

# Aiming to roll back the years, Geraei plots fresh start in 77kg



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When Mohammadreza Geraei defied all expectations by winning a stunning gold medal on his senior international debut at the Tokyo Olympics five years ago, Iranian wrestling appeared to have found its next Greco-Roman sensation, following in the footsteps of lightweight legend Hamid Sourian.

Nicknamed 'The Iceman' by United World Wrestling for his cold-blooded composure when executing his trademark throws and body locks, Geraei swiftly backed up his 67kg Tokyo triumph with another gold at the World Championships in Oslo just two months later.

However, the following three years failed to yield the success his early promise had foretold.

Geraei again made it to the final at the 2022 World Championships, but was undone by home-favorite Serbian Mate Nemeš.



Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Mohammadreza Geraei is seen in action during a national team training session in Tehran, Iran, on January 24, 2026.

The following year, the Iranian recovered from a technical-superiority loss

to Azerbaijan's Hasrat Javarov in the quarterfinals to finish with a consola-

tion bronze at the world showpiece. His bronze secured Iran a

67kg quota for the 2024 Paris Olympics, but Geraei missed out on a title de-

fense in the French capital after falling short against young prodigy Saeid Esmaili – who would go on to win gold in Paris – in the Iranian trials.

With Esmaili emerging as the new dominant force in the 67kg category, Geraei moved up to the 72kg division for the 2024 World Championships – featuring four non-Olympic weight classes – but hit a new low in Tirana, as he suffered a devastating 11-3 loss to American underdog Benji Peak in the first round.

His most recent international outing was equally disappointing: a fifth-place finish at the Zagreb Open Ranking Series event in February 2025.

Now, 11 months later, the 30-year-old Geraei is poised for a fresh start. Having moved to the Olympic 77kg class, he has set his sights on glory at the Los Angeles Games in 2028.

Geraei did not compete in last month's National Championships, which served as the opening

phase of Iran's trials for major 2026 tournaments. However, he has earned the trust of national team head coach Hassan Rangraz, who called him up for a recent training camp in Tehran.

While Geraei has already shown glimpses of a renewed version of himself in training, his prospects will be put to the test by Rangraz and his staff at an international tournament in the coming months. A strong performance there is essential if he is to fancy a realistic shot at a second world title in Manama this September.

The race for Iran's 77kg slot in Bahrain will be fiercely contested, as Geraei will face competition from 2024 world U20 champion Alireza Abdeva

li, who also impressed at last year's Senior Worlds; Islamic Solidarity Games silver medalist Amir Abdi; national champion Ali Oskou; reigning world junior silver medalist Ahoura Boveiri; and former world cadet champion Amirmahdi Saeidinava.

## Judo jubilation as Parhizgar wins captures gold in Casablanca

### Sports Desk

Elyas Parhizgar claimed a gold medal to power the Iranian men's judo team to a third-place finish at the Casablanca African Open 2026 in Morocco.

Russia dominated the men's competition with a remarkable 12 medals – including five golds – while host nation Morocco took second place with one gold, one silver, and one bronze.

Parhizgar, an Asian junior

silver medalist in 2024, defeated Angola's Antonio Candeiro with a pin after 1 minute and 34 seconds to take the title in the men's -81kg class.

The Iranian began his campaign with a win over Ivorian Konin Junior Emmanuel Kossan in Group A, then overcame Argentina's Ivan Ferreyra and Dutch judoka Mika van Sinderen to reach the quarterfinals.

A victory over Bosnia's Mustafa Hebib sent Par-

hizgar into the semifinals, where he beat Canada's Olivier Gagnon by ippon to advance to the final.

Amir-Abbas Choopan added to Iran's tally with a fifth-place finish in the men's -90kg event, after falling to Russia's Eldar Allakhverdiev in the bronze-medal contest.

Amirhossein Valizadeh (-73kg), Mohammadhossein Yaqouti, and Alireza Nikseresht (-100kg) also competed for Iran but did not

medal in their respective weight classes.

Iran's Sobhan Hakimi, meanwhile, secured an impressive silver in the men's -81kg at the Cadet African Cup in Casablanca.

After a first-round bye, the young Iranian opened with a victory over local hopeful Yahya Benouna, then defeated Lithuania's David Khatchatourian to reach the final, where he was undone by Estonia's Aleksei Kikas to settle for silver.



Iranian judoka Elyas Parhizgar (R), pictured at last November's Islamic Solidarity Games, won the men's -81kg gold medal at the Casablanca African Open 2026.

## Asian Men's Handball Championships:

### Iran to vie for 11th spot after China setback

### Sports Desk

Iran will look to secure 11th place in the Asian Men's Handball Championship when it faces Jordan at the Kuwait Handball Association Hall in



Da'ya today.

The match follows a 33-23 loss to China on Sunday, which saw Iran finish second in Group IV of the Martyr Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Cup – the classification bracket for 9th to

15th places. Spanish head coach Rafael Guijosa fielded a young, new-look roster for the China game, resting star players Pouya Norouzinejad, Mohammadreza Oraei, Yassin Kabirian, Vahid Masoudi, and Saber Heidari. Ali Heidarian led the Iranian scoring with eight goals, supported by six from Mehran Rahnama and four from Alireza Mousavi.

For China, Fangwei Sun led all scorers with eight goals, while Hao Wang added six. Iran's campaign in the 22nd edition began with a narrow 24-22 loss to four-time bronze medalist Saudi Arabia in Group D of the preliminary round. The team rebounded strongly with a 39-13 rout of Australia in its second outing. A draw in its final pre-

liminary game against Japan would have secured Iran a main-round spot. However, after holding a five-goal lead in the second half, Guijosa's side collapsed in the final moments, conceding a winner from Daisuke Tanaka for a crushing 30-29 Japanese victory.

Iran recovered to beat India 39-16 in its Group IV opener last Thursday and routed Australia once more, 37-17, on Friday. In today's semifinals, 2024 finalist Japan will meet Bahrain, while defending champion Qatar faces host nation Kuwait for the other spot in Thursday's final. The continental championship also serves as a qualifier for the 2027 World Championship in Germany, with the four semifinalists securing berths.

## Mojarrad makes winning debut with Alanya Belediye in Turkish league

### Sports Desk

Iranian middle blocker Aliashghar Mojarrad enjoyed a winning start to life in Turkish top-flight volleyball, helping Alanya Belediye sweep Istanbul Başakşehir in straight sets (25-22, 25-18, 25-17) in the Efeler Ligi on Sunday. The victory, secured just a day after Mojarrad joined the club, ended a six-game



losing streak in the league and lifted Alanya Belediye out of the relegation zone. The team now sits 11th in the 14-team table with five wins and 18 points from 11 matches. Mojarrad contributed six points in the win, while his fellow Iranian and international teammate, opposite spiker Bardia Saeedat, chipped in 15 points to help snap the skid.

Mojarrad, who was part of Iran's squad at the Tokyo Olympics, was once widely touted as the natural successor to Seyed Mohammad Mousavi following the veteran middle blocker's retirement from national team duty.

However, the 28-year-old's trajectory in recent years was derailed by a series of recurring injuries, which repeatedly sidelined him for long periods, making recovery and rehabilitation the dominant theme of his career.

Last season, after transferring to San'atgaran Omid in the Iranian Super League, he was struck by another severe injury that kept him off the court for nearly a year. His career now appears to be turning a new page with his recent move to Turkey.