

Karate 1 Premier League:

Golshadnejad wins gold as
Iranians notch up five medals

Sports Desk

The final day of the Karate 1 Premier League series in Hangzhou saw Iranians collect five medals, including a kumite gold in the women's competitions.

Representing the country in the -61kg weight class, Atousa Golshadnejad defeated German grand winner Reem Khamis 4-3 to walk away with the ultimate prize.

This was a six victory in Hangzhou for the Iranian girl, who also won a gold medal at the Karate 1 Premier League in Paris last year.

Fatemeh Sa'adati was the other Iranian female finalist on Sunday, settling for a silver medal in the -55kg class after a 4-0 defeat against Japanese rising star Rina Kodo.

In the men's draw, former Asian champion Saleh Abazari bagged a second silver medal for Iran.

Having beaten opponents from Bosnia & Herzegovina, Thailand, Italy, Turkey, as well as Egyptian grand winner Taha Tarek Mahmoud en route to the final, Abazari suffered a 5-3 loss to Georgian Merabi Gelashvili in the +84kg showdown.

Four-time world gold medalist Bahman Asgari bounced back from a last-four setback against Enzo Berthon of France to beat Croatian Ivan Martinac 1-0 and finish his campaign with a consolation bronze in the men's kumite -75kg contests.

Berthon still had to settle for a silver medal after a defeat by Senshu against reigning world and African champion Abdalla Abdelaziz of Egypt.

A second bronze medal for Iran came in the men's -84kg class, where Mahdi Khodabakhshi defeated Dutch opponent Brian Timmermans 3-0 to share the third podium with Rikito Shimada of Japan.

Egypt's Youssef Badawy, who had beaten Khodabakhshi in the semi-finals, went on to snatch the gold, thanks to a Hantei win against Jordanian Mohammad Aljafari after the final showpiece finished scoreless.



Iran's Atousa Golshadnejad (R) won a gold medal in the women's kumite -61kg event on the final day of the Karate 1 Premier League series in Hangzhou, China.

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Persian Gulf Pro League:

Tractor back on top after
hard-fought win against Golgohar

Sports Desk

Tractor came from behind to beat Golgohar Sirjan 2-1 in the Persian Gulf Pro League at home on Sunday.

Third in the Iranian top-flight table with two games in hand prior to the contest, Tractor will now finish the Persian calendar year on top of the standings with 48 points – one point clear of defending champion Persepolis and two above Sepahan. Maximum points in the rescheduled fixture at four-placed Foolad Khuzestan will leave Tractor in pole position to lift a maiden domestic league trophy come the end of season.

Alireza Kazemi gave the visitors a second-minute lead at the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium, capitalizing on an error by Tractor skipper Shoja Khalilzadeh to dink the ball past charging goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand.

Beaten by Saudi side Al Taawoun in the shootout in the AFC Champions League Two quarterfinals last Tuesday, Tractor managed to restore parity in the 25th minute,

when Brazilian Ricardo Alvez's low effort hit the post and deflected into the net off Golgohar defender Abolfazl Razzaqpour's leg on the rebound.

Tractor started the second half on the front foot and took the lead through Mahdi Hashemnejad, who finished off an exquisite team move down the middle with a left-footed strike from inside the box seven minutes after the break. Tractor missed several clear-cut chances to secure all points before the final whistle and had to hold off a desperate late surge by the visiting side for the massive victory.

A sixth defeat of the campaign left Golgohar fifth in the table with 35 points.

Elsewhere, Zob Ahan and Esteghlal shared the points in a 1-1 draw at the Fooladshahr Stadium in Isfahan.

Mohsen Azarbad's looping header found the bottom corner to put Zob Ahan in front in the 47th minute, before Ramin Rezaeian headed home from close range with five minutes left on the clock to avoid

further misery for the visiting Tehran Blues, who will finish the year in a below-par ninth place in the 16-team table with 27 points – one point adrift of Zob Ahan, which played to a 10th stalemate in 23 games.

Iranian fans will be treated to a tight race at both ends of the table with seven rounds of games remaining, when the top-flight clubs resume action after the international break.

Tractor will visit seventh-placed Iralco on March 29, a day before Persepolis plays at relegation-threatened Shams Azar in Qazvin, and Sepahan and Foolad – on 41 points with a game in hand – square off in Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium.



Tractor players celebrate a goal during a 2-1 victory over Golgohar Sirjan in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium, Tabriz, Iran, on March 16, 2025.

MASOUD VAEZ/TASNIM

Draper lives out dreams with Indian Wells breakthrough

REUTERS – Briton Jack Draper turned his childhood dreams into reality at Indian Wells on Sunday, claiming his maiden Masters 1000 title and catapulting himself into the top 10 for the first time after a rapid ascent through his sport. The 23-year-old downed Denmark's Holger Rune 6-2 6-2 in a display of total dominance in the final, after overcoming the twice defending champion Carlos Alcaraz in the semi-final and swatting aside top U.S. hopes Taylor Fritz and Ben Shelton. "I have been watching this tournament since I was a young guy, watching all the champions play on this big court," said Draper, who will be ranked seventh after picking up the title. "It means the world to me, hon-

estly, to be able to be a champion here."

It was only 18 months ago that Draper – then ranked 123rd in the world – emerged as the unlikely hope for British men's tennis when he defied injury and the odds to reach the fourth round of the 2023 U.S. Open.

He quickly added to his credentials from there, beating Italian Matteo Berrettini for his first ATP title in Stuttgart in June.

Weeks later, he was in the final four at Flushing, becoming the first British man since Andy Murray in 2012 to reach the U.S. Open semi-final and he picked up his first ATP 500-level title in October in Vienna.

"You dream of winning this stuff when you're a kid. I think over

the years, especially when you're playing pro and stuff, it kind of gets lost a little bit, because maybe that, you know, when you're young you think, 'Oh, I'm just going to rock up and win,'" he told reporters.

"It doesn't work that way. You've got to go through many ups and downs and emotions."

Draper, whose competition schedule early this year was limited due to a nagging hip issue, credited his coach with providing a structured approach to help him weather the highs and lows.

"I want to achieve amazing things in this sport, but my main goal is keep on improving and keep on knocking down," he said.

"I know there is a long way ahead of me. I'm very ambitious. I don't want to just stop here."



MARK J. TERRILL/AP