

Geraei revels in rollercoaster year, eyes further success in 2025

Sports Desk

Reigning world Greco-Roman wrestling champion Mohammad-Ali Geraei says he will be looking to build on his milestone achievement in 2024 to chase further glory over the next 12 months of his career.

Geraei's long wait for a maiden gold medal at the World Championships came to an end in October, when the 30-year-old Iranian defeated Hungary's Erik Szilvassy by superiority to walk away with the ultimate prize in the 82kg category in Tirana.

The triumph in the Albanian capital took Geraei's personal haul to four world medals, following his three bronzes in 2017, 2019, and 2021.

"I only took part in the Iranian team trials 50 days prior to the world event and managed to secure a place in the national squad despite moving up to a new weight class," the former 77kg wrestler said in an interview with the official website of the Iranian Wrestling Federation.

"I am truly grateful to the federation and the Iranian coaching staff for their trust. The selection process gives every wrestler a fair shot, and the best one



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ultimately wins a spot in the national team," added Geraei.

Geraei enjoyed a dominant run in Tirana, cruising to comfortable victories over Indian Rohit Dahiya (8-0), Moldova's Mihail Bradu (7-2), and Japanese Taizo

Yoshida (14-6), before a 2-0 win against Georgia's former world junior and under-23 champion Gela Bolkvadze in the semifinals. "Years of experience with the national team in high-profile competitions helped me peak in my form

for the World Championships and win the elusive gold medal," said the Iranian.

However, 2024 could have held a totally different outcome for the Iranian, who began the year five months into a one-year suspension

by the United World Wrestling.

The punishment came after Geraei threw a bottle of mineral water on the mat during a 67kg bout – featuring his younger brother Mohammadreza and Kyotaro Sogabe of Japan – in

last year's World Championships to halt the contest and presumably buy the Iranian wrestler some time to restore stamina.

The international governing body of the sport lifted the ban in February and Geraei found a second

chance for a place in the Paris Olympics, though he eventually missed out on the Games after a last-eight defeat in June's Ranking Series event in Budapest.

"Sometimes things don't quite happen as you expect them to, despite all the dedication and effort you put in," Geraei said.

"My own mistakes cost me against the Japanese Olympic champion [Nao Kusaka] in last year's world event in Belgrade, and then I was unfortunate to miss the Olympics.

"However, I didn't lose hope. As I said, I made the most of my experience to succeed in Tirana. Now I'm eager for more in the 2025 World Championships," added the Iranian.

Geraei heaped praise on his fellow-Iranians for a most prolific Olympic campaign ever in Paris, where they collected a remarkable eight medals across 12 weight categories in the Greco-Roman and freestyle events.

"This was an unprecedented achievement in Olympic history for Iranian wrestling, as the country had settled for only one or two medals in some of the previous editions. Wrestling once again proved to be the most decorated sport for Iran."

'Bright future' for Iranian weightlifting after Asian junior triumph



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The future of Iranian weightlifting is "bright" after the country enjoyed a remarkable campaign at the recently-finished Asian Youth and Junior Championships in Doha, according to head coach Javad Naderi. All 12 members of the squad managed to step onto the podium in their respective events as Iranians boys grabbed 35 medals, winning the juniors'

title with 727 points. Ariya Paydar spearheaded the country's medal haul in the Qatari capital, making a clean sweep of three golds thanks to a 169-211-380 record in the 109kg weight class.

Mehrab Davasari, Amirmohammad Rahmati, Hamidreza Zarei, and Amirhossein Sepah were also among the gold winners, as Iran finished with eight golds, 15 silvers, and 12 bronzes, coupled with 15

medals – including Hanieh Sharifi's double golds – in the women's draw.

"The future is bright for Iranian weightlifting, given all 12 contestants won at least one medal, which is an unprecedented feat for the country in the history of the competition," said the men's coach Naderi.

"The number of the Iranians' successful efforts was impressive, while, Davasari lifted 160kg in the clean & jerk discipline of

the youth 67kg category, which is a truly promising outcome for him," added the Iranian.

There were further outstanding performances for the Iranians, Naderi said, adding: "Zarei made an attempt for world record in the 96kg class, though he failed at the end.

"Hamidreza Mohammadi Tanha, meanwhile, was our sole representative in the +109kg event and proved to be an up-and-coming talent in the superheavyweight class. He has improved his personal records by 15 to 20 kilograms over the past 12 months," Naderi said.

The young Iranian finished on 177-225-402 to settle for triple silver medals.

Naderi still believes Iranians could have collected more gold medals in Doha, had it not been for some bad luck last-gasp slips.

"Sepah stood atop the podium in the 96kg snatch event and should have won the C&J gold, but failed in the very last second of his third attempt. Illia Salehipour could have also won a gold in the 89kg contests but saw his lift deemed as a foul by the judges. Alireza Nassiri, who won double silvers and a bronze in the 102kg, came short of the total gold by one kilogram."

Djokovic says Murray bringing fresh ideas as new coach

REUTERS – Novak Djokovic said his recently retired rival Andy Murray was bringing a unique perspective as his new coach and he was eager to put into practice what the duo have discussed when he begins his season in Brisbane.

Djokovic, a 24-times Grand Slam champion, added fellow former world number one Murray to his team last month and will work with the Scot until the end of the Australian Open next month before deciding on their future.

"He has a unique perspective on my game as one of the greatest rivals I've had. He knows the pros and cons of my game," said Djokovic, who spent 10 days recently with Murray preparing for the 2025 campaign.

Djokovic will be without Murray in Brisbane but the 37-year-old Serb is keen to get the most out of his new coach when they reunite ahead of the Jan. 12-26 Australian Open.

"He played until recently on the tour, so

he knows all the other best players currently in the world, the youngsters and the weaknesses and strengths in their game. I look forward to it, I really do," Djokovic said.

"I think he's bringing a fresh look to my game and I'll be able to benefit from that, no doubt, on the court. But also that champion mentality he has, I'm sure we'll match very well."

Djokovic opens his Brisbane campaign against Rinky Hijikata this week and is looking to win a 100th ATP singles title before his tilt at a record-extending 11th Australian Open crown.

The Paris Olympics champion is also planning a busier schedule in 2025, after his world ranking slipped to number seven.

"I'm planning to play a few more tournaments than I did last season," he said.

"Hopefully the level is also going to go up and as a consequence I'll be able to hopefully win a few tournaments and get my ranking higher."



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