

IWF Youth and Junior Championships:

Iranian weightlifters eager to build on Asian success in Lima

Sports Desk

Young Iranian weightlifters will be looking to carry their junior title-winning momentum from last year's Asian championships into the upcoming IWF World Youth and Junior Championships – starting Thursday in Lima, Peru.

Iran collected a remarkable 50 medals across different categories in December's Asian event in Doha, claiming the men's junior title with eight golds, 15 silvers, and 12 bronzes.

More than 500 of the sport's global talents will vie for success over a hectic six days in the Peruvian capital, where the youth and junior competitions will be staged concurrently for the first time.

Illiya Salehipour, who won two silvers and a bronze in Doha, will be joined by Amir-Mohammad Rahmati – a winner of three Asian youth medals – in representing the country in the men's junior 89kg class.

Hamidreza Zarei and Amirhossein Sepah, who collected six medals – including three golds – between them in the Qatari capital, will also be among the Iranian junior hopefuls in Lima, when competing in the 96kg contests.

Having a combined six world and Asian junior medals under his belt,

Abolfazl Zare' will be among the favorites in the men's 102kg event, with fellow-Iranian Amirmohammad Soleimani – a former Asian youth record holder – also fancying his chances for glory.

Alireza Nassiri will be the Iranian to watch in the 109kg class, having won two world junior golds in 2023, with Farhad Qolizadeh also hoping to have a decent campaign. The men's junior +109kg contests will see Tahan Ne'mati make his return to the world event following a triple silver-winning campaign two years ago, while Hamidreza Mohammadi-Tanha will be keen on building on his impressive performance in Doha, where he made a clean sweep of superheavyweight silvers.

Elsewhere in Lima, Hossein Yazdani will be the sole Iranian male contestants in the youth competitions, taking part in the men's +102kg event, while Alma Hosseini (64kg), Reyhaneh Karimi (71kg), and Ghazal Hosseini (76kg) will represent the country in the women's junior event.

Former Olympic champion Sohrab Moradi will be in charge of the Iranian men's squad in Lima, with Hamideh Hosseini – a winner of a historic three golds at the 2022 Asian Championships – coaching the girls trio.



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UAE Pro League:

Iranian duo on target as Shabab Al Ahli salvages point at Al Wahda



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Iranian international teammates Saeed Ezzatollahi and Sardar Azmoun were on target as Shabab Al Ahli overcame a two-goal deficit to rescue a point in a 2-2 draw at Al Wahda in the Emirati ADNOC Pro League on Sunday.

Colombian Kevin Andres Agudelo put Al Wahda in front with 11 minutes into the game at Al Nahyan Stadium, following a smart assist from Argentine winger Facundo Kruspzky.

The visitors had a chance to level from the spot soon after, only to see Cartabia superbly denied by Al Wahda keeper Mohammed Al Shamsi.

Thing went from bad to worse for Shabab Al Ahli when a Sasa Ivkovic's header doubled the host's lead in the

40th minute. Ezzatollahi gave the Emirati league leaders a lifeline just before the break, heading home from close range to make it 2-1 at halftime – a sixth goal in 33 appearances for the Iranian holding midfielder this season.

Shabab Al Ahli kept the pressure high after the break, and Azmoun brought them level with a powerful finish in the 54th minute.

The goal took Azmoun's tally to a remarkable 26 strikes across all competitions in his debut season for Shabab Al Ahli, leaving him fourth in the league's leading marks-men chart with 11 goals.

Both teams had chances to secure all points, with Iranian midfielder Ahmad Nourollahi coming closest for Al Wahda, before Hamad Abdul-

lah's save kept Shabab Al Ahli in the game.

The draw saw Shabab Al Ahli tighten the grip on the top spot of the table with 56 points – 11 clear of Sharjah, which has a game in hand – and remain on course for a second domestic top-flight trophy in three years.

Elsewhere on Sunday, Sharjah settled for a 1-1 stalemate at Al Jazira.

Neeskens Kebano sent the goalkeeper the wrong way from the spot to give Al Jazira a 10th-minute lead, before Firas Ben Alarabi drew Sharjah level in similar fashion in the fourth minute of first-half added time.

Sharjah had to finish the game with 10 men, after full-back Shahin Abdulrahman received his marching orders in the 95th minute.

Iran, Japan set to rekindle rivalry in FIBA Asia Cup

FIBA – Iran and Japan are headed for another chapter in one of the continent's most balanced and bruising basketball rivalries when they square off in Group B of the FIBA Asia Cup in Jeddah in August. It's a series deadlocked at 7-7 in Asia Cup history. Every win, every loss, has carried weight. The last time they met, Iran got the better of Japan, winning 88-76 at the Asia Cup 2022. It wasn't just the scoreline that stood out – it was the clash of generations and two of the biggest stars of the competition. Iran's Hamed Haddadi, the long-reigning king of Asian big men, stuffed the stat sheet with 21 points, 11 rebounds, 4 assists, and 3 blocks. Japan's Yuta Watanabe, a familiar name to NBA fans, countered with 17 points and 10 rebounds of his own.

Iran's Behnam Yakhchali and Mo-

hammad Jamshidi piled on 41 points combined, showing that the generation after Haddadi and Samad Nikkhah Bahrami is still carrying the torch proudly.

Their 2015 encounters are still a sore point for Japan. Iran crushed them 86-48 in the opening game – then came back to deny Japan a medal in the third-place game, winning 68-63 behind Bahrami's epic 35-point outburst.

Iran grabbed their fourth Asia Cup medal. Japan were left without a podium finish once again, a drought that has now stretched since 1997.

Japan once owned this rivalry, winning the first five meetings between 1973 and 1991. But Iran turned the tide in 1993, and since then, it's been a fight for every inch. They've spilled that battle over into World Cup qualifiers, too. Ja-

pan swept Iran in the 2019 Asian qualifiers during their miracle eight-game win streak to reach the World Cup.

In the 2023 cycle, the story flipped: Iran spoiled Japan's hot start with a 79-68 win behind Yakhchali's 30-point explosion, before Japan stormed back six months later with a brutal 96-61 payback, with Ren Kanekchika splashing six threes in his senior team debut.

This rivalry isn't just about the past – it's about two programs pulling in opposite directions. Iran, trying to squeeze the last drops out of a golden era. Japan, banking on a new wave of shooters, speed, and swagger.

Come Group B, history says it's a toss-up. Reality says it could be one of the most intense games of the group phase in Jeddah.



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