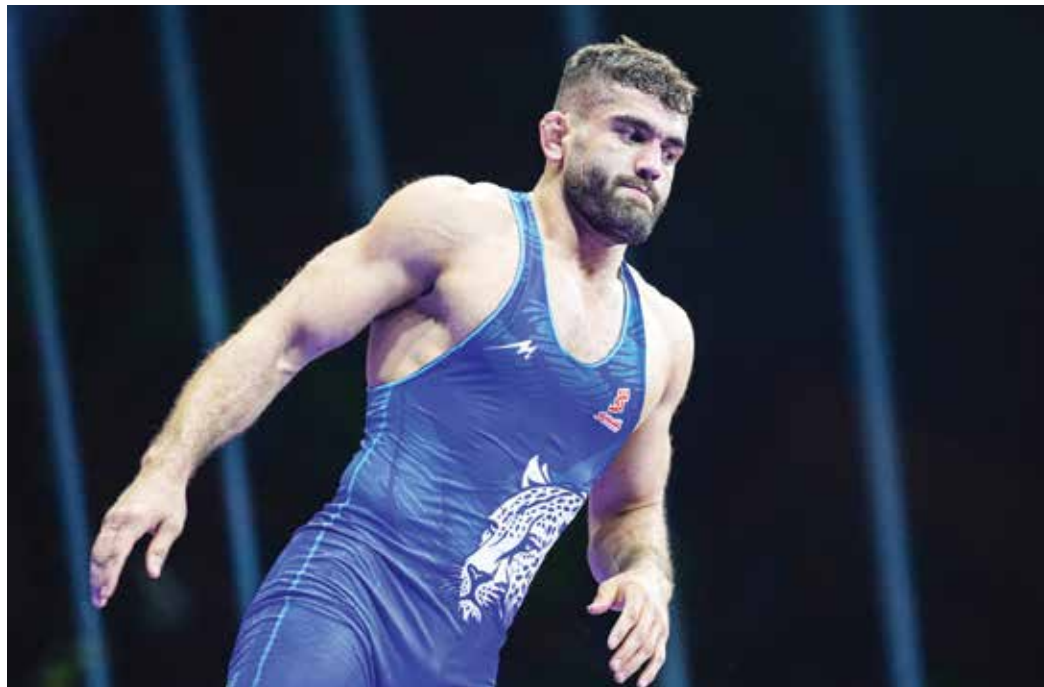


## UWW Ranking Series:

## Babaei, Bazri bag golds in Ulaanbaatar to stay on selection course



Iranian wrestlers Fariborz Babaei (L) and Ahmad Bazri won the freestyle 79kg and 97kg gold medals, respectively, at the Ulaanbaatar Open in Mongolia. ● IAWFIR

## Sports Desk

Iranian freestyle wrestlers Fariborz Babaei and Ahmad Bzari walked away with the ultimate prize in their respective weight classes at the Ulaanbaatar Open to remain in contention with a place in the Iranian squad for September's World Championships in Zagreb. An International Takhti Cup champion in May, Babaei maintained his impressive form at the third Ranking

Series event of the season by defeating Magomet Evloev of Tajikistan 4-0 to win the gold medal in the 79kg contests. However, the debate over the Iranian 79kg slot for the world showpiece remains far from settled, as reigning Asian champion Mahdi Yousefi still fancies his chances of booking a Zagreb ticket – despite losing to Babaei in the Takhti Cup final – while four-time world medalist Mohammad Nok-

hodi recently entered the fray after recovering from a knee surgery. Meanwhile, Bazri also built on a gold-winning run at the Takhti Cup to go all the way in Ulaanbaatar, outmuscling the host's Gankhuyag Gambaatar 8-0 in the final. Standing between Bazri and a spot in Zagreb is Amirali Azarpira, who also underwent a surgery on his injured knee after claiming the Olympic bronze in Paris last summer.

Elsewhere in the Mongolian capital, Aliakbar Fazli and Mohammadali Amouzad were dealt a massive blow in their bid to secure a national team spot after missing out on the top podium in the 70kg event. Amouzad left the competition empty-handed, suffering a 10-6 loss to his fellow Iranian in the semifinals before a 7-5 defeat against Mongolia's Tulga Tumur-Ochir in the third-place contest.

Fazli, meanwhile, had to settle for a silver medal following a 6-0 loss to neutral participant Konstantin Kaprynov. Seven Iranians have already secured a national team spot for September's showpiece, including Younes Emami, who defeated Amirmohammad Yazdani in an all-Iranian 74kg final in Ulaanbaatar to remain on course for a third world medal. Kamaran Qasempour came out victorious against Abol-

fazl Rahmani in a domestic head-to-head in Tehran last week to seal the 86kg slot, while reigning world champion Amirhossein Zare' (125kg) and Ali Mo'meni (57kg) won the Takhti Cup golds to punch the Zagreb ticket, joining Ahmad Mohammadnejad-Javan, Rahman Amouzad, and Amirhossein Firouzpour. Mohammadnejad-Javan will be the Iranian 61kg wrestler, thanks to a gold-winning run at February's

Zagreb Open, as well as an Asian bronze in March. Olympic silver winner Amouzad will chase a second world 65kg gold after domestic rivals Yassin Rezaei and Ali Khorramdel had below-par runs at the Ranking Series season-opener in February, while Firouzpour's dominant campaigns at the Asian Championships and the Zagreb Open, convinced the Iranian coaching staff to pick him for the world 92kg contests.

## World Cup Asian qualifiers:

## Iran names squad for double dead rubbers

## Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee named the 28-man squad for the upcoming double-header against Qatar and North Korea at the World Cup Asian qualifiers. Iran sits atop the Group A table with 20 points, three clear of second-placed Uzbekistan and seven above the United Arab Emirates with two games to spare. A 2-2 home draw against Uzbekistan last time out in March guaranteed a top-two finish in the group for Team Melli and direct qualification for next year's finals in the United States, Mexico, and Canada. Iran will play away to Qatar in Doha's Jassim bin Hamad Stadium on Thursday, before concluding the qualifiers against bottom-side North Korea at Tehran's Azadi Stadium next Tuesday.

Fourth in the group with 10 points, Qatar, which will have Spaniard Julen Lopetegui as the new head coach, will be desperate to collect all points on the home turf, which will keep the reigning Asian champion in contention with a third-place finish and a place in the final group phase of the qualifiers. Qatar is the last team to have beaten Iran in a competitive game – a 3-2 victory in the Asian Cup semifinals in February 2024 – though Al Annabi was hammered 4-1 when the two sides met in the qualifiers in Dubai last October. Shabab Al Ahli striker Sardar Azmoun is ruled of the upcoming fixtures with an injury, with Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh and Ali Alipour – the top two leading marksmen in the newly-finished Iranian top-



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flight season – joining Interstriker Mahdi Taremi and Ittihad Kalba's Shahriar Moghanlou in the Iranian frontline.

Injured winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh will also miss the games, making way for Sepahan's Mohammad-Mehdi Mohebbi, who will hope

to make his senior international debut after bagging nine goals and 10 assists in 37 appearances across all club competitions.

Wizard winger Mahdi Qayedi will also aim to bring his impressive club form to international duty, having contributed with six strikes and double assists in five UAE Pro League outings for Ittihad Kalba. Right-back Sadeq Moharrami, who is set to join Sepahan as a free agent from Dynamo Zagreb, has received a first call-up by Qalenoee in 16 months, having recovered from a torn ligament injury he suffered against the UAE at the Asian Cup.

The following is the full Iranian squad:

**Goalkeepers:** Alireza Beiranvand (Tractor), Payam Ni-azmand (Persepolis), Seyyed Hossein Hosseini (Esteghlal), Mohammad Khalifeh (Ittihad Kalba). **Defenders:** Shoja Khalilzadeh (Tractor), Aref Aqasi (Trac-

tor), Morteza Pouraliganji (Persepolis), Milad Mohammadi (Persepolis), Ali Ne'mati (Foolad Khuzestan), Mohammad-Amin Hazbavi (Sepahan), Saleh Hardani (Esteghlal), Sadeq Moharrami (-), Omid Nourafkan (Sepahan). **Midfielders:** Arya Yousefi (Sepahan), Saeed Ezzatollahi (Shabab Al Ahli), Mohammad Karimi (Sepahan), Mohammad Qorbani (Al Wahda), Amirmohammad Razaqnia (Golgothar Sirjan), Rouzbeh Cheshmi (Esteghlal), Mohammad-Javad Hosseinejad (Dinamo Makhachkala), Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi (Sepahan), Saman Qoddous (Ittihad Kalba), Mahdi Qayedi (Ittihad Kalba), Mahdi Hasehmnejad (Tractor). **Strikers:** Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh (Tractor), Mahdi Taremi (Internazionale), Ali Alipour (Persepolis), Shahriar Moghanlou (Ittihad Kalba).

## Gauff speeds past Alexandrova, heads into French Open quarters

**REUTERS** – Second seed Coco Gauff brushed aside Russian Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-0 7-5 on Monday to move into the French

Open quarter-finals and stay on course for her first title in Paris. The American world number two must have

thought she would have an easy morning session after powering through the first set in sensational fashion but the Russian

bounced back in the second to test her opponent. "The whole match I played well. She stepped up her game in the second set.

Overall I thought I played great," Gauff said. "I move well on clay, really comfortable with sliding and moving on the sur-

face. The most physical surface for sure and I do well in that department." Gauff is the youngest American player to have

reached at least the fourth round at seven consecutive Grand Slams since Venus Williams between 1997-1999.