

Asian Wrestling Championships: Valizadeh, Azimi steal the show, emerge as global contenders

Sports Desk

It was business as usual for Iranian freestyle wrestling at the newly finished Asian Championships in Bishkek.

A remarkable haul of eight medals, including four golds, across 10 weight classes saw the global powerhouse finish atop the standings with 178 points – 16 clear of second-placed India – and claim a ninth continental team title in a decade on Sunday. While the title-winning runs for Kamran Qassempour and Amirhossein Zare', who share nine world and Olympic medals between them, were nothing beyond expectation, their compatriots Milad Valizadeh and Mohammad-Mobin Azimi introduced themselves as two new contenders in their respective categories by grabbing gold in the Kyrgyz



Milad Valizadeh (L) and Mohammad-Mobin Azimi celebrate with the Iranian flag after grabbing freestyle gold medals at the Asian Wrestling Championships in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. **IWFIR**

capital. Valizadeh built on last year's Asian silver and world U23 bronze to dominate the 57kg division, finishing off with a 14-3

victory over Mongolian Munkh Erdene Batkhuyag in the final – the first gold medal for Iran in this weight class since Reza Atri's triumph in 2019.

Batkhuyag suffered an apparent rib injury while scoring a stepout midway through the first period, which cut Valizadeh's lead to 4-3. After the restart, Valizadeh – who

had outmuscled India's Ankush (10-0) and Japan's Fuga Sasaki (11-0) en route to the final – shot in for a takedown, at which point Batkhuyag seemed to have

stopped fighting. But Valizadeh didn't, and flipped the lifeless Batkhuyag back and forth until he piled up enough points for a superiority victory that ended the match at 1:47 on Saturday.

Meanwhile, world U23 champion Azimi, who moved down to 92kg after taking a bronze at 97kg last year, was also in a league of his own.

The Iranian finished an 11-0 victory over Russian-born Magomed Sharipov, who represented Bahrain, with just under a minute to go – and 10 seconds after scoring his first takedown of the final on Sunday.

Azimi built up a 7-0 lead with a flurry of stepouts – five in all – before combining a takedown and gut wrench to conclude the match at 5:01.

The result meant that Azimi scored a total of 26 points across three bouts, not conceding a single point, in Bishkek.

It also saw the 23-year-old stake a claim for a place in the national team for September's World Championships, though he will still have to see off domestic competition from his compatriot Amirhossein Firouzpour, who won world bronze in Zagreb last year.

World Taekwondo Junior Championships: Khodaei wins boys' gold, takes Iran's tally to two medals

Sports Desk

Mohammad-Erfan Khodaei pushed Iran's medal count to two at the 15th World Taekwondo Junior Championships, clinching gold on the second day of action in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Competing in the boys' -55kg weight class, Khodaei dominated at the Olympic Sports Complex on Monday, winning all six of his bouts without dropping a single round.

In the final, Khodaei was unstoppable against Poland's Antoni Sokolowski, sweeping the match in consecutive rounds to claim the title.

His campaign began with a commanding 2-0 victory over El Salvador's Astorga Melgar. He followed that with identical straight-



Iran's Mohammad-Erfan Khodaei (red) is seen in action against Poland's Antoni Sokolowski in the boys' -55kg final at the World Taekwondo Junior Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on April 13, 2026. **WORLD TAEKWONDO**

round sweeps against rivals from Malaysia and Albania. The Iranian prodigy contin-

ued his impressive run by defeating Chinese Taipei's Po-Yu Cheng in the quarter-

finals before beating the Kazakh representative to book a place in the final.

Pinar Lotfizadeh had opened Iran's account on Day 1, settling for a consolation bronze in the girls' -59kg class after a last-four defeat to her Chinese opponent on Sunday.

Elsewhere on Monday, Khodaei's compatriots Taha Nazer (boys' -48kg) and Dina Babarhim (girls' -55kg) fell short of the podium.

The 15th edition of the competition – featuring 986 competitors from 115 countries – will run for six days. Iran bagged 11 medals at the previous edition in Chuncheon, South Korea, in 2024, including a remarkable seven golds, to complete a clean sweep of the team titles.

Iran names women's team for Asian taekwondo meet

Sports Desk

Head coach Mahrouz Saei has confirmed Iran's women's team for the upcoming Asian Taekwondo Championships.

The 27th edition of the continental showcase will get underway in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on May 21.

The Iranian team trials took place during the two-week national team training camp, with eight contestants coming out on top in their respective weight classes.

The Olympic silver medalist Nahid Kiani, who has recently recovered from surgery on her injured knee, will headline the Iranian squad in the Mongolian capital, look-

ing to add to her four Asian medals when competing in the -57kg weight class. Mobina Ne'matzadeh – a bronze medalist at the Paris 2024 Olympics – will represent the country in the -53kg contest, aiming to build on her gold-winning campaign in last December's U21 World Championships.

The high-profile duo will be joined by former world senior silver medalist and two-time world cadet champion Mahla Mo'menzadeh, who will vie for glory in the -49kg event.

Yalda Valinejad, meanwhile, will step into the -62kg contest on the back of a silver medal at last November's Islamic Solidarity Games in



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Riyadh. Ma'soumeh Ranjbar (-46kg), Fereshteh Fat'hi (-67kg), Baran Ne'mati (-73kg), and Fatemeh Ahmadi (+73kg) complete the Iranian women's team in Ulaanbaatar.

Winners of a maiden women's team title in 2022, Iran had to settle for a sixth-place finish at the Asian Championships in 2024, collecting a bronze and a silver medal in Da Nang, Vietnam.

Piazza calls up Iran's 30-man squad for Volleyball Nations League

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Roberto Piazza has named a provisional 30-man roster for the upcoming FIVB Men's Volleyball Nations League. The Asian heavyweight will get its campaign underway with a daunting test against Brazil in Brasilia on June 10. The two sides also met on the opening day of the annual event last year in the Brazilian capital, with the South American powerhouse emerging victorious in straight sets.

In his second year in charge, the Italian coach has again lined up a young squad for the global showpiece, ignoring the so-called 'Golden Generation' of Iranian volleyball – namely the veteran trio of Milad Ebadipour, Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi, and Amir Ghafour.

The national team's first training camp will begin in the northern Iranian city of Noor on May 1, with Iranian champion Foolad Sirjan's players – who are set to compete at the AVC Men's Champions League from May 13 – as well as overseas players joining the rest of the squad after concluding their club duties.

Tricky tests will come thick and fast in Week 1 of the preliminaries for Piazza's men, who will take on Bulgaria – finalists at last September's World Championships – on June 11, before facing Argentina and Belgium later in the week at the Nilson Nelson Gymnasium.

Iran also played Argentina and Bulgaria in last year's edition, defeating the former 3-1 before conclud-



FIVB

ing the preliminary phase with a straight-sets win against the European powerhouse.

Iran will then visit Orleans, France, for the second week of action, starting with a mammoth task against the host and reigning Olympic champion France at the CO'Met Arena on June 24. This will be followed by matches against the United States (June 25), Japan (June 26), and Cuba (June 28).

The third and final week of the preliminaries will see the Iranian men go head-to-head with Ukraine in Belgrade on July 15, with further tests against Germany (July 16), Slovenia (July 17), and Türkiye (July 19). The top eight teams in the 18-team standings will progress to the VNL Finals, which will begin in Ningbo Beilun, China, on July 29. China is already guaranteed a place in the quarterfinals as the host.

Iran will aim to build on a promising first year under Piazza by securing its first quarterfinal berth in four years at the prestigious tournament. After finishing in the bottom three in the two previous editions, Iran staged a late surge

in the 2025 preliminaries to place eighth with six wins from 12 matches. However, Piazza's team ultimately missed out on the Finals, as China's host status secured the Asian team a quarterfinal spot despite finishing second from bottom.

The following is Iran's full provisional VNL squad:

Setters: Arshia Behnejad, Emran Kookjeili, Ilshan Davoudipour, Ardalan Seyyed-Abbasi

Opposite spikers: Amir-mohammad Golzadeh, Amin Esmailnejad, Pouya Aryakhah, Mohsen Delavari, Ali Mombeini

Outside hitters: Ehsan Daneshdoust, Alireza Abdolhamidi, Matin Hosseini, Amirreza Aftab-Azari, Arian Mahmoudinejad, Morteza Narimani, Seyyed Hossein Zamani, Ra'ouf Khoshhal, Mobin Nasri

Middle blockers: Yousef Kazemi, Seyyed Issa Nasseri, Nima Bateni, Armin Qelichniazi, Shayan Mehrabi, Taha Behboudnia, Amirreza Sarlak, Mahdi Jelveh

Liberos: Mohammadreza Hazratpour, Komeil Khojasteh, Morteza Tabatabaee, Hossein Hajikalateh.