

U20 Wrestling World Championships: Yousefi ends Iran's gold drought in Samokov

Sports Desk

Mahdi Yousefi gave Iran something to cheer about amid another dire freestyle campaign at the U20 Wrestling World Championships by securing the country's first gold medal in Samokov, Bulgaria.

However, there was further misery for Iran – winner of three freestyle team trophies over the past four editions – on Tuesday as Arshia Haddadi, Aliasghar Tat, and Tohid Nouri all finished empty-handed in their respective weight classes. Yousefi defeated American William Henckel 8-6 to walk away with the ultimate prize in the 79kg contests – a second medal for the Iranian at the U20 Worlds following last year's bronze in

Pontevedra, Spain. The Iranian built a commanding 8-2 lead in the second period and then held off a late surge by Henckel to round off a prolific 10 month in his career, which began with the world under-23 title in Tirana last October.

Yousefi had an impressive breakthrough in senior wrestling earlier this year by collecting a Ranking Series silver and bronze, either side of a gold-winning performance at the Asian Championships in March, though he ultimately missed out on a place in the Iranian squad for September's World Championships in Zagreb.

The Iranian prodigy began his campaign in Samokov with emphatic

victories over Moldovan Ion Laurențiu Marcu (10-0) and Armenia's Narek Nikoghosyan (8-0, technical fall) and then beat Turkmenistan's Alp Arslan Begenjow 6-4 for a place in the semifinals.

A thrilling last-four clash saw the Iranian outmuscle Russian Said Saidulov, who participated as a neutral athlete, 15-7 to set a final date with Henckel.

Meanwhile, Haddadi recovered from a first-round setback (6-1) against Russian Magomed Ozdamirov to rout Bulgaria's Esad Bozali by technical superiority in the 57kg repechage but was undone by Kyrgyzstan's Baiaman Kerimbekov (5-4) and failed to reach the third-place bout.

Elsewhere, a 10-9 defeat

against Russian wrestler Amal Dzhandubaev ended Tat's 65kg campaign in the round of 16.

Nouri was forced to retire from the quarterfinal clash with Gadzhimurad Gadzhibatyrov due to a rib injury, while trailing the Russian 3-1.

Tuesday's results came after Iran had managed to win a silver and bronze across four weight classes the previous night.

Abolfazl Mohammadnejad had to settle for a silver medal in the 125kg contests following a 4-1 loss to Kazakhstan's Yedige Kassimbek, while Ebrahim finished with a consolation bronze in the 70kg category.

Elahi bounced back from a last-four criteria defeat (2-2) against American Peter John Duke to beat France's Abdoullah Na-

kaev 6-4 and share the third podium with Nurlan Aghazada of Azerbaijan.

Erfan Alizadeh – an Asian U20 champion in July – crashed out in the round of 16 following a 7-5 loss to Nikolaos Karavanos of Greece in the 97kg class, with Mohammad-Mahdi Mamivand also missing out on the podium in the 74kg event – courtesy of a 9-8 setback against Italian Raul Caso in the last 16.

The freestyle competition will be followed by the women's wrestling event in Samokov, before the Iranian Greco-Roman squad begins its bid for a fourth successive team title at the U20 Worlds on Friday.



● IAWFIR

Persian Gulf Pro League:

Esteghlal stuns Tractor; Malavan, Sepahan share the spoils

Sports Desk

Esteghlal made a strong statement on the opening day of the new Persian Gulf Pro League season by claiming a massive 1-0 away victory over defending champion Tractor in Tabriz on Tuesday.

Mohammad-Hossien Eslami played a delicate one-two with summer signing Saied Saharkhizan before lobbing young Tractor goalkeeper Adib Zarei midway through the second half at an empty Bonyan Diesel Stadium. The victory ended the Tehran Blues' three-game losing streak against the northwest Iranian club – including last week's 2-1 setback in the Iranian Super Cup.

With Portuguese head coach Ricardo Sa Pinto back on the bench after two years and the addition of some marquee signings

in recent weeks, Esteghlal faithful will hope the Blues build on the victory to mount a serious title charge, having endured a dreadful league campaign last term by finishing ninth in the table.

Meanwhile, the opening-day setback, coupled with a drab performance throughout the 90 minutes, served as a wakeup call for Tractor and Croatian head coach Dragan Skocic ahead of a hectic season in the domestic competitions as well as the AFC Champions League Elite.

Next for Tractor is an away game against Mes Rafsanjan and former head coach Rasoul Khatibi on Tuesday, while Esteghlal will host Zob Ahan at the Shahr-e Qods Stadium.

Elsewhere, Sepahan shared the points with Malavan, courtesy of a 1-1 stalemate at the Sirous Qayeqran Sta-

dium on Tuesday.

Aria Yousefi gave Sepahan a 12th-minute lead with a tame effort from the edge of the box, only to see his strike canceled out by Hossein Sadeqi in the 65th minute.

Sepahan will hope to extend its five-game winning run against Persepolis, which was held to a 1-1 home draw by newly-promoted Fajr Sepasi on Monday, when the two heavyweights go head-to-head in the 'Iranian Clasico' next week.

Malavan, meanwhile, will travel to Ahvaz to play Foolad Khuzestan on Tuesday.

Having finished fourth in the table last season, Yahya Golmohammadi's Foolad got off to a losing start in the new campaign, suffering a 1-0 defeat against Chadormalou.

Foolad went down to 10

men after Mohammadreza Soleimani received his marching orders in the 44th minute, before Ali Khodadi found the net from the spot in the 90th minute.

Chadormalou – the surprise package in the Iranian top flight last season – will play away to Shams Azar next.

Shams Azar played to a 1-1 draw against Esteghlal Khuzestan on Tuesday.

Hojjat Ahmadi put the home side in front in the 26th minute, before Mahdi Mohammadi drew Shams Azar level with 18 minutes left on the clock.

Esteghlal Khuzestan will visit Paykan next Tuesday.



Esteghlal players celebrate their 1-0 victory over Tractor at the Persian Gulf Pro League in Tabriz, Iran, on August 19, 2025.

● FFIRI

Asian Shooting Championships:

Rostamian, Golkhandan team up for mixed bronze in air pistol contests

Sports Desk

Iran's Hanieh Rostamian and Vahid Golkhandan teamed up to win a bronze medal in the 10m air pistol mixed event at the Asian Shooting Championships in Shymkent, Kazakhstan.



The Iranian duo defeated Vietnam's Thuy Trang Nguyen and Cong Minh Lai 16-8 on Wednesday to share the third podium with India, while China defeated South Korea 16-12 to walk away with the ultimate prize.

The bronze took Iran's haul to seven medals across different age classes in Shymkent.

Iranian boys Mohammadreza Ahmadi, Amirhossein Gohari, and Mohammad-Mahdi Choobin scored 1721 points to beat India (1716pts) and South Korea (1699) to the men's youth 10m air pistol gold on Monday, while Ahmadi went on to win the individual bronze in the same category.

Meanwhile, Iranian girls Parimah Amiri, Donya Arshadnia, and Tara Abaszadeh won a youth silver medal on Tuesday, scoring 1676 points for a runner-up finish behind India (1701) in the women's 10m air pistol event.

Amiri also claimed the in-

dividual bronze of the category with 214.1 points.

Iran also collected a couple of bronzes in the men's 10m air pistol team event. Golkhandan, Amir Joharikhou, and former Olympic champion Javad Forouqi scored 1733 points for a third-place finish in the team table, while Joharikhou bagged a bronze in the individual competitions.

The 16th edition of the Asian Championships will continue at the Shymkent Shooting Plaza until August 30.



Hanieh Rostamian (l) and Vahid Golkhandan won the 10m air pistol mixed team bronze at the Asian Shooting Championships in Shymkent, Kazakhstan.

● IRISSF

Iran U21 beats Brazil in last outing before FIVB World Championship

Sports Desk

Iranian boys defeated Brazil in straight sets (25-23, 26-24, 25-15) on Tuesday in a final warmup friendly before the FIVB Volleyball U21 World Championship, which will get underway today in Jiangmen, China.

Mohammad Mo'menimogaddam's team had come out victorious in four sets against France in the Chinese city on Sunday. "Results don't really matter in friendly games, but I'm still grateful that the two victories will boost our confidence for the World Championship," said the Iranian head coach, who will be looking to build on a 20-game unbeaten run in competitive matches, during which Iran claimed back-to-back

Asian under-20 titles either side of the world U21 crown in 2023 – thanks to a 3-2 victory over Italy in the final showdown in Manama. Two-time champion over the past three editions, Iran will begin its title defense against Kazakhstan in Pool B today.

A second outing for Iran will come against Puerto Rico on Friday, followed by games against South Korea – in a repeat of last year's Asian under-20 final, which Iran won in straight sets – Canada, and Poland. The top four in each of the four six-team groups will progress to the round of 16.



● AMIRHOSSEIN KHEIRKHAH/volleyball.ir