



# Iranian wrestler Yazdani back in training in bid for coveted Olympic crown

## Sports Desk

Iranian wrestling great Hassan Yazdani began his bid for an elusive second Olympic gold medal on Monday.

Yazdani, 30, started his rehabilitation program under national team coach Hassan Hosseinzadeh at the Iranian Wrestling Federation gym in Tehran – five months after undergoing a second surgery on his injured shoulder in the French city of Nice.

A winner of a national-high 10 world and Olympic medals, the wrestling sensation last appeared at the 2024 Paris Olympics back in August, where he settled for the freestyle 86kg silver after a 7-1 defeat against Bulgarian Magomed Ramazanov.

Yazdani had already been out of action for eight months before last June's Ranking Series event in Budapest – due to a first surgery on his right shoulder – but recovered in time to secure his place in the national team for the Games.

The Iranian showed no signs of an injury on his way to the final showpiece but the problem flared up against Ramazanov as he struggled with the dislocated shoulder from the get-go, calling for treatment on several occa-

sions throughout the six minutes of action.

A gold medal in Paris would have seen Yazdani overtake taekwondo legend Hadi Saei as the most decorated Iranian in the history of the Olympic Games with two golds and one silver.

A 74kg champion in Rio 2016, Yazdani suffered an Olympic final heartbreak against his familiar foe David Taylor in Tokyo five years later, and when the American fell short against Aaron Brooks in the US Olympic trials, the Iranian looked to be the favorite for the ultimate prize in Paris. Iranian fans thought the defeat against Ramazanov was the last episode of Yazdani's storied career but he was quick to reject the retirement plan on his return from the French capital as he remains eager to collect the coveted gold in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

Dr. Sohrab Kayhani, the head of the medical team at the Iranian federation, said at the time of Yazdani's surgery in September that the three-time world gold winner would face "between 12 to 18 months" on the sidelines and is unlikely to feature in the Iranian trials for the World Championships next summer.

Yazdani has gained significant

weight over the past five months and is unlikely to compete in the 86kg class ever again, according to his personal coach Hemmat Moslemi.

"As it stands, Hassan will participate in the 92kg contests in the 2026 world event, and will then move up to the 97kg category if he decides to compete in the next Asian Games. His ultimate goal will be to take part in the 97kg class in the L.A. Games, but we should take one step at a time," Moslemi told Varzesh3 last November.

That means Yazdani will likely have to overcome domestic competition from 22-year-old Amir-Ali Azarpira – a bronze medalist in Paris – and Mojtaba Goleij for the Iranian 97kg spot in the Games, before taking on the likes of reigning Olympic champion Akhmed Tazhudinov, and American great Kyle Snyder for the top podium in Los Angeles.



Iranian freestyle wrestler Hassan Yazdani is pictured alongside national team coach Hassan Hosseinzadeh during a training session in Tehran, Iran, on February 17, 2025.

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## AFC U20 Asian Cup:

# Iran to face Uzbekistan for group top spot

## Sports Desk

The top spot in Group C of the AFC U20 Asian Cup will be on the line when Iran and defending champion Uzbekistan go head-to-head in Shenzhen, China, today.

A 6-0 victory over Yemen on Sunday saw Iran sit atop the group table with six points, thanks to a superior goal difference over Uzbekistan, and a draw in today's game will be enough to send the four-time champion into the last eight as the group winner.

Iran head coach Hossein Abdi looked to be confident in the pre-match press conference, saying that he will likely rotate his squad for the final group game.

"It was very important to take the three points from our match against Yemen," said Abdi, whose team has netted netting nine unanswered

goals in its first two outings.

"We're a little relaxed heading into our next match against Uzbekistan, and will give a chance to the other players to get some minutes here in Shenzhen.

"We have to be careful about our players picking up cautions heading into the knockout stage. We know how Uzbekistan can play and we have other players in the squad to take us through the game."

Having edged Yemen 1-0 in group opener, Uzbekistan secured a place in the quarterfinals after overcoming Indonesia 3-1 later on Sunday, with head coach Muhammadali Urinboev eager to maintain their winning momentum.

"Now we have one more battle with Iran, if we win, we can take a 100 percent record into the next round," said Urinboev.

"This tournament is important for us and the fans because we are the defending champions and, hopefully, we are also the next champions."

Both two sides will not know about their last-eight opponents until Group D fixtures conclude on Thursday, with the 2023 semifinalists South Korea and Japan in pole position to go through.

Beaten in the last-four shootout by Uzbekistan in the previous edition, South Korea is top in the group standings with maximum points and will face second-placed Japan (4pts) today.

Syria, which played to a 2-2 draw against Japan last time out, will still fancy its chances of advancing when taking on Thailand.

The four semifinalists in China will qualify for September's FIFA U20 World Cup in Chile.



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## Tehran to host Asian Women's Kabaddi Championship

## Sports Desk

Tehran will host the upcoming edition of the Asian Women's Kabaddi Championship from March 4-8, Abbas Khajeh Avareseji, the chairman of the Iranian Kabaddi Federation, confirmed on Tuesday.

The host country will be joined by four-time champion India, Nepal, Iraq, Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka in the sixth edition of tournament, with the eight

teams set to be split into two groups.

Hosting the event on a third occasion, Iran will be chasing a maiden Asian title, having won double silver and bronze medals apiece.

Having beaten India for a precious gold medal at the 2018 Asian Games, Iran fell to a last-four defeat against the Chinese Taipei in the Hangzhou 2022 event and settled for a consolation joint-bronze alongside Nepal.

"The Iranian women's squad at the Asian Championship will be much younger than the one that competed in Hangzhou as our ultimate goal is to win the gold medal at the 2026 Asian Games in Nagoya," said Avareseji – the former president of the Asian Kabaddi Federation.

"Next for Iran will be the World Championship, which is to be held in India in June, though the exact date of the competition is yet to be confirmed," added the Iranian.