

Freestyle fightback as Iran completes double over Russia in PWL7

Sports Desk

A sensational freestyle fightback saw Iran make a clean sweep of double team victories over Russia at the Poddubny Wrestling League 7 in Moscow.

The triumph came after the Iranian Greco-Roman team had also edged out the wrestling powerhouse 21-19, despite a 5-5 deadlock, in the event – named after late Soviet wrestler Ivan Poddubny – on the preceding night.

The freestyle contest was decided by an even more razor-thin margin as Iran only managed to emerge victorious thanks to a 2-1 record in superiority wins, though Pejman Dorostkar's 10-man squad still had to overcome a 5-0 deficit.

Former world silver medalist Magomedrasul Idrisov handed the host a first win of the night, beating Ali Mo'meni 3-0 in the 57kg bout, before Zaur Uguev, an Olympic champion in Tokyo, doubled Russians' lead with a 5-1 win against Reza Mo'meni in the 61kg clash.

A thrilling 65kg contest saw Russia's Shamil Mamedov come out on top against Olympic silver winner Rahman Amouzad 10-7, and then Kurban Shiraev beat Sina Khalili 5-2 in the 70kg bout. Four-time world and Olympic champion Zaurbek Sidakov dominated Amir-Mohammad Yazdani 12-1 in their 74kg encounter to



put Russia on the cusp of team victory, but the rest of the Iranian squad had other ideas. Fresh from an under-23 world title in October, Mahdi Yousefi got Iran off the mark with a

massive 7-5 victory over Magomed Magomaev in the 79kg meeting, despite trailing the world silver medalist by four points with less than 40 seconds left on the clock.

Two-time world champion Kamran Qasempour also had to come from behind to beat Ibragim Kadiev 8-5 in the 86kg class and find a little consolation after finishing Oc-

tober's World Championships with a loss to American David Taylor in the bronze-medal contest. Amirhossein Firouzpour – also a gold medalist in last month's



Amirhossein Zare', pictured at the Paris Olympics in August, defeated Shamil Musaev by technical superiority in the 125kg bout to steer Iran to a freestyle team victory over Russia at the Poddubny Wrestling League 7 in Moscow.

● OLYMPIC.IR

under-23 world event – rallied past Magomed Kurbanov 5-4 in a 97kg clash marked by refereeing controversy, with Dorostkar threatening to withdraw the Iranian wrestler after his challenge was rejected by a lengthy video review.

Mojtab Goleij conceded the first point for caution against Samdan Bady Maadyr in the 97kg bout but went on to finish off the Russian with an 11-1 rout, meaning it all went down to the wire in the 125kg clash, featuring Amirhossein Zare' and Shamil Musaev.

A winner of five world and Olympic medals, Zare' was caught off guard by a Musaev's early single-leg takedown but again proved to be in a league of his own in the superheavyweight class, easing to a superiority win (12-2) with 50 seconds remaining. Zare's victory leveled the overall scoreline at 21-all but the emphatic wins in the final two bouts saw Iran ultimately come out on top.

AFC – Victory is the only option Esteghlal and Pakhtakor have when they square off in their AFC Champions League Elite tie today.

Persian Gulf Pro League club Esteghlal are in eighth place in the standings with three points while Uzbekistan's Pakhtakor – on two points – are 10th with the top eight teams to advance to the knockout stage from the West Zone.

Three defeats have followed Esteghlal's opening day 3-0 win against Qatar's Al Gharafa and another loss would make it their longest run without victory on the continental stage. The Tehran Blues have been struggling domestically as well, sitting 10th in the standings on 11 points, 10 behind pacesetters Sepahan SC.

Goals have also been hard to come by as their last three matches ended without Esteghlal finding the back of the net and they desperately need to have their shooting boots on against

Pakhtakor if they are to challenge for a knockout stage berth.

The Uzbekistan side have also found the going tough with a run of two draws and two defeats and will head into the tie having not beaten teams from Iran on the continental stage in their last six meetings.

The head-to-head is, however, in Pakhtakor's favour with two wins in their previous three meetings but it has been a difficult season for them on the domestic and continental stages, with a 2-0 loss to AGMK on Thursday their ninth defeat in the Uzbekistan Super League.

Meanwhile, Esteghlal's city rivals Persepolis will be hoping to claim a first victory of the campaign when playing away to Al Rayyan SC later today.

Both sides are in desperate need of a win with Qatar's Al Rayyan having accumulated three points from four matches while the Iranian

Reds are one behind.

Al Rayyan ended a run of three consecutive defeats with their 1-0 win over Pakhtakor on Matchday Four and will be hoping to carry that form into their tie against Persepolis.

Inconsistency has been a bane this season, with their form in the Qatar top flight also underwhelming with a 2-1 defeat to Al Shamal on Friday leaving them ninth in the standings on 10 points, 15 behind leaders Al Duhail SC.

Persepolis have also found the going tough on the continental stage, managing just two draws but will count on their record against Al Rayyan to get on the winning trail – having won two and drawn one of their last three meetings with the Qatari side. Their domestic form has been good, advancing to the Round of 16 of the Hazfi Cup with a 3-0 defeat of Songoun on Thursday and sitting just a point behind Sepahan in the Iranian Pro League with a game in hand.

AFC Champions League Elite:

Esteghlal, Persepolis desperate for much-needed wins



● AFC

Verstappen lights up Las Vegas with fourth F1 title



Max Verstappen celebrates after securing his fourth Formula One title in a row at the Las Vegas Grand Prix on November 23, 2024.
● MARK THOMPSON/GETTY IMAGES

REUTERS – Red Bull's Max Verstappen lit up the Las Vegas night after securing his fourth Formula One title in a row on Saturday in a race won by George Russell in a Mercedes one-two with Lewis Hamilton.

Verstappen finished where he started in fifth but that was all the Dutch driver needed to put the championship, already effectively over, out of reach of McLaren rival Lando Norris with two rounds to spare.

Norris took the chequered flag in sixth, also where he started, making a late pitstop for fresh tyres to secure a bonus point for fastest lap that still left him an insurmountable 63 points adrift.

"What a season. Four times. Thank you guys. Thank you to everyone," Verstappen said over the radio after being con-

gratulated by team boss Christian Horner.

"It was a little bit more difficult than last year but we pulled through and we gave it all."

Norris was quick to recognise his rival's achievement: "As much as it hurts a little bit, saying congrats doesn't hurt," he said.

"He drove an incredible season and when you have the quickest car he dominated and when he didn't he was still there and always on my heels. He made my life tough, we made his tough at times I'm sure, but he drove a better season."

Russell led away cleanly from pole position, fending off Charles Leclerc who surged from fourth to second at the start, and was never troubled as Hamilton charged back from 10th on the grid

on a cold desert night.

"I was planning on flying in a couple of hours but I'm definitely not getting on that flight," said the race winner. "I will enjoy this evening with all my team."

"It's been a dream of a weekend. I don't know how I've been so quick but I'm just enjoying this ride right now."

Ferrari's Carlos Sainz was third with team mate Leclerc unhappy in fourth, after suffering early tyre trouble, as the Italian team cut the gap in the constructors' standings to McLaren to 24 points. Oscar Piastri was seventh for McLaren, despite collecting a five second penalty for a false start, and Nico Hulkenberg was eighth for U.S.-owned Haas.

Yuki Tsunoda took points for RB in ninth and Verstappen's struggling team mate Sergio Perez got himself back on the scoreboard in 10th.