

Moeini targets world, Asian Games success in 2026

Sports Desk

Iranian weightlifter Alireza Moeini says he is targeting a landmark year in his career as he sets his sights on gold at both the World Championships and the Asian Games in the upcoming international season.

The 23-year-old enjoyed a strong run of results over the past 12 months, highlighted by a record-breaking performance at October's World Championships in Førde, Norway.

Moeini lifted 182kg to win snatch gold in the men's 94kg category, setting a new world record in the process. He then added total silver with an aggregate of 391kg, finishing four kilograms behind Bulgarian Olympic champion Karlos Nasar, who claimed clean and jerk gold.

Earlier in the year, Moeini secured snatch gold and total bronze at the Asian Championships in Jiangshan, China, before collecting two silver medals and a clean and jerk bronze at November's Islamic Solidarity Games.

"2025 was the best year of my career after I won gold at the World Championships and set a new world record," Moeini told ISNA. "I know expectations are higher now. My main goal for 2026 is to win gold at the Asian Games in September.

"Then there are the World Championships in October, which will be the first Olympic qualifying event. I want to perform strongly there and begin my Olympic qualification campaign in the best possible way, with the ultimate aim



Iranian weightlifter Alireza Moeini is seen action at the IWF World Championships in Førde, Norway, on October 9, 2025. **GIORGIO SCALA/INSIDEFOTO**

of competing at the Los Angeles Olympics."

To earn a spot at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games, Moeini faces stiff competition from fellow Iranian Ali Alipour, with only one athlete set to represent the country at the multi-sport event.

The pair were locked in a close domestic rivalry last season. Alipour won clean and jerk and total gold at the

Asian Championships but finished runner-up to Moeini in the snatch at both Asian and world events.

"Ali and I are longtime friends," Moeini said. "Whoever is selected for the Asian Games will have one goal: to raise Iran's flag and win gold. We will both give our utmost to achieve the best possible result in Japan."

Moeini acknowledged he must further

improve his clean and jerk to challenge Nasar's dominance at the next World Championships, though he believes his progress in the lift has been overshadowed by his snatch success.

"My clean and jerk has improved compared to the 2024 World Championships," he said. "The coaching staff has placed more emphasis on that lift, and I've made significant progress. But be-

cause my snatch numbers are so high, my clean and jerk improvements often go unnoticed."

He added that adjustments to training methods have been made with the Asian Games firmly in mind.

"This young team became world champions after eight years, and the coaches believe we can succeed at the Asian Games and the Olympics as well," Moeini said.

"The 2026 World Championships will be among the toughest in recent years, as all lifters will be fighting for Olympic quotas. Everyone will give 100 percent, and I will be no exception. My goal is to finish on top, win a prestigious medal and secure Olympic qualification.

"There is only a one-month gap between the World Championships and the Asian Games, which makes it extremely challenging to compete at two major events in such a short period. Still, we will prepare to deliver the best possible results in both."

Reflecting on life after winning world medals and breaking the snatch world record, Moeini said success has brought both pride and pressure.

"It feels great to live the life of a champion, but it is also demanding because expectations rise and you are no longer seen as an ordinary person," he said.

"At the same time, it pushes you to dedicate yourself even more, knowing you must defend your title the following year. That motivation helps drive you toward the ultimate goal, which is the Olympics."

Iranian coach Mansourian relishing strong start in Iraqi top flight



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Sports Desk

Iranian head coach Alireza Mansourian has enjoyed an impressive start to life with Al Talaba in the Iraq Stars League.

A 3-0 away victory over bottom club Al Qasim on Sunday marked Al Talaba's second win in three matches since the 54-year-old took charge in late November.

Iraqi international center-back Masies Artien headed Al Talaba into the lead 10 minutes into the match at Baghdad's Al Madina Stadium, before Ecuadorian midfielder Darío Pazmiño doubled the advantage from the penalty spot six minutes after the restart.

Al Talaba was reduced to 10 men in the 56th minute when

Zaid Ismail was sent off, but Hussein Amer Ojaimi put the scoreline beyond doubt just two minutes later by heading home Habib Oueslati's corner.

Mansourian's side finished the match with nine men after Karrar Saad was dismissed in the 73rd minute, only three minutes after coming on as a substitute.

The win lifted Al Talaba, which had managed just three victories in seven matches before Mansourian's appointment, to seventh place in the league standings with 17 points – seven behind leaders Erbil SC.

Mansourian marked his Iraqi league debut in style on December 26, guiding his side to a memorable 1-0 home win over Al Shorta, ending

Al Talaba's four-year wait for victory in one of Baghdad's most anticipated derbies.

That result was followed by a goalless draw against Mosul SC at home five days later.

"Al Talaba is one of the four most popular clubs in Iraq, alongside Al Shorta, Al Zawraa and Air Force Club. Accepting the managerial role here was the best decision I've ever made in my career," the former Esteghlal coach said ahead of Sunday's match.

"We are like one family and are working hard to bring our supporters back to the stands through positive results," added Mansourian, whose previous role ended midway through the 2023/24 Persian Gulf Pro League season following a run of poor results with Foolad Khuzestan.

Iran's swimmer Izadyar confirms retirement plans after Asian Para Games

Sports Desk

Iranian swimmer Shahin Izadyar – country's most decorated athlete in the history of the Asian Para Games – has confirmed he will retire after competing at the next edition of the multi-sport event in October.

Izadyar captured widespread attention at the 2018 Asian Para Games in Jakarta, where he won six gold medals and one silver. He added two silvers and three bronzes at the Games five years later in Hangzhou, China, taking his overall tally to an impressive 24 medals across four appearances at the continental showcase.

Speaking to Mehr News Agency, the 32-year-old said his current training with the national team is focused squarely on the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Para Games. "The Games are the main target behind all the training camps we have planned. For me, the quality of participation in these camps and making the most of them is especially important, because my approach to this edition of

the Asian Para Games will be different and special," Izadyar said.

"The Asian Para Games will mark the end of my career, which is why it's important for me to arrive in Nagoya more prepared than ever and capable of winning medals in my final appearance."

Izadyar also confirmed he plans to compete in fewer events than in previous editions.

"Compared to past Games, I will take part in fewer events this time. At the moment, I intend to compete in the 50m freestyle, 100m freestyle and 100m breaststroke. The final decision will be made with the coaching staff, but for now I am training specifically for these three races," he said.

Reflecting on his earlier success, Izadyar added: "In the 2018 Asian Para Games in Indonesia, I competed in the maximum number of events and won six golds and one bronze. However, due to certain considerations, I've decided to focus on fewer events in Nagoya so I can deliver higher-quality performances."

He cited age and physical de-

mands as the main reasons for scaling back.

"I'm 32 now, and Nagoya will be my fifth Asian Para Games. At this stage, I may not be able to compete at full capacity across multiple events. I'd rather focus on fewer races and perform at the highest possible level," he said.

On his decision to retire after October's Games, Izadyar added: "I've been with the national team for nearly 20 years. In Iran, swimmers usually compete until around 25; abroad, with better facilities, they may continue until 26 or 27. Some exceptional swimmers go on until 40, but I won't be able to continue at that level.

"That's why I've decided to retire after the Games, and it motivates me even more to achieve strong results in Nagoya."

Asked about his expectations, Izadyar said: "Swimming is a sport of fine margins where every second counts. Still, I will strive to succeed in all three events and hope to bow out with a clean sweep of medals."



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