

Household names lined up for National Wrestling Championships

Sports Desk

Kamran Qasempour's bid for a berth in next year's Wrestling World Championships will begin with participation at the National Championships.

Those wrestlers who failed to win a medal at the Paris Olympics and last month's World Championships will have to take part at December's national event to have a shot at a place in the Iranian freestyle squad, according to the selection process for major international tournaments in 2025, which was unveiled by the sport's governing body in the country this week.

Two-time world gold medalist Qasempour made his long-awaited return to action in October's world event in Tirana but missed out on the 92kg podium after his last-four setback against Russian sensation Abdulrashid Sadulaev, who was followed by a 6-2 loss to American great David Taylor in the third-place bout.

Double world bronze winner Younes Emami will also have to participate at the National Championships after his freestyle 74kg campaign in Paris came to an end against American Kyle Dake in the quarterfinals.

Alireza Sarlak, a former world and Asian silver medalist, also left the French capital empty-handed due to a weigh-in failure in the 57kg class and will be in action at the flagship do-



Iranian freestyle wrestler Kamran Qasempour (blue) is seen in action against American David Taylor in the 92kg bronze-medal bout at the Wrestling World Championships in Tirana, Albania, on Oct. 31, 2024.

● UWW

the Iranian 97kg slot at the Paris Olympics, looked to be back to top form in his familiar 92kg territory when he eased past opponents from Japan, Turkey, and Moldova. Awaiting Qasempour in the last-four round was two-time Olympic champion Sadulaev, who was chasing a sixth world gold in Tirana. Qasempour looked to have done enough for a famous victory before the Russian scored a four-point takedown with four seconds left on the clock to secure a 5-3 win.

"Kamran had been out of action for months with an injury before the competitions and did not have proper training. Sadulaev is an all-time great in the sport and was the clear favorite in the semifinal," Dorostkar said, adding: "Qasempour still came up with the right gameplan against Sadulaev and delivered a brave performance. He would have won the bout if it wasn't for his single mistake as well as Sadulaev's higher experience in the closing seconds."

"Kamran suffered a mental breakdown after the semifinal setback and couldn't sleep all night. We tried to lift his spirits for the bronze-medal contest, but to no avail, and the mental strain ultimately got the better of him against Taylor."

mestic competition.

Rahman Amouzad, Amirhossein Zare', and Amir-Ali Azarpira – the Iranian medal-winning trio at the Paris Games – as well as Mohammad Nokhodi, who won a 79kg bronze in the Albanian capital, will join the latter stages

of the Iranian trials.

Joining them in being exempt from the National Championships are Ali Mo'meni, Ebrahim Khari, Abbas Ebrahimzadeh, Ali Khorramdel, Ali Rezaei, Mahdi Yousefi, Abolfazl Rahmani, Amirhossein Firouzpour, Mah-

di Hajiloueian, and Amirreza Ma'soumi – Iranian medalists at the world junior and under-23 championships – as well as 2023 world cadet champion Sina Khalili and two-time world silver winner Amirmohammad Yazdani.

'Mental breakdown'

Pejman Dorostkar, the head coach of the Iranian freestyle team, believes a "mental breakdown" cost Qasempour in his bout against Taylor last month. Qasempour, who stood behind Azarpira in the pecking order for

Iran midfielder Qoddous ruled out of Kyrgyzstan game with injury

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Iran midfielder Saman Qoddous will miss Tuesday's World Cup qualifier against Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek with a hamstring injury.

The Ittihad Kalba player, who sat out Thursday's 3-2 victory over North Korea with the same problem, left the Iranian squad on Saturday to fly back to the UAE for further treatment on his injury.

Tractor center-back Shoja Khalilzadeh also missed the visit to the Kyrgyz capital after receiving his marching orders in the second half against North Korea and is likely to be replaced by Persepolis defender Hossein Kan'anizadegan in the starting XI. Mohammad Mohebbi, who found the net twice on Thursday, will be the other key absentee for Team Melli in Bishkek after suffering the same injury as Qoddous, as Sepahan's Mahdi Limouchi received a late callup to fill in for the Rostov FC winger.

Iran sits atop the Group A table with 13 points after five rounds of matches – three points clear of second-placed Uzbekistan, which fell to a 3-2 loss to Qatar in Doha last time out in the Asian qualifiers, and, more significantly, six above the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

With a top-two finish in each of the three groups securing direct qualification for the 2026 finals, maximum points in Tuesday's game will all but guarantee a place for Amir Qalenoee's side in the showpiece cohosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

Iran had to dig deep for a 1-0 win on home soil in the reverse fixture in September, with a Mahdi Taremi's first-half strike making the difference between the two sides in Isfahan's Fooladshahr Stadium.

Alcaraz relishing role in Nadal's career farewell in Davis Cup



● CLIVE BRUNSKILL/GETTY IMAGES

REUTERS – Spain's Carlos Alcaraz said playing in Rafa Nadal's career farewell in the Davis Cup Final Eight will be the most special event he will play in his career.

Nadal, who captured 22 Grand Slam titles in a glittering career, will make his final bow in the team event being staged in Malaga starting Tuesday.

Spain will face the Netherlands in their opening match in what is likely to be a momentous occasion.

"It's probably the most special tournament I'll play in my career, because of what's happening, because of the circumstances," Alcaraz was quoted by the ATP website after arriving in Spain following his ATP Finals exit.

"The Davis Cup has always been a tournament that I'd

love to win one day, I'm passionate about representing Spain.

"Having Rafa by my side, knowing it's his last tournament, will make it much more special."

The 21-year-old Alcaraz, who already owns four Grand Slam titles, played with Nadal at this year's Paris Olympics, the pair losing in the quarterfinals.

"I'll try to contribute and help the team any way I can – for me, for Spain and especially for Rafa," Alcaraz said.

"No player deserves more to finish the incredible career he had with a title, and I know how special the Davis Cup is for him. It will be a difficult challenge but winning it for Rafa is a huge motivation."

Spain have won the Davis Cup six times, the last occasion in

2019 when Nadal inspired the hosts to the trophy in Madrid.

"Rafa's farewell is much more important, at least for me," Alcaraz said. "The Davis Cup is every year. Rafa's farewell, saying goodbye to a legend of the sport, unfortunately only happens once. Personally I'm very excited to be by Rafa's side for his farewell."

"And the fact that it's in the Davis, which is a very important tournament for him, virtually where he started his career with that victory against (Andy) Roddick (in 2004). It will be an incredible event because of the occasion and hopefully it will end with the title."

Eight nations are contesting the Davis Cup Final Eight with action taking place in Malaga between Nov. 19 and Nov. 24.

● ALI SHARIFZADEH/IRNA