

Wrestling World Championships: Esmaeili wins 67kg gold, rounds off historic campaign for Iran

Sports Desk

Olympic champion Saied Esmaeili brought the curtain down on a memorable campaign for Iran at the Wrestling World Championships by grabbing the Greco-Roman 67kg gold in Zagreb, Croatia, on Sunday.

Esmaeili's gold, along with a silver and bronze medal on the final day of competition, helped the Iranian squad dominate the standings with 180 points – courtesy of a remarkable four golds, two silvers, and two bronzes across 10 weight classes – lifting the Greco-Roman trophy for the first time since 2014, with Azerbaijan (89pts) and Uzbekistan (72) in the following spots.

Alireza Mohmadi had to settle for a silver medal in the 87kg division after a final heartbreak against Serbian Aleksandr Komarov, while Mohammad-Mahdi Keshtkar defeated Russian former world champion Sergey Emelin, who competed as a neutral athlete, 6-4 to finish with an impressive 63kg bronze on his debut at the Wrestling Worlds.

The Greco-Roman crown saw Iran complete a first-ever men's team title double at the World Championships – a feat previously achieved only by the Soviet Union and Russia.

Leader lauds wrestlers

Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution, was full of praise for the national



Greco-Roman wrestler Saied Esmaeili celebrates with members of the Iranian coaching staff after winning the 67kg gold medal at the Wrestling World Championships in Zagreb, Croatia, on September 21, 2025.

● IAWFIR

Greco-Roman team after the historic achievement in the Croatian capital, extending his congratulations in a message on Sunday night.

"The resolute determination and arduous efforts of you and your brothers in the freestyle team brought joy to the nation and honor to the country."

"I pray to God for your dignity and victory, and commend the athletes, coaches, and the officials," the statement added.

Back-to-back titles

Esmaeili became the second Iranian wrestler in as many nights

– after Mohammad-Hadi Saravi – to follow last year's Olympic triumph with a senior world gold medal.

In his showdown against reigning European champion and Paris Olympic bronze medalist Hasrat Jafarov of Azerbaijan, the 22-year-old Iranian sensation got a stepout to start the bout, which proved the difference in a hard-fought 2-1 victory.

"With a smart plan, I beat him 2-1 and became the champion of this weight class," said Esmaeili, who won the gold in his senior world debut.

Each wrestler had a chance in par terre, but neither could turn the other, giving Esmaeili his closest victory of the tournament. He had cruised into the final with four consecutive wins by technical superiority.

"Anyone who makes it to the final is obviously a good wrestler, but I didn't want to take unnecessary risks in the final," Esmaeili said. "We had a clear plan to win, and thank God it worked out – we came out on top."

Esmaeili has been on quite a run in recent years. He has suffered just one loss since 2021, a 9-7

defeat at the hands of Cuba's Luis Orta in the semifinals of the Budapest Ranking Series event in June 2024.

His accolades, in addition to the Paris gold, include back-to-back Asian titles in 2024 and 2025. Having already won golds at the world U17 and U20, he needs just the world U23 to complete a "Golden Grand Slam," which includes the Olympics.

"This was my first time competing in the [senior] World Championships," Esmaeili said. "Before this, I had competed in the Olympics, where thankfully I won gold, and here I was able to repeat that Olympic gold to prove myself once again."

However, the Iranian party was spoiled later on the night, when Mohmadi fell to a 4-3 loss in the very last bout of the nine-day tournament at the Arena Zagreb.

The difference came down to what each wrestler did from par terre. Mohmadi could only manage a stepout on a throw attempt, while Komarov, on the other hand, got the traditional roll, which put him up 3-2 in the second period. The key moment of the contest came in the final minute, when the Iranian pressed forward in a tackle position and had Komarov backpedaling out of the ring.

But the stepout – nor a potential fleeing point – was not awarded when it was determined on a lost Iranian challenge that Mohmadi's hands had dropped below Koma-

rov's waist, which made it 4-2.

Mohmadi needed a takedown to win, but could only manage a late stepout. At the final whistle, he dropped to the mat in total despair and dejection, though he still secured a third silver medal in as many major tournaments – following the runner-up finishes at the 2023 World Championships and the Paris Olympics.

Sunday's results came after Saravi (97kg), Gholamreza Farrokhi (82kg), and Amin Mirzazadeh (130kg) had walked away with the ultimate prize in their respective classes, while Payam Ahmadi, 19, finished with a 55kg silver in his Senior World Championships debut.

Danial Sohrabi (72kg) was the other Iranian Greco-Roman bronze winner at the competitions.

The Iranian freestyle team had bagged seven medals across 10 weight classes to claim a first team trophy in 12 years at the Wrestling Worlds last week.

Rahman Amouzad (65kg) and Amirhossein Zare' (125kg) grabbed golds, with Ahmad Mohammadnejad Javan (61kg) and Amirali Azarpira (97kg) settling for a couple of silvers.

Mohammad Nokhodi (79kg), Kamran Qassempour (86kg), and Amirhossein Firouzpour (92kg) added three bronzes to Iran's medal haul as the country finished atop the freestyle standings with 145 points – 11 ahead of the United States, with Japan in third place on 111 points.



● IRIHFH

Asian Men's U-17 Handball Championship: Iran routs Qatar, sets last-four date with Bahrain

Sports Desk

Iranian boys continued their perfect run at the inaugural Asian Men's U-17 Handball Championship, hammering Qatar 46-25 for a sixth victory in as many outings in Amman, Jordan, on Sunday.

The victory saw Iran finish atop the main round's Group 2 table and set up a semifinal clash with Group 2 runner-up

Bahrain at the Jordan capital's Princess Sumaya Hall today. Hassan Joudaki and Shayan Sousani each scored a game-high six goals for Iran, with the former awarded with the Man of the Match prize.

Meanwhile, Iranians Darnial Mirhosseini, Mohammad-Pouya Parouhan, Amirhossein Nikeqbal, and Farshad Nowruzpour each contributed with five goals,

with Rashid Madadi and Alan Almbarek jointly topping Qatar's scoring chart with four goals apiece.

South Korea and Qatar will square off in the other semifinal today, with the two last-four winners heading into Wednesday's final showpiece, while securing a spot at the 1st IHF Men's U-17 Handball World Championship – starting October 24 in Morocco.

Iran began its campaign in Amman with a 65-4 hammering of Maldives, and then went on to defeat Syria (44-22) and South Korea (31-25) to win Group D in the preliminary round.

The first game in the main round saw Iran beat Asia's traditional handball powerhouse Kuwait 35-30, before sweeping the host team 42-22 on Saturday.

Persian Gulf Pro League: Hosseinzadeh at the double as Tractor sinks Sepahan

Sports Desk

Iran international striker Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh scored twice, including a 96th-minute winner, to help Tractor beat Sepahan 2-1 at the Persian Gulf Pro League in Isfahan on Sunday.

The victory saw the defending champion move atop the Iranian top-flight table – equal on seven points with Golgozar Sirjan and Khaybar Khorramabad after four rounds of matches – while Moharram Naividkia's Sepahan – yet to win a game in the new campaign – remained third from bottom with two points.

Hosseinzadeh, the leading marksman in the Iranian league last season, put the visitors in front from the spot just before halftime at the Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium,

only to see his goal canceled out on the hour mark by Mohammad-Mahdi Lotfi's side-footed strike from inside the box.

Just when the two sides looked set for a stalemate following a quiet closing stages, Hosseinzadeh head home the winner on the rebound after substitute Odildzhon Khamrobekov's effort from outside the box was kept out by former Tractor goalkeeper Mohammadreza Akhbari.

Elsewhere, Esteghlal came from behind twice to salvage a point in a 2-2 draw against Paykan, which played with 10 men for the best part of game in Tehran.

Iran U23 striker Kasra Taheri gave Paykan a shock lead midway through the first half at the Shahr-e Qods Stadium,

before his teammate Milad Baqeri received his marching orders for a harsh challenge on Moroccan midfielder Munir El Haddadi.

Albanian winger Jasir Asani drew the Blues level with a sublime curling effort in the seventh minute of added time in the first half, but the home side was stunned again three minutes after the break.

Taheri intercepted a back pass by Esteghlal center-back Aref Aqasi and then went past goalkeeper Habib Farabbasi before rolling the ball into an empty net for his fourth goal of the season. Asani bagged a second equalizer with a VAR-awarded spot-kick in the 80th minute as it finished 2-2, leaving Esteghlal eighth in the table with five points, with Paykan in fourth on six points.

Tractor striker Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh (bottom) celebrates a goal during a 2-1 win against Sepahan in the Persian Gulf Pro League in Isfahan, Iran, on September 21, 2025.

● FFIRI



AFC Futsal Asian Cup qualifiers: Iran marches past UAE, stays on perfect run in Group G

Sports Desk

Iran made it two wins out of two following its 10-0 defeat of the United Arab Emirates in Group C of the AFC Futsal Asian Cup qualifiers in Kuantan, Malaysia, on Monday.

Masoud Yosef scored twice, with Behrouz Azimi, Hossein Tayyebi, Mahdi Karimi, Amirhossein Dehqani, and Ali Khalilvand also on the score-

sheet as Vahid Shamsaei's men took a commanding 7-0 lead in the first half.

Azimi, Yusef, and Mahdi Ros-tamiha added three more goals in the second half as the Asian powerhouse, having hammered Bangladesh 12-0 in the group opener, remained on course for a place in January's finals in Indonesia and a bid for a record-extending 14th title in 18 editions of the Asian Cup.



● AFC