

Iranian wrestling prodigy Ma'soumi seals Azerbaijan move

Sports Desk

Months of speculation surrounding Amirreza Ma'soumi's future came to an end as the young Iranian wrestler joined Azerbaijan's freestyle team.

The 20-year-old prodigy, whose contract is reportedly worth \$22,000 per month, will have to spend time on the sidelines before representing the European country, after the Iranian Wrestling Federation refused to issue a letter of consent for his departure.

Under United World Wrestling regulations, a wrestler must either obtain approval from his national governing body or refrain from competing internationally for three years before switching national allegiance. This means Ma'soumi's first appearance under the Azerbaijani flag will likely come at the 2027 World Championships.

Ma'soumi has dominated the super-heavyweight division across multiple age groups in recent years, collecting six world gold med-



Amirreza Ma'soumi (red) has his hand raised as the winner against Amirreza Sahraei during the Iranian Wrestling Premier League final in Tehran, Iran, on December 12, 2025.

● IAWFIR

als, 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 at the Asian

Championships in March, winning 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, along with his father and personal coach, Fardin, believes the 8-2

scoreline was influenced by controversial refereeing decisions.

Ma'soumi was last in action during the Iranian Wrestling Premier League final in mid-December, where he had his hand raised after Amirreza Sahraei withdrew with an injury while trailing 7-0 in the first period, leading Bank Shahr to a 6-4 team victory over Esteghlal Juybar.

Earlier in July, Ma'soumi shared a photo of himself alongside his father at a training session with Azerbaijan's national team in Baku, hinting that he was considering continuing his international career abroad.

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

"We've always granted approval for lower-ranked wrestlers to represent other countries, but Ma'soumi is a top-tier asset for us, al-

ready 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.

"Amirhossein Zare' is definitely a top-notch wrestler, but Amirreza wants to make progress in his career. I just hope to see two Iranians square off in the Olympic final," Ma'soumi's father said earlier this month.

Persian Gulf Pro League:

Crivelli nets last-gasp winner to send Sepahan back on top

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Enzo Crivelli scored a 95th-minute winner to lead Sepahan to a 1-0 victory over Chadormalou in the Persian Gulf Pro League at Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium on Saturday. Introduced as a second-half substitute, the French striker tapped in from close range on the rebound after Aref Haji-Eidi's effort from the edge of the box was initially cleared by Chadormalou fullback Saeid Mohammadifard. The goal took Crivelli's tally to three in 12 appearances across all competitions since joining Sepahan as a free agent from Swiss top-flight side Servette in August.

An eighth win in nine league games since the 2-1 home defeat to Tractor in September helped Moharram Navidkia's side – which had collected only two points from its first four matches of the campaign – return to the top of the table with 30 points, two clear of second-placed Persepolis with a game in hand.

Sepahan could extend its lead further with a victory over Esteghlal in its rescheduled matchday 10 home fixture on Thursday.

Chadormalou remained third on 24 points, two above defending champion Tractor, which was held to a sixth goalless draw of the season away to Shams Azar on Friday.

Persepolis had Soroush Rafiei's first-half strike to thank for a hard-fought 1-0 away win against bottom club Mes Rafsanjan on Friday. The host was reduced to 10 men with 20 minutes remaining. It marked Persepolis' fifth win in six matches since Brazilian head coach Osmar Loss Vieira returned to the Tehran Reds' bench for a second spell last month.

Elsewhere, Paykan and Khaybar shared the points in a goalless draw in Tehran on Saturday. Khaybar sits sixth in the standings with 21 points, while Paykan is 12th on 15.

On Friday, Yahya Golmohammadi's Foolad Khuzestan claimed only its third win of the campaign, edging newly promoted Fajr Sepasi 2-1 after a dramatic finish at Shiraz's Pars Stadium.

Ehsan Mahrouqi headed Foolad in front in the 70th minute, only for his goal to be cancelled out by Shervin Bozorg's 99th-minute penalty. Just when the two sides appeared to have settled for a draw, Mahrouqi struck again in the 13th minute of added time, lifting the visitors to 10th place with 16 points – level with Ahvaz rival Esteghlal Khuzestan, which defeated Zob Ahan 2-0 at home on Thursday. Fajr, meanwhile, is ninth on 18 points.

There was also late drama at Arak's Imam Khomeini Stadium as Qaem Eslamikhah netted a 91st-minute winner to lead Malavan to a 1-0 away victory over Irarco.

Malavan climbed to seventh with 21 points, while Irarco sits 13th in the 16-team table with 15 points – two clear of the relegation zone.



Sepahan striker Enzo Crivelli (L) celebrates after scoring the winner in a 1-0 victory over Chadormalou in the Persian Gulf Pro League at the Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium, Isfahan, Iran, on December 27, 2025.

● PEYMAN SHAHSANAEL/ISNA

FIBA hails Iran's 'insane comeback' against Chinese Taipei at Asia Cup

Sports Desk

Iran's "insane comeback" against Chinese Taipei was hailed by FIBA as one of the key moments of the Asia Cup in Jeddah in August, in the international governing body's review of the near-ending basketball year.

"No lead is safe, as the old saying in sport goes, and two teams embodied that as much as Iran and New Zealand, who pulled off comebacks of epic proportions on their way to completing half of the semifinals picture," read the Lookback '25 article on FIBA's official website.

"Team Melli did it first, rallying from 21 points down to upend Chinese Taipei 78-75 – a feat made possible in part by Sina Vahedi, even after he was called for three personal fouls just seven minutes into the match.

"I was patient on the bench, thinking about defense, offense, everything. And

in the second half, we won the game. I'm so happy about that," said the eventual All-Star Five member, who finished with 21 points.

"The Tall Blacks would author their own story the next night, fighting back from a deficit as large as 22 points to eliminate Lebanon with an 80-76 victory, thanks to the efforts of Mojave King and Carlin Davison."

However, Iran, which had beaten Guam (77-52), Japan (78-70), and Syria (82-43) to win Group B, was outclassed by Australia in the semifinals, suffering a comprehensive 92-48 defeat. Australia went on to secure a third successive Asian crown with a 90-89 victory over China.

Greek head coach Sotiris Manolopoulos's side managed to recover by beating New Zealand 79-73 in the third-place playoff, standing on the podium for the first time since finishing runner-up in 2017.



Iranian players celebrate after their quarterfinal victory over Chinese Taipei at the FIBA Asia Cup in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on August 13, 2025.

● FIBA