

# U20 Wrestling World Championships: Iranian young guns aiming for glory in Sofia

Sports Desk

Iran will once again be among the hot favorites for team trophies when the U20 World Championships get underway in Sofia on August 17. Iranian wrestlers will chase a sixth Greco-Roman title – fourth in a row – in eight editions, and the freestyle squad will be looking to improve on last year’s runner-up finish to the United States in Pontevedra, Spain. Payam Ahmadi will be the Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler in the 55kg weight class, having won the Asian junior gold in Bishkek last month, with Mohammad-Amin Abdelvali vying for success in the 60kg class. Mohammad-Javad Aboutaleb (63kg) and Gholamreza Abdevali (67kg) will head to the Bulgarian capital on the back of Asian bronze medals in their respective classes in July. Ahmadreza Mohammadian, a world cadet silver medalist in 2023, will be a contender for the 72kg glory, while Ahoura Bouveiri will be among the wrestlers to watch in the 77kg class after he won a world under-17 silver in 2022. Former world under-17 bronze medalists Hamed Azarshab and Hamidreza Keshkar will aim for another age-group success when representing the country in the 82kg and 87kg events respectively.



● FARSHAD BANDANI/IAWFIR

Reigning Asian champion Mohammad-Hadi Seydi will be a medal hopeful in the 97kg division, while Abolfazl Fat’hi – a silver medalist last year – will

compete in the 130kg contests, fresh off back-to-back Asian superheavyweight titles. In the freestyle competitions, Arshia Haddadi will be looking

to build on July’s Asian bronze in the 57kg class, with 2023 world U17 champion Ahoura Khateri desperate to make up for his below-par performance in last

year’s world cadet event when beginning his campaign in the 61kg category. Aliasghar Tathashtikeh will be part of the 65kg draw, and Asian

junior gold medalists Ebrahim Elahi and Mohammad-Mahdi Mamivand will represent Iran in the 70kg and 74kg classes, respectively. World U23 champion Mahdi Yousefi will be the contestant to beat in the 79kg event after he enjoyed an impressive run in the senior competitions in recent months, winning a precious silver in February’s Ranking Series event in Zagreb before grabbing the gold at the Asian Championships in March. Abolfazl Rahmani will also be a favorite for the ultimate prize in the 86kg class, following gold-winning campaigns at the Asian senior and junior championships over the past five months. Former world cadet bronze winner Tohid Noori (92kg), and Asian U20 champion Erfan Alizadeh (97kg), who won a Ranking Series silver in February, will chase another age-group medal in Sofia, while the country will hope to see another superheavyweight prodigy is introduced in the 125kg class when Abolfazl Mohammadnejad – a world U17 bronze winner – lock horns with his opponents. Around 650 wrestlers are expected to compete across the men’s and women’s competitions in Sofia, with the freestyle event kicking off the tournament – followed by women’s wrestling – before the Greco-Roman event brings the curtain down on the showpiece on August 24.

## Esteghlal signs Iranian striker Saharkhizan

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Esteghlal signed young Iranian striker Saied Saharkhizan from Russian club FC Orenburg on a three-year contract, reportedly worth €2 million, the Persian Gulf Pro League club announced on Friday. Saharkhizan, 22, bagged eight goals and one assist in 32 appearances across all competitions for Orenburg last season, having joined the Russian outfit last summer from Iranian top-flight side Golgozar. Saharkhizan, who contributed 10 strikes and four assists in his season-long spell at Golgo-

zar, is the ninth summer signing for the Tehran Blues, who are desperate to improve on a dreadful campaign last term. Esteghlal, which has Portuguese Ricardo Sa Pinto back on the bench as the head coach, finished ninth in the 16-team table of the Iranian top division last season, and was knocked out by Saudi giant Al Nassr in the AFC Champions League Elite last-16. The Blues still managed to win the Hazfi Cup trophy under interim boss Mojtaba Jabbari in May and secure a place in the upcoming AFC Champions League Two season.

Esteghlal’s activity in the market gathered pace in recent days as the club secured a deal with Albanian international winger Jasir Asani last Sunday, before former Real Madrid and Sporting CP goalkeeper Antonio Adán joined the Blues as a free agent on Wednesday. Esteghlal had already signed young midfielders Esmail Qolizadeh and Amirmohammad Razzaqinia, plus ex-Sepahan fullback Hossein Goudarzi, Iranian center-back Aref Aqasi, Uzbekistan international center-back Rustamjon Ashurmatov, as well as former Malavan goalkeeper Habib Farabbasi.



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## AFC U20 Women’s Asian Cup qualifiers: Dini, Rahmani on target as Iran beats Guam

AFC – Iran made it two wins out of two after defeating Guam 2-0 in Group F of the AFC U20 Women’s Asian Cup qualifiers on Friday. Iran went into the tie in a better position, having opened their campaign with a 3-0 win over Malaysia while Guam – defeated 5-0 by Japan – needed victory to stay in the running. However, the Central Asian side were quicker to get into stride and went ahead in the 16th minute through Maryam Dini,

with the forward netting her third goal of the campaign. To their credit, Guam showed more resilience compared to their tie against Japan and managed to keep Iran at bay for the remainder of the half. Iran, however, kept knocking on the door and finally found their second in the 60th minute through Parnia Rahmani. A Dini’s double, coupled with an Asal Qajarian’s strike, had secured an opening-day victory for Niloofer Ardalan’s

girls against the group host on Wednesday. Up next for Iran are Japan on Sunday, with the tie to likely decide the group winners. The eight qualification group winners and best three runners-up will join host Thailand in the finals next April.



*Iranian girls celebrate a goal during a 2-0 victory over Guam in the AFC U20 Women’s Asian Cup qualifiers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on August 8, 2025.*

● AFC

