoming competitions.

Having collected three medals – including Davoudi's C&J bronze – in last year's World Championships, Iran will be looking for a fresh start after a below-par Olympic campaign in the French capital, where the country failed to win a weightlifting medal in the Games for the first time since Beijing 2008.

Jahanbakhsh set for new chapter in Dutch Eredivisie

Sports Desk

Iranian midfielder Alireza Jahanbakhsh will be looking to make his debut for SC Heerenveen when the Dutch club takes on Go Ahead Eagles at home in the Eredivisie today.

Having parted ways with Feyenoord in the summer Jahanbakhsh, 31, joined Heerenveen as a free agent for the rest of the season last Wednesday – marking a fourth chapter in the Dutch top flight for the Iranian.

First introduced to the European club football with NEC Nijmegen in 2013, Jahanbakhsh enjoyed his most prolific spell with AZ Alkmaar between 2015 and 2018, contributing with 37 goals and 31 assists in 111 outings. The Iranian enjoyed a most successful campaign in the 2017/18 season, finishing as the league's leading marksman with 21 strikes, which convinced Brighton & Hove Albion pay a then-club

record €22.5 million to sign him. His contribution for the Premier League outfit, however, was limited to four goals and two assists in 61 games, with 31 of those appearances coming in the starting XI.

On his return to the Netherlands, Jahanbakhsh won the Eredivisie title with Feyenoord in 2023 before lifting the KNVB Cup trophy last season, while finishing runner-up to AS Roma in the inaugural UEFA Europa Conference League in 2022.

"I can add experience, but, of course, also creativity, goals and assists. I promise the supporters that I will always work hard and do everything I can to make them happy," Jahanbakhsh – involved in 91 goals as a provider or finisher in 183 Eredivisie appearances – said in a first interview with Heerenveen official website.

Jahanbakhsh is the second Iranian to wear the Heerenveen shirt over the past decade, following

former international teammate Reza Qouchannejad, who scored 32 goals in 77 games for the club between 2016 and 2018.

"I used to watch a lot of Heerenveen games when Reza played here. He is one of the best players we have ever had in our national team. He has scored a lot of goals here and done well. I hope I can do that too," Jahanbakhsh said.

Heerenveen head coach Robin van Persie, who worked with Jahanbakhsh as an assistant to Arne Slot in Feyenoord, will hope the Iranian's addition will turn his side's fortunes around after a slow start to season, which has seen the club sit 14th in the 18-team table with 11 points in as many games – just a couple of points clear of the relegation play-off spot.

"I know Robin van Persie from my time at Feyenoord. He was with us once or twice a week to work with the wingers and the strikers. I had a really good relationship

with him at the time. He called me a couple of weeks ago to ask me about my situation. He explained the project and told me what he expected from me tactically, and I then decided to come here," the Iranian said of his previous collaboration with the former Arsenal and Manchester United striker.

The ex-Dutch international was full of praise for his new signing in a press conference on Friday. "He's a great guy," RvP said. "But of course he's here because he can play football well. Ali brings positivity, quality and hopefully goals and assists. He's also a real leader, on and off the pitch."

The Dutchman, however, believes today's game may come a bit too soon for the Iranian.

"He has played 90 minutes once in the past five months, so we have to build it up slowly. We all want to see him, but he needs time. He has trained twice so far and that went well. We will see tomorrow whether he is there."



● SC Heerenveen.nl



Aliakbari suffers first-round submission against Brazilian Almeida

Sports Desk

Iranian mixed martial artist Amir Aliakbari fell to a first ONE Championship loss in three years, suffering a first-round submission against 17-time BJJ world champion Marcus 'Buchecha' Almeida of Brazil in Friday's ONE 169 event in Bangkok, Thailand.

The Brazilian landed a take-down in the bout's opening minutes, and once he had his Iranian foe's back flat on the canvas, he turned in a clinical performance. Almeida patiently passed the

former world Greco-Roman wrestling champion's guard, and then he took his back and sunk in the fight-ending rear-naked choke in the blink of an eye at the 3:15 mark of the opening frame.

The victory improved the Brazilian's career slate to 5-1 and kept his 100-percent finishing rate intact, while boosting his chances of a shot at the coveted ONE heavyweight MMA world title, currently held by three-division world champion Anatoly Malykhin. Aliakbari (14-4), meanwhile, saw

his run of four successive victories in the organization come to an end, with his last win coming in the fourth round against Indian Arjan Bhullar in ONE 166: Qatar in March.

◀ MMA fighter Amir Aliakbari (r) is seen in action against Marcus Almeida at the ONE 169 event in Bangkok, Thailand, on Nov. 8, 2024.

● ONE CHAMPIONSHIP