

## UWW Awards:

## Amouzad named Most Dominant Freestyle Wrestler of the Year

## Sports Desk

Iran's Rahaman Amouzad has been named the United World Wrestling (UWW) Most Dominant Freestyle Wrestler of the Year, securing the fourth award for the country at the annual UWW Awards.

The 23-year-old standout edged fellow Iranian world champion Amirhossein Zare', Americans Zahid Valencia and Kyle Snyder, and Russian Zaur Uguev to claim the prestigious honor.

The recognition follows a dominant 12-month stretch in which Amouzad returned to the top of the sport with title-winning campaigns at the Senior World Championships, the Islamic Solidarity Games and the Muhamet Malo Ranking Series event. He finished the season ranked world No. 1 in the 65kg category with 58,000 points.

Amouzad compiled a flawless 14-0 record in 2025, with five victories coming against elite opponents who hold world or Olympic medals — including American Real Woods (twice), Uzbekistan's Umidjon Jalalov and Kyrgyzstan's Taiyrbek Zhumashbek Uulu.

The highlight of his season came at September's World Championships in Zagreb, where he avenged his loss to Kotaro Kiyooka in the final of the Paris Olympics by defeating the Japanese wrestler in



Iranian freestyle wrestler Rahman Amouzad celebrates after his final victory over Japan's Kotaro Kiyooka at the World Championships in Zagreb, Croatia, on September 16, 2025.

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emphatic fashion. Amouzad secured a technical superiority victory in the first period of the 65kg final to claim his second world title, adding to his 2022 triumph. Remarkably, across his five wins against top-tier opponents, Amouzad outscored them by a combined margin of 42-4. Nicknamed "Ruthless Rahman," Amouzad was equally dominant

at the Islamic Solidarity Games in November, reaching the final in Riyadh without conceding a single point before overpowering Tajikistan's Abdulmazhid Kudiev 12-2 to secure his second major gold medal in less than two months. Amouzad's compatriot Saeid Esmaeili was earlier named Most Dominant Greco-Roman Wrestler of 2025, following a stellar season

in which the reigning Olympic champion also captured world and ISG gold medals, along with a second consecutive Asian title in March. Meanwhile, Gholamreza Farrokhi claimed the Breakout Performer of the Year award after posting a perfect 17-0 record across his international appearances, including 11 victories by technical

superiority.

Farrokhi announced his arrival on the senior stage at February's Ranking Series event in Zagreb, defeating 2024 world silver medalist Erik Szilvassy of Hungary 6-2 in the 82kg final. He built on that momentum at the World Championships in September, amassing 37 points across four bouts while con-

ceding just one en route to the world title.

After moving up to the 87kg division at the U23 World Championships in October, Farrokhi swept aside all five opponents by technical superiority — including Ukraine's Ivan Chmyr in the final — to clinch gold in Novi Sad, Serbia. He capped off his season with another title at the Islamic Solidarity Games, beating Kazakhstan's Islam Yevloyev 6-0 in the final.

In addition, Iran was named Top Greco-Roman Team of 2025 following a prolific year that saw the nation complete a clean sweep of four world team titles across all age groups. Iranian wrestlers earned medals in 29 of the 40 weight categories on offer, collecting 10 golds, six silvers and 13 bronzes.

The high point of Iran's international campaign came at the Senior World Championships in Zagreb, where a remarkable haul of four golds, two silvers and two bronzes secured only the country's second team title — and its first since 2014 — in the history of the competition.

## AFC Futsal Asian Cup:

## Past glory offers no guarantees as Iran eyes 14th continental crown



By Amirhadi Arsalanpour  
Staff writer

Defending champion Iran is set to face a sterner test at the upcoming AFC Futsal Asian Cup, which kicks off on January 27 in Indonesia.

Team Melli will begin its quest for a record-extending 14th continental title against Malaysia in its Group D opener on the second day of the competition in Jakarta. Iran has long been the dominant force at Asia's flagship futsal event, having suffered just four defeats in 105 matches across the previous 17 editions. Two of those losses came in finals against Japan — the only nation other than Iran to have lifted the Asian crown.

Fresh from a gold-medal campaign at the Islamic Solidarity Games in November — capped by a commanding 5-0 victory over Morocco in the final — Iran once again enters the tournament as the outright favorite to lift the trophy at the Indonesia Arena on February 7.

However, with the rapid development of futsal across the continent in recent years, Vahid Shamsaei's side will need to navigate a series of tricky challenges against emerging Asian powers.

Afghanistan will be making only its second appearance at the tournament, but arrives with growing confidence after an impressive debut in 2024. Under Iranian coach Majid Mortezaei, Afghanistan finished fifth to secure a historic first-ever World Cup berth in Uzbekistan later that year.

Mortezaei's men went on to enjoy a respectable World Cup campaign, opening with a comfortable win over Angola before narrow defeats to eventual semifinalists Argentina and Ukraine. They advanced to the round of 16, where they were edged out 3-1 by Paraguay after extra time.

Iran and Afghanistan will meet at a major



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tournament for the third time in less than two years when they clash in Group D on February 1. Iran claimed a 3-1 win when the sides met at last year's Asian Cup, but were held to a 2-2 draw at the Islamic Solidarity Games.

Also in Group D is Saudi Arabia, which exited at the group stage in the previous edition but showed signs of progress at the ISG on home soil. The Saudis pushed eventual champions Morocco in the semifinals before falling 6-3 after extra time.

Tajikistan, meanwhile, will be making its 12th Asian Cup appearance. The Central Asian side has reached the quarterfinals twice and recorded its best-ever finish last year with a fourth-place result. Uzbekistan, which defeated Tajikistan in the third-place playoff, will return as a four-time runner-up. The side was narrowly beaten by Iran on penalties in the 2024 semifinals and again pushed Shamsaei's men hard at the ISG, eventually losing 4-2, before securing the bronze medal with a shootout victory over Saudi Arabia.

Three-time finalist Thailand will also be among the teams to watch in Jakarta. Although beaten 4-1 by Iran in the most recent final, Thailand remains the only team other than Japan to have defeated Iran in Asian Cup history, thanks to a dramatic 5-4 semifinal victory at the 2012 edition in Dubai.

"From past experience, we know that every Asian team raises its game to the maximum when facing Iran, bringing far greater energy onto the court. That's why we can't afford to be fooled by previous results," Shamsaei told the official website of the Iranian Football Federation.

"It's not a case of simply boarding a plane, picking up the trophy, and coming back. It will take a great deal of effort and hard work.

"We are aiming for the ultimate prize, but for now our focus is firmly on the group stage, and then we will turn our attention to the later rounds in due course," the Iranian futsal great added.

## Olfati's historic Asian gold among 'gymnastics biggest stories of 2025': FIG

## Sports Desk

Mahdi Olfati's historic gold medal at the Men's Artistic Gymnastics Asian Championships in June was recognized as "one of the sport's 10 biggest stories" of 2025 by the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG).

Olfati made history for Iranian gymnastics by scoring 14.500 points in the men's vault final in Jecheon, South Korea, claiming the country's first gold in 12 editions of the competition.

China's Huang Mingqi took silver, while reigning Olympic champion Carlos Yulo of the Philippines settled for bronze.

"2024 Olympian Mahdi Olfati raised the standard on men's vault when he landed a Yurchenko full-twisting double back at the Asian Championships in Jecheon," the FIG report said.

"The 5.6 difficulty vault made Olfati the first Iranian gymnast to win an Asian title in gymnastics and etched his name into the Men's Code of Points as the creator of one of gymnastics' most challenging new skills," the report added.

The 24-year-old Iranian also made history at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, two years ago, when he claimed vault silver — Iran's first-ever artistic gymnastics medal in 19 editions of the Games.



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