

## UWW Ranking Series:

# Mirzazadeh dominates superheavyweight class, Ahmadi Vafa settles for bronze

## Sports Desk

The final day of the Muhamet Malo Ranking Series tournament in Tirana, Albania, saw Iran's Amin Mirzazadeh ease to the Greco-Roman 130kg gold medal, while Ali Ahmadi Vafa finished with a consolation bronze in the 60kg contests.

Making his first appearance since winning the superheavyweight bronze at last year's Paris Olympics, where he was only beaten by Cuban great Mijain Lopez, Mirzazadeh adopted the same gameplan throughout his four bouts to walk away with the ultimate prize in the Albanian capital.

The reigning world champion got the first passivity and scored by a turn from par terre before holding off the reverse position in the second period, winning his quarterfinal, semifinal, and final bouts by the same scoreline of 3-1. It was only in his first match against Estonian Heiki Nabi that Mirzazadeh took advantage on both par terre positions to win 4-0.

While the final showpiece against Turkish Hamza Bakir, who has all three age-group world titles under his belt, did not take a toll on Mirzazadeh, the Iranian will still have to see off domestic competition from young prodigy Fardin Hedayati and Ali-Akbar Yousefi to secure a place in September's



Iranian wrestler Amin Mirzazadeh (red) reacts after his victory over Turkey's Hamza Bakir in the Greco-Roman 130kg final at the Muhamet Malo Ranking Series tournament in Tirana, Albania, on March 2, 2025.  
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World Championships in Zagreb. A world junior and under-23 gold medalist over the past two years, Hedayati will be eager to have a shot at seniors' glory, having won double Ranking Series titles last season.

A world champion in 2021, Yousefi, meanwhile, made an emphatic return to international scene in February by claiming three superiority victories on his way to the gold medal at the Zagreb Open Ranking Series event.

Earlier on Sunday, reigning world U20 and U23 champion Ahmadi Vafa got off to losing start to his campaign, suffering a 12-6 defeat against former world bronze medalist Yu Shiotani of Japan. The Iranian still managed to re-

cover from the setback to hammer China's Ziyue Xi (11-2) and home-favorite Ergi Uku (10-0) before crushing Akyl Sulaimanov of Kyrgyzstan 12-3 for a joint-bronze alongside Chinese Haodong Tan.

Shiotani, meanwhile, did not concede a point following his first win, defeating Georgian Amiran Shavadze 9-0 in the final.

Sunday's results came after Iran had collected a gold and a bronze medal earlier in the Greco-Roman competitions.

An Olympic silver medalist last year, Alireza Mohmadi won the 87kg gold after Hungarian David Losonczi pulled out of the final showpiece with injury. The pinnacle of the Iranian's campaign, however, came in the last-eight round, where he outmuscled Semen Novikov 5-0, avenging the final loss to the Bulgarian in Paris. Mahdi Mohsennejad settled for a bronze medal in the 63kg class, beating Romanian Razvan Arnaut 3-1 in the third-place contest.

There was further glory for Iran in the freestyle event last week in Tirana, Ali Mo'meni (57kg), Rahman Amouzad (65kg), Kamran Qassempour (92kg), and Amirhossein Zare' (125kg) collected four gold medals, while Erfan Alizadeh settled for the 97kg silver and Younes Emami took the bronze in the 74kg class.

## AFC Champions League Two:

## Tractor looking to build on domestic form, home support against Al Taawoun

## Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League club Tractor will be looking to take its domestic momentum into the continental campaign, when hosting Saudi side Al Taawoun in the first leg of their AFC Champions League Two quarterfinal in Tabriz today.

Tractor will step into the contest on the back of a goalless stalemate against Sepahan, though it was enough to keep Dragan Skocic's side

one point clear of the Isfahan-based outfit on top of the Iranian league table.

Al Taawoun, meanwhile, defeated Al Fateh 2-1 at home last time out but is stuck in mid-table in the Saudi top flight. Chasing a maiden Asian silverware, Tractor will expect a jam-packed crowd at the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium to push their side the extra mile as they seek a healthy advantage ahead of next week's return leg in Bahrain's Al Khaldiya in a 3-3

draw on home soil in the previous round second leg to advance 5-4 on aggregate. Al Taawoun had to work even harder to secure a quarterfinal spot, as its last-16 tie against Al Wakhrah SC of Qatar ended 4-4 on aggregate, before the Saudi club came out victorious 4-3 in the shootout.

Al Taawoun will draw confidence from their unbeaten away record in the competition this season, having won three and drawn once.

Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh will be the player to watch in Tractor colors, having scored a remarkable eight goals in six outings to sit atop the leading marksmen's chart of the competition alongside fellow-Iranian Sardar Azmoun, who plays for Emirati club Shabab Al Ahli. Croatian Skocic, however, will hope his backline puts in a more solid performance after Tractor had to hold off a late fightback from Bahrain's Al Khaldiya in a 3-3



● MOJTABA SALEH/AFC

## Asian Water Polo Championship:

## Iran undone by Kazakhstan, misses out on podium



## Sports Desk

Iran fell to shootout defeat against Kazakhstan in the third-place matchup at the 2025 Asian Water Polo Championship in Zhaoqing, China.

In a repeat of the bronze-medal contest in the 2022 edition, the two teams played to a 12-12 draw, before Kazakhstan came out victorious 4-2 in penalties.

This was a second shootout setback for Iran, after a 9-9 (4-1) defeat against the host in the semifinals had seen the country miss out on a place in July's World Aquatics Championships in Singapore.

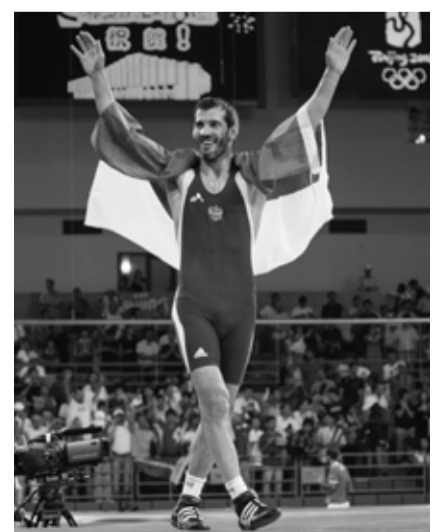
Runner-up to China in the previous edition, Iran began its campaign in Zhaoqing with comfortable victories over South Korea (16-9), Chinese Taipei (37-5), and Uzbekistan (33-9) before losing 16-12 to Japan to finish second in Group B and progress to the quarterfinals. Iran then beat Singapore 14-7 to book a last-four place.

Japan, meanwhile, defeated China 14-11 in the final showpiece to lift a fourth trophy in five editions.

## Russian wrestling legend Saitiev dies at 49

REUTERS - Russian three-time Olympic freestyle wrestling champion Buvaisar Saitiev has died at the age of 49, Russian sports officials said on Sunday. Sports Minister Mikhail Degtyarev told TASS news agency that Saitiev's death was "premature and tragic," but provided no further details. Tass said only that he had died in Moscow.

Degtyarev described Saitiev as one of the most decorated freestyle wrestlers in history and praised his "inestimable" contribution to sport. Saitiev won Olympic gold in the 74 kg category in the 1996, 2004 and 2008 Games and was a six-time world and European champion. Saitiev, who retired in 2009, was awarded several civil honours in Russia and had served as a member of the State Duma lower house of parliament.



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