

Salimi in charge as Iranian weightlifting enters new era

Sports Desk

Former Olympic champion Behdad Salimi will be looking to restore the good old days for Iranian weightlifting after taking charge of the men's national team.

A superheavyweight gold medalist at London 2012 and a winner of four world titles, Salimi was appointed to the job last week, replacing Navvab Nasir-Shalal, who stepped down from his role after two years at the helm.

Nasir-Shalal led his team to a second place in the team table behind China in December's World Championships in Manama, Bahrain, though his squad settled for a single gold across 10 weight classes through Alireza Yousefi in the +109kg clean & jerk event.

Meanwhile, Sohrab Moradi – also an ex-Olympic gold medalist – was named the head coach of the Iranian men's junior squad.

"It will definitely be a tough job as the federation's success will be judged by the senior team's results," Salimi said after being appointed to the role, adding: "My contract will run until the end of the 2026 Asian Games in Nagoya and then the new head of the federation by that time will decide on further cooperation with me."

"For now, my top priority will be to deliver decent



results in the upcoming world and Asian championships later this year, as well as the Islamic Solidarity Games in August," added the three-time Asian Games gold winner.

"We have a young squad and many of the team members also represent

the country in the lower age groups, so I will be looking to work in full co-ordination with the technical staff of the Iranian junior team to make sure a formidable squad will head to the Asian Games in two years' time. Sohrab Moradi enjoyed an

illustrious career and I'm confident he will build on years of experience as a decorated weightlifter and coach to succeed in the new role."

Salimi is the third coach of the men's national team – following Ali Hosseini and Nassir-Shalal – during

Sajjad Anoushiravani's two-year reign at the Iranian Weightlifting Federation, but his appointment has already raised doubts among weightlifting experts and pundits in the country, as he has never worked as a coach since retiring after a gold-win-

ning campaign at the 2018 Asian Games.

"There are major tournaments ahead of Salimi and his team, while he will have to set sights on Iran's success in the 2028 Olympic Games. Behdad has no coaching experience but has been privileged to

work with some high-profile coaches throughout his career. I guess it's a bit too soon to assess his prowess for the job. We can only wait and see how he delivers in the near future," said Saied Mohammadpour, who won an Olympic gold alongside Salimi in 2012.

Weightlifting has been the second-most prolific sporting event for the country – after wrestling – in the history of the Olympics, yielding 20 medals – including nine golds – since Jafar Salmasi became a maiden Iranian Olympic medalist by winning a bronze in 1948.

However, Iranian weightlifting has been yearning for an Olympic gold since Rio 2016, when Moradi and Kianoush Rostami walked away with the ultimate prize of their respective events.

Ali Davoudi is the last Iranian weightlifter to stand on the podium in the Games, finishing runner-up to Georgian great Lasha Talakhadze in the superheavyweight contest in Tokyo four years ago.

The future still remains bright for the sport in Iran, after the country collected an impressive 50 medals across the men's and women's competitions at the Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships in Doha last December.

Conte calls for calm amid Napoli's title charge



● CIRO DE LUCA/REUTERS

REUTERS – Napoli manager Antonio Conte hailed his side's 2-1 comeback win over Juventus in Serie A on Saturday but stressed the importance of staying grounded despite his side keeping pace with their title-winning season of two years ago.

Conte's side recovered from a goal down at home as Andre Frank Zambo Anguissa and Romelu Lukaku sealed the victory against a Juve side that were unbeaten in the league.

Napoli now have 53 points, the same total that Luciano Spalletti's side had at this stage on their way to winning the Scudetto in 2023, and sit atop Serie A, six points ahead of Inter Milan, who have two games in hand.

"We must never extinguish the enthusiasm because it's our lifeblood. However, we must stay grounded because what we've

done so far is extraordinary," Conte told reporters.

"We have already matched last year's points, and this is without (Victor) Osimhen, Kvara (Khvicha Kvaratskhelia), and Piotr (Zielinski)," he added, referring to three key players who have left the club this season, albeit with Osimhen on loan.

"It's nice to see that, despite the difficulties with the (transfer) market and injuries, nothing changes.

"We need to stay humble and keep working. Today, though, we beat a great team that had left us far behind last year."

Juve finished third last season on 71 points while Napoli languished in 10th with 53. Conte added that his side performed well above expectations against Juventus.

"The intensity today was like a

European match, with very high rhythms and full-field pressure," he said.

"We took some risks and yet some still say we play with a low defensive line and on the counter-attack. Sometimes it feels like I'm dreaming."

Despite the good run Napoli are on, Conte is still holding his cards close to his chest regarding the transfer window.

"It's not just about bringing someone in ... Everyone is good at saying who is missing and I could easily say what we need too," he added.

"But my role as head of the group forces me to focus on the players I already have and to make a difference with them.

"Let's see what happens but I remain calm because I know I have a group of players ready to fight with me."

Davis, James lead Lakers to 118-108 victory over Warriors

AP – Anthony Davis had 36 points and 13 rebounds, LeBron James added 25 points and 12 assists, and the Los Angeles Lakers beat the Golden State Warriors 118-108 on Saturday night.

Andrew Wiggins led the Warriors with 20 points. The Lakers held Stephen Curry scoreless in the second half as he went 0 for 8 from the field after halftime. Curry finished with 13 points and nine assists.

The game marked the 25th regular-season meeting between James and Curry. James' team has won 13 of the 25.

Elsewhere, Kevin Durant scored 29 points, Nick Richards added 20 points along with a career-high 19 rebounds and the Phoenix Suns held off the Washington Wizards 119-109 on Saturday night.

The Suns have won eight of 11. Bradley Beal scored 20 points and Devin Booker added 18 despite missing all eight of his 3-point attempts.

The Wizards are an NBA-worst 6-38. Their last victory came on Jan. 1. Kyle Kuzma scored a season-high 30 points and grabbed 11 rebounds, and Jordan Poole added 19 points. Phoenix led 111-98 with about four minutes remaining, but Washington cut it to 113-109 when Kuzma banked in a 3-pointer with 1:57 left. Richards responded with two free throws on the next possession to turn back the threat.



Lakers forward Anthony Davis (3) is fouled by Warriors center Quinten Post during an NBA game in San Francisco, CA, US, on Jan. 26, 2025.

● AP

Grayson Allen made a 3-pointer at the buzzer to give the Suns a 68-53 halftime lead. Richards – recently acquired in a trade with Charlotte – had 15 rebounds in the half.

James Harden scored 40 points and the Los Angeles Clippers overcame Giannis Antetokounmpo and Damian Lillard to beat the Milwaukee Bucks 127-117 on Saturday night. Norman Powell added 33 points and Kawhi Leonard had 18 in three quarters to help the Clippers end the Bucks' five-game winning streak.

Antetokounmpo had 36 points,

making 12 of 15 free throws, and 13 rebounds. Lillard added 29 points, going 16 of 17 from the foul line, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for his second triple-double in two days.

Harden had 12 points in the first half when the Clippers trailed by 11. He took over in the third with 17 points, scoring 15 in a row to end the period with Los Angeles ahead 94-93.

The Bucks were in catch-up mode most of the fourth after leading by three early.

Powell's dunk launched a 14-0 spurt that Harden capped with a 3-pointer for a 112-100 lead.

