

## Karate World Cup – National Team Championships: Iran settles for runner-up finish in men's kumite

### Sports Desk

The Iranian kumite team had to settle for the men's silver medal at the WKF Karate World Cup following a final defeat against Egypt in Pamplona, Spain.

Having beaten Japan in the semifinals, Shahrman Heravi's men suffered a comprehensive 3-0 loss in Sunday's showdown as the African champions improved on their world silver in Budapest last year.

The setback will still go down as decent result for the Iranians, who were making their first appearance in the final showpiece in six years.

Reigning world 84kg champion Youssef Badawy gave Egyptians an early momentum with a 7-5 victory over Mahdi A'ashouri, before Iranian Mahdi Khodabakhshi and Ali Elsayw fought to a scoreless stalemate.

Saleh Abazari fell to a 5-0 defeat against Abdalla Abdelaziz – also a 2023 world gold medalist – and Ahmed Elmasry rounded off the victory with a 6-1 triumph over Mahmoud Ne'mati. Bahman Asgari, Mahdi Ganjzadeh, Morteza Ne'mati, and Mahdi Shahgol were the other members of the Iranian kumite squad.

Heravi, meanwhile, went on to step down from his role after the final loss, bringing the curtain down on an illustrious ca-



reer as the Iranian head coach, which saw him steer the country to overwhelming success over the past decade – including three world team crowns, and five Asian team titles, as

well as Sajjad Ganjzadeh's historic gold medal at the Tokyo Olympics.

The Iranian team began its campaign in Pamplona with a 4-0 beating of North Macedonia

and then came out victorious against Croatia (4-1), Italy (3-1), and Australia (3-2) to finish atop the Pool 1 standings and head into quarterfinals.

Iran secured a dominant 3-0

win against Slovakia in the last-eight round, before coming out on top against the Japanese with the same scoreline, making amends for the semifinal loss to the karate powerhouse

in September's Asian Championships.

Japan still managed to ensure a podium finish in all four categories of the event with a 3-1 win against Italy in the bronze-medal contest.

Elsewhere in the competitions, Japan maintained its stronghold on female team kata, claiming a 15th world title – and fifth in a row – thanks to a final victory (46.60-43.20) over Portugal.

Represented by Mahsa Afsaneh, Maria Hosseinnia, Parisa Rahmani, Kowsar Salehi, the Iranian team beat Switzerland, Colombia, and the Czech Republic, while losing to Spain, to finish second to the host in the pool table, but was unfortunate to leave Pamplona empty-handed after a last-eight setback against Italy.

The Iranian men's kata squad, comprising Sahand Eslami, Yahya Pishzari, Mahdi Shahin, and Mohammad Sadra Shidzi, also stood second in the group phase – courtesy of wins against South Africa, Montenegro, and Poland, and a loss to Japan – but their knockout journey was short-lived following a quarterfinal defeat against the Italians.

Japan overcame Turkey for the men's kata title.

A third gold medal for the Japanese came in the women's kumite event, thanks to a final victory over the United States.

WKF

## Shamsaei to stay on as Iran futsal head coach

### Sports Desk

Vahid Shamsaei will continue in his job as the head coach of the Iranian futsal national team, the country's Football Federation confirmed.

The news was announced after Shamsaei had a meeting with Mahdi Taj, the chairman of the federation, and members of the futsal and technical committees in the national governing body of the sport.

The federation's decision may come as a surprise to futsal fans in the country, following several sources suggesting in recent months that September's World Cup in Uzbekistan was the final episode of Shamsaei's reign

as Iran coach.

"With the support of the federation, my coaching staff and I succeeded in introducing a group of young talents to create a combination of youth and experience for the national team over a two-and-a-half-year period," Shamsaei said during the meeting.

"We still need to learn from our previous mistakes and move towards the future Asian Cup and World Cup tournaments," added Shamsaei. "I firmly believe we need to play against world-class teams to improve our game. We would also benefit from the addition of a top-notch foreign trainer and a goal-keeping coach."

Widely regarded as the great-

est Iranian futsal player of all time, Shamsaei took charge of the national team in 2022 and settled for a runner-up finish in his maiden event after a 3-2 loss to Japan in the AFC Asian Cup, a tournament he won on eight occasions as a player.

The 49-year-old coach successfully led Iran to a record-extending 13th Asian title in April, thanks to a 4-1 victory over host Thailand in the final, and when his team headed to the World Cup, Iranian fans were eager to see their team improve on its best-ever finish at the flagship international event – the third place in the 2016 edition in Colombia after a shootout win

against Portugal.

The Asian powerhouse routed Venezuela 7-1 in its Group F opener, and then went on to win the group by defeating Guatemala (9-4) and France (4-1), though the latter scoreline triggered angry reactions from other teams and a FIFA probe into tanking allegations, as a defeat would have meant an easier path in the knockout phase for the group runner-up.

The top spot sent Iran into a last-16 clash against Morocco, where Shamsaei's men gave away an early lead to suffer a 4-3 loss to the African champion and fail to progress to the World Cup quarterfinals for the first time in 12 years.



MOHSEN DAVOUDI/FFIRI

## Salah 'disappointed' by lack of Liverpool offer

BBC – Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah says he is "disappointed" by the club's failure to offer him a new contract – and looks more likely to leave than stay.

The 32-year-old, Liverpool's top scorer this season with 12 goals in all competitions, is out of contract at the end of the season.

Salah scored twice in the 3-2 win against Southampton on Sunday, including the winner from the penalty spot, to take Liverpool eight points clear at the top of the Premier League.

The Egypt forward, who joined the Reds from Roma in 2017, told reporters, external after the win at St Mary's: "We are almost in December and I haven't received any offers yet to stay in the club."

"I'm probably more out than in."

Asked if he was 'disappointed' that he is yet to receive an offer to extend his deal, Salah said: "Of course, yeah."

"I'm not going to retire soon so I'm just playing, focusing on the season and I'm trying to win the Premier League and hopefully the Champions League as well. I'm disappointed but we will see."

Only Manchester City forward Erling Halaand has scored more Premier League goals than Salah this season, with the Egyptian netting 10 times

so far in the top flight.

Salah signed a three-year contract extension with the club in 2022, with that deal set to expire in the summer.

"You know I have been in the club for many years. There is no club like this," said Salah. "But in the end it is not in my hands. As I said before, it is December and I haven't received anything yet about my future."

"I love the fans. The fans love me. In the end it is not in my hands or the fans' hands. Let's

wait and see."

Salah is one of three high-profile Liverpool players coming towards the end of their deals. Trent Alexander-Arnold and club captain Virgil van Dijk are both out of contract at the same time as Salah.

After scoring the winner in a 2-1 victory against Brighton earlier this month that took Liverpool top of the table, Salah wrote on X: "No matter what happens, I will never forget what scoring at Anfield feels like."