

World Taekwondo Under-21 Championships: Iran collects eight medals, claims men's title

Sports Desk

Iran captured six medals, including three golds, to secure the men's title at the World Taekwondo Under-21 Championships in Nairobi, Kenya.

The Iranian women's squad earned a gold and a bronze to finish behind Türkiye, South Korea, and Morocco in the team standings.

The final day of the inaugural event saw Mohammad Alizadeh take silver in the men's -87kg class, while Matin Rezaei claimed a bronze in the men's -68kg category.

Alizadeh began his campaign with a straight-round victory over Serbia's Ognjen Radaković, then rallied from behind to defeat Spanish top seed Sergio Troitino 2-1 (0-1, 6-5, 6-5).

The highlight of his run came in the semifinal against Brazilian Henrique Marques, where he once again fought back to beat the reigning world senior champion and earn a spot in the final against Kazakhstan's Batyrkhan Toleugali.

Alizadeh's title bid ultimately fell short, as he suffered a 2-0 defeat in the final, with Toleugali adding the gold to his 2022 World Junior Championships

triumph.

Earlier in the day, Rezaei – also a 2022 world junior champion – defeated Morocco's Reda Khomani before overcoming neutral athletes Ivan Findziukevich and Pavel Lukichev, all without dropping a round.

A semifinal loss to eventual gold medalist Berkay Erer of Türkiye left the Iranian joint third alongside Egypt's Omar Muhamed Fathy. It was Rezaei's fourth international bronze, following podium finishes at the 2023 World Senior Championships, the 2023 Asian Games, and last year's Asian Championships.

Saina Karimi, who won a stunning gold at the Islamic Solidarity Games last month, was the only other Iranian in action on the final day. She fell short of the podium in the women's -46kg division after a quarterfinal defeat to neutral Russian athlete Alisa Angelova.

Iran enjoyed further recognition during Saturday's closing ceremony, as Majid Aflaki was named Best Men's Coach, while Abolfazl Zandi received the award for Most Valuable Player in the men's category.

Zandi – a world senior champion in late October – capped a brilliant five-week stretch by



Iran's Abolfazl Zandi (R), pictured in the men's -58kg final, was named the Men's Most Valuable Player at the inaugural World Taekwondo Under-21 Championships in Nairobi, Kenya.

● WORLD TAEKWONDO

winning gold in the -58kg division with a straight-round victory over Russian neutral athlete Magomedg Magomedov on the opening day.

The final victory rounded out an emphatic run for the Iranian sensation, who completed a clean sweep of five 2-0 victories, scoring a total 131 points, while conceding only 23.

Radin Zeinali and Ammirreza Gholami were Iran's other men's gold medalists.

Zeinali defeated Türkiye's Omer Furkan Korpe 2-1 to win the -74kg crown on Friday, one day after Gholami edged Spanish top seed Mikel Fernandez Garcia (3-2, 8-8, 7-6) to claim the -80kg title. World junior champion Amir-mohammad Ashrafi (+87kg) added a bronze to Iran's tally, helping Aflaki's men finish ahead of Türkiye (two golds and one silver) and Kazakhstan (two golds and one bronze) in the standings.

Iran's two women's med-



als came courtesy of Mobina Nematzadeh and Hasti Mohammadi.

Nematzadeh, a bronze medalist at last year's Paris Olympics, bounced back from a disappointing performance at November's Senior World Championships to defeat Türki-

ye's Sila Irmak Uzuncavdar 2-1 (9-3, 7-12, 5-1) in the final and secure gold in the -53kg division. Mohammadi, who also won bronze at the Islamic Solidarity Games, suffered a semifinal setback against reigning world under-18 champion Amina Dehaoui of Morocco, finishing with

another international bronze in the -57kg category.

More than 450 participants from 75 countries competed over four days at Nairobi's Moi International Sports Centre.

The second edition of the tournament will take place in Samokov, Bulgaria, in 2027.

Iranian Ma'soumi to represent Azerbaijan at 2027 Wrestling Worlds



Sports Desk

Freestyle wrestler Amirreza Ma'soumi is set to represent Azerbaijan at the 2027 World Championships, the Iranian prodigy confirmed on Saturday.

The 20-year-old standout has dominated the super-heavyweight division across multiple age groups in recent years, collecting six world gold medals – including last year's junior and under-23 titles.

He also competed for Iran's senior team at February's Ranking Series event in Zagreb and then at the Asian Championships in March, winning the 125kg gold at both tournaments. However, Ma'soumi – who fell short against compatriot Amirhossein Zare' in last

year's Iranian Olympic trials – saw his hopes of securing a place at this September's World Championships dashed after suffering another defeat to the reigning world champion in the International Takhti Cup final in Isfahan in May.

Ma'soumi had previously shared a photo of himself with his father and personal coach, Fardin Ma'soumi, during a training session with Azerbaijan's national team in Baku earlier in July – a hint that he was considering continuing his international career abroad. But the Iranian Wrestling Federation refused to issue a letter of consent for one of the country's brightest wrestling talents. Under United World Wrestling regulations, a wrestler

must either obtain approval from his home federation or refrain from competing internationally for three years before switching national allegiance.

"I really wanted to continue winning medals for my country, but there are certain issues I don't wish to discuss right now. I don't believe in explaining myself, as it is a sign of weakness. The day will come when I prove through my achievements what Iranian wrestling has lost," Ma'soumi said of this new chapter in his career.

He also addressed the time of his return to international competition, saying: "I will be eligible to wrestle for Azerbaijan from the 2027 World Championships, and I am firm in my deci-

sion."

The Azerbaijan Wrestling Federation reportedly made an official approach for Ma'soumi in July, offering 300,000 Swiss francs for his services – an offer rejected by Alireza Dabir, the chairman of the Iranian federation.

"We've always granted approval for lower-ranked wrestlers to represent other countries, but Ma'soumi is a top-tier asset for us, already a favorite for world and Olympic golds. He has simply been unlucky to have Zare' as a domestic rival, though I believe the competition between them will push both to new heights. I'm sure they are by far the world's top two in their weight class," Dabir said at the time. "The national team's interests come first. I like Amirreza as if he were my own son, and I just hope he receives the right guidance," added the former world and Olympic champion.

Ma'soumi's decision means wrestling fans could witness a rare all-Iranian showdown under different flags at the 2027 Wrestling World Championships – and potentially again at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

Asia Triathlon Youth and U15 Championships:

Iranian trio sweeps men's youth podium

Sports Desk

An Iranian trio dominated the men's youth category at the Asia Triathlon Youth and U15 Championships, completing a historic clean sweep of the podium in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on Saturday. Sadra Ebrahimi claimed gold in the closely contested multisport event – which includes swimming, cycling, and running – finishing with a total time of 26:47 minutes, just one second ahead of his silver-winning compatriot Parsa Rasoul.

Borna Naqiyeh secured the all-Iranian podium by clocking 26:49 to take the bronze.

Aliasghar Keshavarzian was the other Iranian in action, placing 17th with a time of 28:08.

The three-stage event featured 31 athletes competing in a 400m swim, a 10km cycling race, and a 2.5km run.

Iran also fielded four competitors in the men's under-15 division, though none were able to reach the podium.

Mohammad-Parsa Siampour finished sixth with



28:19, while Arvin Moqimi (29:40) and Mohammad-Sam Qahremani (29:56) placed 15th and 16th, respectively.

Amirali Masaeli completed the course in 30:30, finishing 18th in the 23-man field.

Athletes from 13 Asian countries took part in the two-day tournament.

Iran learns hosting venues at 2026 World Cup



Sports Desk

Iran will begin its 2026 World Cup campaign against New Zealand at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California, at 21:00 Eastern Time on June 15 next year.

The two-day marathon for the draw of the expanded 48-team tournament – co-hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada – concluded on Saturday with the announcement of venues

and kickoff times for the global showpiece.

The timing of Team Melli's opener will be disappointing for fans inside Iran, who will have to stay awake into the early hours of Tuesday morning to watch their national team in action.

Iran's second Group G match will be against European heavyweight Belgium, again at SoFi Stadium, on June 21 at 15:00 Eastern Time.

The team will then travel to Seattle, Washington, to face Egypt in its final group-stage game at Lumen Field on June 26 at 23:00 Eastern Time.

With eight of the third-placed teams across the 12 groups advancing to the round of 32, Iranian supporters will feel optimistic about their team's chances of securing a first-ever knockout-stage berth at the seventh attempt.

Iran topped Group A in the third round of Asian qualifying to seal a fourth consecutive World Cup appearance, suffering its only defeat in 10 matches in a dead rubber away to Qatar in June.

The opening match of the 23rd World Cup will feature co-host Mexico against South Africa at the historic Azteca Stadium in Mexico City – the iconic venue of the 1970 and 1986 finals – on June 11.