

Two-week wrap-up: Iranian sport enjoys continental glory



Iranian players and coaching staff celebrate qualification for the 2026 World Cup after a 2-2 draw against Uzbekistan at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on March 25, 2025.
● MOJTABA SALEH/AFC

Sports Desk

Iranian athletes and teams had a busy schedule during the Persian New Year's national vacation, tasting glory across various Asian competitions.

Iranian national football team secured a comfortable qualification for the FIFA World Cup, while the country lifted a record fourth trophy at the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup. Meanwhile, Iran made a clean sweep of the freestyle and Greco-Roman crowns at the Asian Wrestling Championships despite sending new-look, young squads to the event in Amman, Jordan.

Fourth in a row

Iran began the FIFA international break with a 2-0 victory over the United Arab Emirates at Tehran's Azadi Stadium on March 20 to move within touching distance of a place at the World Cup finals

– cohosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada in 2026.

Prolific striker Sardar Azmoun headed home to put Team Melli in front deep into first-half stoppage time, before FC Rostov winger Mohammad Mohbbi guaranteed all points with a composed finish in the 70th minute. A sixth win in seven games meant Amir Qalenoie's men needed a draw in the home fixture against Uzbekistan on March 25 to secure a top-two finish in Group A of the Asian qualifiers with two games to spare. Iran still had to come from behind twice for a hard-fought 2-2 stalemate against the Central Asian opponent.

Inter striker Mahdi Taremi's sensational volley seven minutes after the break canceled out Hojimat Erkinov's 16th-minute opener for the visitors. The parity, however, only lasted a min-

ute as Uzbekistan regained the advantage after Abbosbek Fayzullaev's curling free-kick from the left was completely missed by a line of Iran players as it bounced straight into the net. Iran's relentless pressure for a second equalizer paid off with seven minutes remaining, when substitute Ali Qolizadeh swung in a deep cross which Uzbekistan failed to deal with, allowing Taremi the chance to steer in from close range to take Iran to a fourth consecutive World Cup. Iran remained top of the group with 20 points – three clear of second-placed Uzbekistan and seven points above the UAE before the final two games in the qualifiers against Qatar (away) and North Korea (home) in June.

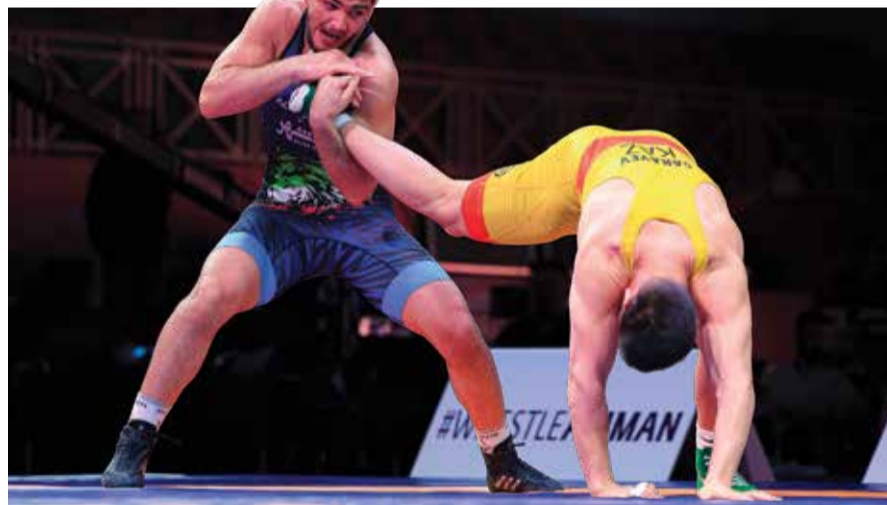
Wrestling domination

Iranian wrestling cemented its status as the dominant force in the continent after collecting a remarkable 17 medals – includ-

ing nine golds – across 20 weight classes at the Asian Championships. Five gold medals and three silvers saw Hassan Ranzraz's 10-man squad finish atop the Greco-Roman standings with 201 points, with Uzbekistan (168 points)

mad-Mahdi Keshkar (63kg), Alireza Abdevali (77kg), and Yasin Yazdi (87kg) added three runner-up prizes to Iran's medal haul. In the freestyle competitions, Pejman Dorostkar's squad, comprising under-23 wrestlers,

Amirhossein Firouzpour (92kg) and Amirreza Ma'soumi (125kg) dominated their divisions, not giving away a point on their way to the gold, while world U23 champion Mahdi Yousefi (79kg) and Abolfazl Rahmani (86kg) also en-



Iranian Abolfazl Rahmani (L) is seen in action during a victory over Kazakhstan's Bolat Sakayev in the freestyle 86kg final at the Asian Wrestling Championships in Amman, Jordan, on March 30, 2025.
● UWW

and Japan (131 points). In their first international appearance since grabbing the Olympic golds last summer, Saeid Esmaili (67kg) and Mohammad-Hadi Saravi (97kg) walked away with the ultimate prize in their respective events, while reigning world under-23 champion Fardin Hedayati was in his own league in the 130kg event, claiming three wins by superiority – without conceding a single point – before easing to a 7-0 victory over Alimkhan Syzdykov of Kazakhstan in the final.

Danial Sohrabi and Mohammad Naqousi also finished their campaigns with final victories in the 72kg and 82kg events, respectively, while Moham-

grabbed four gold and bronze medals apiece, plus Milad Valizadeh's 57kg silver, to lift the team trophy with 190 points. Japan finished second 146 points – courtesy of three gold and bronze medals apiece – with Kazakhstan in third on 123 points.

Iranian players celebrate lifting the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup trophy after an 8-1 win against Oman in the final in Pattaya, Thailand, on March 30, 2025.
● FFIRI



joyed thrilling campaigns to leave Amman with a gold medal.

Ahmad Mohammadnejad Javan (61kg), Abbas Ebrahimzadeh (65kg), Sina Khalili (70kg), Mohammad-Mobin Azimi (97kg) settled for four bronze medals.

Jubilations on the sand

An 8-1 triumph over Oman in the final showpiece on Sunday summed up an emphatic run for Iran at the Beach Soccer Asian Cup in Pattaya, Thailand.

The final victory was the sixth in as many games for Ali Naderi's men, who defended their Asian title to book a place in May's World Cup in Seychelles.

Iran began the competition with comfortable victories over Indonesia (12-2) and Afghanistan (14-0) and then edged out the UAE 4-3 to progress to the quarterfinals as the Group C winner. An 11-0 rout of Bahrain was followed by a 6-0 last-four win against Saudi Arabia.

There was further glory for Iran in the awarding ceremony as Ali Mirshekari – the leading marksman in the competition with 12 strikes – was named the Most Valuable Player of the tournament, while Seyyed Mahdi Mirjalili won the Best Goalkeeper prize.

Water polo title

Iran ended China's unbeaten run to win the men's title at the Asian U-20 Water Polo Championships in Singapore.

A 15-11 victory at the OCBC Aquatics Centre on March 30 saw the Iranian boys make amends for the 13-11 loss to the Chinese in the group phase earlier in the competition.

Iran eased past Sri Lanka (40-1) and Malaysia (28-6) either side of the China defeat and then came out on top against Uzbekistan (32-7) and the host country (15-10) in the knockouts to progress to the finals.

Iranian skipper Arman Shams, meanwhile, won the MVP and top scorer awards.

Fardin Hedayati celebrates with the Iranian flag after winning the Greco-Roman 130kg gold medal at the Asian Wrestling Championships in Amman, Jordan, on March 25, 2025.
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