

Wrestling World Championships: Saravi reclaims 97kg title, Sohrabi bags consolation bronze

Sports Desk

A memorable World Championships campaign continued for Iranian wrestling on Saturday as reigning Olympic champion Mohammad-Hadi Saravi grabbed the Greco-Roman 97kg gold in Zagreb, Croatia.

Danial Sohrabi, meanwhile, recovered from a last-eight heartbreak to finish with a consolation bronze in the 72kg event. Earlier on the penultimate day of the competitions, Saied Esmaeili (67kg) and Alireza Mohmadi (87kg), who won the Olympic gold and silver medals last year, respectively, progressed to the final showpiece of their respective weight classes, while Mohammad-Mahdi Keshtkar suffered a last-four defeat (5-3) against South Korea's Chung Han-jae to head into the bronze-medal bout in the 63kg division on his debut at the Wrestling Worlds.

Saturday's results were enough to secure the Greco-Roman crown and a historic men's team title double for the country of the final day's outcome in Zagreb – a feat previously achieved only by the Soviet Union and Russia.

Drought ends

Saravi ended a four-year wait for the world title by scoring an early takedown and going on to defeat Russian Artur Sargsian, who competed as a neutral wrestler, 3-1 in the final showdown. "In my opinion, this tournament

wasn't easy at all; it was one of the most exciting and diverse competitions I've ever been part of," Saravi said. "There were new opponents, and some wrestlers reached the finals and repechage rounds that I honestly hadn't expected. The level was much higher than I thought it would be."

After winning the world gold in Oslo in 2021, Saravi had to settle for bronze medals at the 2022 and 2023 editions in Belgrade, falling in the semifinals on both occasions.

But he righted the ship for the Paris Olympics, where he defeated long-time Armenian rival Artur Aleksanyan in the final to add the gold to the Olympic bronze he won in Tokyo in 2021. In Zagreb, while Aleksanyan and defending champion Gabriel Rosillo of Cuba, who defeated Saravi in the 2023 semifinals, fell by the wayside, Saravi marched into the final without pomp or drama, winning his matches by such scores as 4-0, 1-1 and 3-1.

"In this weight class, the champions are among the greats of wrestling: Artur Aleksanyan, Cuban Rosillo, and of course, my final opponent, Artur Sargsian, who is a very well-known and skillful wrestler," Saravi said. "But with my preparation, I was able to execute my plans and win."

His meeting with Sargsian in the final was a rematch of their first-round match at the 2021 World Championships, which Saravi



Iran's Mohammad-Hadi Saravi (red) celebrates after winning the Greco-Roman 97kg gold medal at the Wrestling World Championships in Zagreb, Croatia, on September 20, 2025.

● IAWFIR

won 6-4 en route to his first world gold.

On Saturday, the 27-year-old Saravi drew early blood when he used an arm drag to get behind and force Sargsian down at the edge for a 2-0 lead. He made it 3-0 with a passivity point, but was unable to turn Sargsian from par terre.

That left the door open for Sargsian, when he was put in par terre in the second period. But he also could not budge the Ira-

nian, who then ran out the clock for the win.

"As we had planned with my coaches, even though some of my expected rivals didn't make it to the later rounds, with the analysis we had done we were able to plan well and make it to the final," added Saravi, who is also a three-time gold medalist at the Asian Championships.

"I had wrestled [Sargsian] twice before, and with the strategies we had, I managed to beat him.

Thankfully, this time, too, I was able to execute my plans perfectly on the mat and win the match."

Saravi reflected on coming up short at the two previous World Championships.

"I think in the two World Championships where I won bronze, I had some technical weaknesses," Saravi said. "I was able to fix those before the Olympics and keep that level through this year's Worlds.

"I hope I can keep improving for the upcoming tournaments and continue winning big medals."

In the 72kg category, Sohrabi, who had beaten former world and Olympic champion Mohammadreza Geraei in the Iranian world trials, appeared in unstoppable form in the Croatian capital, beginning with back-to-back superiority victories. However, a controversial loss to Ibrahim Ghanem of France, in which the Iranian was disqualified for exceeding the four-minute bleeding timeout, cost Sohrabi a place in the semifinals on Friday.

Sohrabi still managed to bounce back to beat Armenia's Gor Khachatryan and Kazakhstan's Mery Maulitkanov in emphatic fashion to share the third podium with Abdullo Aliev of Uzbekistan.

"Thank God that I managed to win a medal for my country and will not return home empty-handed," Sohrabi said.

"In my bout against the high-profile French wrestler, I suffered some hard blow to my head and face, which went unnoticed by the officials. However, I didn't let that break my focus. I kept my motivation high and fought until the very end."

"I came into this tournament with extra motivation for my brother, who is sick and having a tough time. I wanted to win this medal to make him happy, and to make my parents proud after they worked day and night for me all year long. I hope this small success brings them some comfort."

UAE Pro League:

Azmoun strikes last-gasp winner for Shabab Al Ahli on return from injury

Sports Desk

Iran international striker Sardar Azmoun announced his long-awaited return from injury in style, scoring a stoppage-time winner to lead Shabab Al Ahli to a massive 1-0 away win against Al Nasr at the UAE ADNOC Pro League on Saturday.

Making his first appearance in 122 days, Azmoun came off the bench with 13 minutes from normal time before rising high to head home Federico Cartabia's corner-kick in the fifth minute of added time, as defending champion Shabab Al Ahli continued its unbeaten start to the new Emirati top-flight season.

The former AS Roma and Bayer Leverkusen striker bagged 26 goals and 10 assists in 39 appearances across all competitions in his debut campaign for Shabab Al Ahli, helping the club win a second league title in three seasons in May, as well as the UAE President's Cup and Super Cup trophies.

Saturday's victory moved Shabab Al Ahli to second in the league table with 10 points, with Al Ain on top on goal difference. Elsewhere, Iranian mid-



Shabab Al Ahli striker Sardar Azmoun celebrates his goal during a 1-0 win against Al Nasr in the ADNOC Pro League in Dubai, UAE, on September 20, 2025.

● X

fielder Ahmad Nourollahi provided Venezuelan Renne Rivas with a 53rd-minute assist, before Ahmed Abunamous found the net in the second minute of added time as Ittihad Kalba came from behind to defeat Dibba away from home and move to fifth in

the table with seven points. Nourollahi's fellow-Iranian Shahriar Moghanlou was introduced as a 68th-minute substitute, while Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi and Samam Qoddous missed the game in Fujairah with injury and Amirhossein Samdaliri was an unused substitute.

WTT Feeder Series:

Iranian girl Safaei wins historic third-place trophy in Cappadocia

Sports Desk

Iranian table tennis girl Shima Safaei won an impressive third-place trophy at the latest WTT Feeder Series event in Cappadocia, Türkiye – the country's first women's title in the history of the competition.

Safaei defeated some prominent opponents en route to the women's singles semifinals, before suffering a 3-0 loss (11-5, 11-4, 11-8) to Asuka Sasao of Japan.

Sasao settled for a runner-up finish after a 3-1 defeat against top-seeded Hitomi Sato in an all-Jap-

anese showdown, while Safaei shared the third place with Tan Zhao Yun of Indonesia.

Safaei began her campaign with a straight-game victory over Uzbekistan's Markhabo Magdieva, and went on come out victorious against eighth-seed Brazilian Laura Watanabe by the same scoreline in the round of 32.

Safaei continued with a 3-1 win against the host's Sibel Altinkaya, and then held off a fightback from second-seed Dian Mershef of Egypt in a five-game thriller (12-10, 12-10, 5-11, 9-11, 11-8) to advance



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to the last four. Mahshid Ashtari and Elina Rahimi were the other Iranian contestants in women's singles draw. Ashtari suffered a 3-0 defeat (11-7, 11-6, 11-5) against

Japanese Sato in the last 16, while Rahimi crashed out in the round of round of 32, courtesy of 3-2 setback (7-11, 11-7, 6-11, 11-8, 15-13) against Turkish girl Ece Harac.

Persepolis closing on contract with ex-Newcastle fullback Lewis

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League club Persepolis is nearing a deal to sign former Newcastle United fullback Jamal Lewis as a free agent.

The 27-year-old Northern Ireland international is in Dubai to undergo medical tests ahead of joining the Iranian top-flight heavyweight, Varzesh3 reported on Sunday.



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Lewis joined Newcastle from Norwich City in September 2020, though his contribution in The Magpies shirt was limited to 36 appearances across all competitions.

He left Newcastle to join English second-tier club Watford on loan for the start of 2023/24 season, before a second loan spell saw him make six appearances for Brazilian Série A outfit São Paulo last year.

Persepolis is fourth in the Iranian top-flight table with six points from four games.