

Asian Wrestling Championships: Olympic champs lined up as Iran confirms squads for Amman visit

The upcoming Asian Wrestling Championships – starting March 25 in Amman – will see Iran's Saeid Esmaeili and Mohammad-Hadi Saravi make their first international appearances since winning the Olympic gold medals in Paris last summer.

The Iranian freestyle and Greco-Roman squads for the visit to the Jordanian capital were confirmed on Sunday, as the country will vie for a fifth continental team title in six years in both categories.

Joining Esmaeili (67kg) and Saravi (97kg) in the 10-man Greco-Roman team is world silver medalist Pouya Dadmarz, who will be among the favorites in the 55kg contests again, having settled for a runner-up finish behind North Korean Ro Yu-chol last year in Bishkek.

Superheavyweight prodigy Fardin Hedayati – a world under-23 champion last October – will be looking to take his age-group momentum into the 130kg event.

Hedayati, 20, stole the show in last June's Ranking Series event in Budapest – only a second senior appearance for the Iranian – by outmuscling Turkish great Riza Kayaalp and Georgian Olympic silver winner Iakobi Kajaia on his way to the ultimate prize.

Pouya Nasserpour and Mohammad-Mahdi Keshkar will be the Iranian wrestlers in the 60kg and 63kg competitions, respectively, having earned their spots through gold-winning campaigns in December's National Championships.



Danial Sohrabi – a bronze winner in last year's U23 Worlds – will be keen on the 72kg title, knowing a gold medal in Amman will give him the edge over former world and Olympic champion Mohammadreza Geraei in the race for a place in September's World Championships in Zagreb. Alireza Abdevali will step into

the 77kg contests as the reigning world under-20 champion, while world U23 gold medalist Mohammad Naqousi (82kg) and Yasin Yazdi (87kg) – silver winner at the U20 Worlds – will also be looking to build on their impressive campaigns last year when making their senior debuts at the Asian Championships.

Freestyle test

The Iranian freestyle team will be facing a daunting task to defend its Asian crown after head coach Pejman Dorostkar decided to name an under-23 squad for the competitions. Dorostkar's men will face a stiff test from Japan, which has excelled in major internation-

al events – particularly in the lightweight divisions – in recent years.

Six-time world age-group champion Amirreza Ma'soumi, who didn't give away a single point en route to the gold at the Zagreb Open Ranking Series in January, will be chasing the ultimate prize in the 125kg event



Paris Olympic champion Saeid Esmaeili (blue), pictured in a training session in Tehran in February, will headline the Iranian Greco-Roman squad at the 2025 Asian Wrestling Championships.

● IAWF

in Amman – ahead of a likely domestic showdown with Olympic silver medalist Amirhossein Zare' for a place at the world event.

Amirhossein Firouzpour will also head to Amman on the back of a Ranking Series triumph in the international season opener, looking to defend his Asian 92kg title.

World U23 champion Mahdi Yousefi – silver winner at the Zagreb Open – will be the Iranian to watch in the 79kg event, with former world under-17 gold medalist Sina Khalili among the favorites in the 70kg class – following an emphatic victory over two-time world silver medalist Amir-Mohammad Yazdani in the Iranian Premier League final in December.

National champion Milad Valizadeh will compete in the 57kg contests, while Ahmad Mohammadnejad Javan and Abbas Ebrahimzadeh will be part of the 61kg and 65kg draws, respectively, following their gold-winning runs in the Croatian capital. Former world U20 champion Mohammadreza Shakeri (74kg), Abolfazl Rahmani (86kg) – a 2024 bronze winner at the U20 Worlds – and Mobin Azimi (97kg) – world junior gold medalist in 2023 – complete the Iranian freestyle lineup in Amman.

AFC Champions League Two: Tractor to pursue Asian dream at Al Taawoun

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League leader Tractor will play away to Saudi Pro League side Al Taawoun in the second leg of their AFC Champions League Two quarterfinal today, hoping to remain on course for a maiden Asian silverware when the final whistle blows in Buraidah's Wolves Park.

Both sides will have it all to play for following a goalless stalemate in Tabriz's Yadegar-e Imam Stadium last week, with the Saudi outfit having goalkeeper Abdulquddus Atiay for delivering a man-of-the-match performance to keep his side in the tie.

Head coach Dragan Skocic went on to rue Tractor's lack of cutting edge, after the Iranian club registered 16 shots – six on target – in the first leg, but remained confident of his team's chances of progressing to the semifinals.

"We had a strong rhythm, but unfortunately, we did not score. We showed how good a team we are and we are going to win the second leg," the Croatian said in the post-match press conference.

The first-leg result marked a second goalless draw for Tractor in as many games – following an Iranian top-flight encounter with title rival Sepahan – but Skocic showed little concern, saying: "It doesn't worry

me. Whenever the players give everything they can on the field, I'm happy. I know we'll have the same chances in the next game and I hope we write fate differently."

Prolific striker Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh will be the player to watch in the Tractor colors – after being denied by Atiay and the crossbar in the first leg – as he will be chasing a ninth goal in eight outings in the competition this season. While Tractor had its domestic trip to Foolad Khuzestan postponed on Friday, Al Taawoun – eighth in the table – will be fresh from Saturday's 3-0 home victory over 10-man Damac in the Saudi top flight.



● MOJTABA SALEH/MIZAN



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Iran runner-up to Brazil in friendly futsal tourney

Sports Desk

Iran settled for a runner-up finish to host Brazil in a four-team futsal tournament after a 3-0 loss to the reigning world champion in Sunday's final in Curitiba.

Felipe Valério put Brazil in front

with two minutes into the game before Neguinho scored twice in quick succession as Brazil got off to commanding lead early on in the first half.

Iran failed to capitalize on a much-improved performance after the break as Vahid Shamsaei's young and new-look team suf-

fered a second defeat against the futsal powerhouse in four days.

Iran began its campaign with a 5-2 loss against Brazil on Thursday, but went on to rout Greenland 11-2 before edging out Afghanistan 4-3 to set up a rematch with the Seleccion in the final.