

Yazdani set for weight class switch on return from injury

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestling sensation Hassan Yazdani is set to change his weight class when returning from a shoulder injury, his personal coach confirmed.

A winner of a national-high 10 world and Olympic medals, the freestyle wrestler had to undergo a second surgery on his injured shoulder in September and is expected to be sidelined for up to 18 months.

Yazdani, who had been out of action for eight months with the same problem before last June's Ranking Series event in Budapest, chased a second Olympic gold in Paris in August, but

had to settle for the 86kg silver after being hit with the recurring injury during a 7-1 loss to Bulgarian Magomed Ramazanov in the final showpiece.

"Hassan has gained some weight since the second surgery, which is why he has decided not to compete in the 86kg class again," Hemmat Moslemi told Varzesh3, adding: "He will surely miss the 2025 World Championships as he is not willing to rush back to wrestling."

"He will go to Paris [where he had the surgery] in three or four months to be visited by his surgeon and know about the timeframe for his full recovery," added the Iranian

coach.

Iranian fans thought the final defeat in Paris was the last episode of the 29-year-old's storied career but Yazdani was quick to reject the retirement plan on his return from the French capital as he remains eager to collect the coveted ultimate prize in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics - one that will see him overtake taekwondo great Hadi Saei as the most-decorated Iranian in the history of the Games with double golds and silvers apiece.

Asked what will be Yazdani's future plans, Moslemi said: "As it stands, Hassan will participate in the 92kg contests in the 2026

World Championships, and will then move up to the 97kg category if he decides to compete in the Asian Games.

"His ultimate goal will be to take part in the 97kg class in the L.A. Olympics, but we should take one step at a time," Moslemi said.

Yazdani had already switched his weight class once through his senior career, moving from the 74kg category to 86kg after winning the Olympic gold in Rio 2016, though Moslemi insisted: "We should wait for him to be visited by his doctor to make a full assessment of his body and, most significantly, the shoulder injury."



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Iranian Hazfi Cup: Joao off the mark in Reds shirt as Persepolis eases into last-16

Sports Desk

Angolan striker Lucas Joao bagged his long-awaited first goal in the Persepolis colors as the Tehran Reds defeated Mes Songun 3-0 at home to head into the round of 16 in the Iranian Hazfi Cup.

Having teed up fellow-striker Ali Alipour for the opener in the first half, Joao dribbled past a Mes defender before his composed effort found the bottom corner to double the Reds' lead against the second-tier club on the hour

mark - his most productive performance in 10 games across all competitions since signing from Qatari outfit Umm Salal in September.

Masoud Rigi came off the bench to seal the victory with a third goal three minutes from normal time.

Next for Spanish Juan Carlos Garrido's side is a vital away game against Qatar Stars League side Al Rayyan in the AFC Champions League Elite on Monday.

Sitting ninth in the 12-team table of the West Zone with two points,

Persepolis is yet to win a game after four rounds of matches in the continent's flagship club competition and will have to walk away with maximum points against Al Rayyan to remain in contention for a place in the knockout stage.



Persepolis striker Lucas Joao celebrates his goal during a 3-0 win against Mes Songun in the Iranian Hazfi Cup in Tehran, Iran, on Nov. 21, 2024.

● IRNA

I could not leave now, says Guardiola after new City deal

AFP - Pep Guardiola has extended his contract as manager of Premier League champions Manchester City for a further two seasons, saying Thursday "I could not leave now" with the club facing arguably the toughest period of his time at the Etihad Stadium. There had been speculation the 53-year-old's City career could be coming to an end, with the club facing an uncertain future due to an ongoing hearing over 115 breaches of the Premier League's financial regulations - charges they deny completely.

City are also currently on a four-game losing streak in all competitions - the worst of Guardiola's managerial career, excluding penalty shoot-outs - although they are second in the Premier League, five points behind leaders Liverpool.

But reports emerged on Tuesday that Guardiola, who took over at City in 2016 and has since won a total of 18 trophies across all competitions, including six Premier League titles, would stay. That was despite City's director of football Txiki Begiristain, a close

ally of Guardiola, having already confirmed his exit at the end of the campaign.

But with City, on an English record-breaking run of four successive top-flight titles, Guardiola - who led City to a Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League treble in 2023 - said he had changed his mind about this being his last season at the Etihad. "I felt I could not leave now, simple as that," the Catalan boss told the club's media channels.

"Don't ask me the reason why. Maybe the four defeats were the reason why and I felt I cannot leave. I felt the club still want me or had the fact that we were together and that's the reason why we sign."

'Turn the situation'

Guardiola added: "Every time I sign the contract, it's for the last two (years) and after I resign the contract I say okay the last two and still we are here."

"So honestly I think myself, my staff and friends, I think we deserve to be here. I am sorry to say. "I am not arrogant to say, but it's

the truth. I think we deserve after four defeats in a row to bounce back and try to turn the situation. "In that moment, in the period, I had the feeling you have to take the right decisions for the future and I want to take it."

Guardiola explained while the treble represented a "dream come true" and four Premier League titles in a row "amazing", he still felt he had a job to do to help City hit those heights again.

"But you have a past, been lessons and mistakes that we have overcome to arrive in the moment where you are more stable and more consistent," he said.

"We have to recover that because right now we don't have it and that's the target we have to do."

Guardiola, who previously enjoyed a trophy-laden career as a player and coach at Barcelona before taking charge of German giants Bayern Munich, said in an initial club statement: "Manchester City means so much to me...I have a really special feeling for this football club. That is why I am so happy to be staying for another two more seasons."

Guardiola, who thanked the club's Abu-Dhabi-based owner Khaldoon Al Mubarak, chairman Ferran Soriano, Begiristain and the fans for their support, explained: "I have said this many times before, but I have every-

thing a manager could ever wish for, and I appreciate that so much. Hopefully now we can add more trophies to the ones we have already won. That will be my focus."

City chairman Khaldoon Al

Mubarak said: "Like every City fan, I am delighted that Pep's journey with Manchester City will continue; allowing his dedication, passion and innovative thinking to continue to shape the landscape of the game."



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