

National Freestyle Senior Championships: Goleij wins 97kg gold to emerge as contender for Wrestling Worlds spot

Sports Desk

Mojtaba Goleij threw down the gauntlet to Hassan Yazdani and Amirali Azarpira over Iran's 97kg slot for next September's World Championships after claiming gold at the National Freestyle Wrestling Championships on Thursday.

Serving as the opening phase of the country's World Championships trials, the three-day event crowned 10 champions across different weight classes in Tabriz, who introduced themselves as contenders for a place in Iran's freestyle squad for Manama, Bahrain.

A world bronze medalist in 2021, Goleij rebounded from his defeat to Yazdani in the Iranian Premier League final a fortnight ago, defeating Alireza Rekabi 9-2 in the 97kg showdown.

Two-time world silver medalist Amirmohammad Yazdani also finished on a high note in a new weight category, edging Amirhossein Hosseini 6-5 to claim the 74kg gold.

Ali Yahyapour capped off his 57kg campaign with a 10-5 victory over Mahdi Veisi in a thrilling final, while 2021 world silver medalist Alireza Sarlak bounced back from a semifinal loss to Veisi to settle for a shared bronze medal alongside Amir Parasteh.



⬆️ Mojtaba Goleij (red) goes for a single-leg takedown against Alireza Rekabi in the 97kg final at the National Freestyle Wrestling Senior Championships in Tabriz, Iran, on December 25, 2025.

● FARSHAD BANDANI/IAWFIR

Peyman Nemati secured the 65kg title courtesy of a 3-0 win against Morteza Hajmollahmohammadi in the final. Former Asian champion Ali Savadkouhi – best remembered for his stunning victory over American great Jordan Burroughs at the

2022 Freestyle World Cup – overcame Sajjad Gholami 7-2 in the 86kg final.

There were a couple of upsets on the final day of the competition, as Sina Khalili and Mohammad-Mobin Azimi had to settle for silver medals in their respec-

tive divisions.

A winner of senior Asian bronze and world under-23 silver earlier this year, Khalili suffered a setback in his bid for a national team spot after a narrow 2-1 loss to world U20 bronze medalist Ebrahim

Elahi in the 70kg final.

Reigning world U23 champion Azimi, meanwhile, enjoyed an emphatic run at 92kg before suffering a criteria loss (7-7) to Asian 86kg champion Abolfazl Rahmani in the final.

In the 61kg division, Reza

Momeni stayed on course for a third successive appearance at the World Championships thanks to a 5-1 win over Mahdi Rahimi in the final.

Young Iranian prodigy Mahdi Yousefi, who has won four international medals – including world U20 and senior Asian golds – over the past 12 months, continued his impressive rise with a 4-2 victory over Adel Panahian in the 79kg final, boosting his chances of securing Iran's slot in Manama.

Morteza Janmohammadzadeh brought the curtain down on an action-packed three days in the northwestern Iranian city with a 5-2 victory over Mohammad Alitabar in the 125kg final.

The National Greco-Roman Senior Championships were held in Ahvaz last week, marking the start of Iran's quest to determine its national team lineup in the discipline.

Mohammad Hosseinvand Panahi (55kg), Pouya Nasserpour (60kg), former world champion Meisam Dalkhani (63kg), Mohammad Kamali (67kg), Mohammad-Javad Rezaei (72kg), Ali Oskou (77kg), Mohammad-Amin Hosseini (82kg), Behrouz Hedayat (87kg), four-time Asian gold medalist Nasser Alizadeh (97kg), and Mohammad Alghousi (130kg) claimed gold medals across the 10 weight classes.

Iran names provisional squad for AFC Futsal Asian Cup



● FFIRI

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Vahid Shamsaei has unveiled the defending champion's provisional 25-man squad for the upcoming AFC Futsal Asian Cup, which kicks off on January 27 in Jakarta, Indonesia. The list will be trimmed to 14 players for the tournament. The Asian powerhouse will begin its quest for a record-extending 14th title against Malaysia in Group D – also featuring Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan – on the second day of the competition. Shamsaei's men will face Saudi Arabia on January 30 before concluding the group stage against Afghanistan two days later at the Jakarta International Velodrome. The top two teams from each of the four groups will advance to the quarterfinals. AFC Futsal Player of the Year

Salar Aqapour will be joined by Moslem Oladqobad and Saeid Ahmadabbasi – the winners of the prestigious award in the past two editions – as well as prolific pivot and captain Hossein Tayyebi in headlining the Iranian squad in Jakarta. The quartet recently led Iran to a gold-medal campaign at the Islamic Solidarity Games in November, capped by a commanding 5-0 victory over Morocco in the final. Iran has long been the dominant force at Asia's flagship futsal event, suffering 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 – and Shamsaei's side will again be the outright favorite to lift the trophy at the Indonesia Arena on February 7.

Afghanistan will be among the teams to watch in Jakarta following an impressive 2024 debut, in which Iranian coach Majid Mortezaei's side finished fifth to secure a first-ever World Cup berth in Uzbekistan later that year.

Iran and Afghanistan will meet at a major tournament for the third time in less than two years. Iran claimed a hard-fought 3-1 victory when the sides met at last year's Asian Cup but was held to a 2-2 draw at the Islamic Solidarity Games.

Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, exited at the group stage in the previous edition but showed signs of progress at the Islamic Solidarity Games on home soil, pushing African champion Morocco in the semifinals before falling 6-3 after extra time.

The following is the Iranian provisional squad for the Asian Cup:

Goalkeepers: Saeid Momeni, Baqer Mohammadi, Mahdi Rostamiha, Behzad Rasouli, Mohammad-Mahdi Esmailpour
Sweepers: Mohammad-Hossein Derakhshani, Amirhossein Gholami, Hossein Sabzi, Sooran Balkaneh, Mahdi Asadshir
Right wingers: Masoud Yousef, Mahdi Karimi, Moslem Oladqobad, Sajjad Yousefkhah, Amirhossein Dehqani
Left wingers: Salar Aqapour, Ali Khalilvand, Ali Akrami, Mahdi Mahdikhani, Mohammad-Hossein Bazyar
Pivots: Hossein Tayyebi, Saeid Ahmadabbasi, Amirhossein Abtahi, Behrouz Azimi, Amir-Hamzeh Sadiqzadeh.

ITTF World Team Table Tennis Championships Finals:

Iranian women's quartet confirmed for London visit

Sports Desk

Iran has confirmed its women's squad for the 2026 ITTF World Team Table Tennis Championships Finals, which get underway on April 28 in London, Britain, following the conclusion of the national team trials in Tehran on Thursday. Fatemeh Yari and Setayesh Illokhani reached the final of the trials – featuring the country's top 16 players –

to secure their places at the global showpiece, before Yari emerged victorious in a thrilling showdown to claim the title.

The duo will join Iranian captain Neda Shahsavari and Shima Safaei, who had already booked their spots after an impressive campaign at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh in November.

Shahsavari produced a sensational comeback to defeat Syria's Hend Zaza 4-2

(7-11, 10-12, 11-9, 11-9, 11-8, 13-11) in the final to claim the women's singles gold at the multi-sport event. She also teamed up with Safaei to win the doubles title, courtesy of a 3-1 victory (9-11, 11-6, 11-9, 11-8) over Türkiye's Ece Haraç and Özge Yılmaz. Shahsavari and Safaei were also part of the Iranian trio alongside Illokhani that settled for the women's team bronze medal following an 8-2 semifinal defeat to Türkiye.



⬆️ Setayesh Illokhani (L) and Shima Safaei, pictured at the Islamic Solidarity Games in November, will be part of the Iranian women's quartet at the ITTF World Team Table Tennis Championships Finals.

● ERFAN KHOSHKHOO/ISNA