

World Taekwondo Junior Championships: Iran's Houshyar grabs gold, Ebrahimian takes consolation bronze

Sports Desk

The penultimate day of action at the World Taekwondo Junior Championships in Tashkent saw Iran's Parsa Houshyar claim gold in the men's competition, while Helia Ebrahimian won a bronze in the women's event, lifting the country's overall tally to seven medals.

Houshyar, who won the world cadet title less than a year ago in Fujairah, secured Iran's fourth gold in the Uzbek capital with a hard-fought victory over France's Nolhan Rosemond in the -63kg final on Thursday. Rosemond led the first round but conceded five Gam-jeoms (penalty points), handing the round to his opponent. Houshyar appeared on course to win the second round, only for Rosemond to deliver a stunning late body kick and take it 4-3. But Houshyar was not to be denied, claiming the decisive third round 9-6 to seal gold.

Bronze medals went to Serbia's Sergej Ivanovic and South Korea's Youngjin Ji.

Houshyar opened his campaign with a straight-round win over Slovenia's Vid Milosevic, then defeated Senegal's Malick Diagne, Mexico's Dylan Alex Solorio, and Türkiye's Ibrahi Hasanoglu – all in consecutive rounds – to reach the semifinals. He then beat Ivanovic 2-0 to advance to the final.

Elsewhere, Ebrahimian had to settle for joint third place alongside Serbia's Tina Ninić in the



-49kg division after a 2-0 semifinal loss to South Korea's Lee Siwoo. Lee went on to beat China's Mixue Li 2-0 in the final. Abolfazl Najafi was the other Iranian in action on Thursday but was left empty-handed in the men's -68kg class after a last-16 loss (2-1) to Russia's Ismail Ismailov. Thursday's results followed Hana Zarrinkamar's back-to-back golds with a win over Czechia's Alice Binová in the women's +68kg final on Tuesday, while Benyamin Soltanian dominated the men's -73kg event without dropping a single round.

Zarrinkamar's high scoring and trademark head-kicking impressed throughout the day, and she understood the effort required to translate her talent into titles.

"I have a tall height, and I think this is a really good option for me. I think because of that I became world champion, and I trained a lot – I have to mention it. I am also really good at head kicks," she told the official website of the sport's international governing body.

Zarrinkamar knew she would be closely studied by her opponents, but she was delighted to

prevail over all of them in the end.

"All the athletes do their best, grow up and train more. They analyze me because my videos on YouTube are available, but fortunately I became world champion again," she said.

For Soltanian, a blend of powerful kicks and accurate punching proved the winning formula in Tashkent. He credits his parents with motivating him to succeed in the sport.

"I did some punches, and am really good at strong kicks," Soltanian said.

Both athletes' ambitions stretch



Iran's Parsa Houshyar (blue) fights France's Nolhan Rosemond in the men's -63kg final at the World Taekwondo Junior Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on April 16, 2026.

● WORLD TAEKWONDO

far beyond the junior stage. The 2026 Youth Olympic Games in Dakar is the next major target. Soltanian spoke for both of their approaches to going beyond that and seeking Olympic gold at Los Angeles 2028.

"You go step by step. You should go first to the Youth Olympics. Then we have to

keep going in senior competition, training a lot to achieve it," he said.

Tashkent 2026 has already proved a key stepping stone, as Zarrinkamar Roudbari explained.

"Most of the athletes that we fight will also participate in that competition [Dakar 2026]," she noted.

The Iranian team travelled by road for 27 hours to Turkmenistan, followed by connecting flights to Tashkent in order to attend the World Taekwondo Junior Championships.

This highlights the passion and determination of the taekwondo community in Iran, and Zarrinkamar and Soltanian gave them a day to remember, which also saw Bahar Tahmasbi win a bronze in the women's -42kg category.

Mohammad-Erfan Khodaei earned Iran's first gold of the competition with a 2-0 victory over Poland's Antoni Sokolowski in the men's -55kg final – his sixth straight-round win of the tournament.

Pinar Lotfizadeh (women's -59kg) opened Iran's account in Tashkent with a bronze medal on the first day of the event.

The six-day 15th edition of the championships featured 986 competitors from 115 countries. Iran won 11 medals at the previous edition in Chuncheon, South Korea, in 2024, including a remarkable seven golds, completing a clean sweep of the team titles.

Iran 'has to come' to the US for World Cup, FIFA's Infantino says

AL JAZEERA – FIFA President Gianni Infantino is confident Iran will play in the World Cup despite the country's sports minister stating that it cannot participate amid the war with the United States and Israel, along with President Donald Trump voicing concerns for the players' "life and safety". Infantino reasserted his views on Iran's participation on Wednesday, saying the team will travel to the US "for sure".

While the US-Israel war on Iran is currently in the midst of a Pakistan-brokered two-week ceasefire, officials in Iran have repeatedly requested a relocation of their team's games from the US to Mexico – two of the three host nations of the World Cup, along with Canada.

However, FIFA and its president, Infantino, have ruled out a relocation, citing logistical impediments and promising safety for the Iranian players and staff.

"The Iranian team is coming for sure, yes," Infantino told US business news outlet CNBC. The FIFA chief, who has a close relationship with US President Trump, said "Iran has to come" to the tournament despite the fragile ceasefire nearing its deadline on April 22.



"We hope that by then, of course, the situation will be a peaceful situation," Infantino said of the war. "As I said, that would definitely help. But Iran has to come. Of course, they represent their people. They have qualified. The players want to play."

Infantino said he was recently in Antalya, Türkiye, to visit with the Iranian team at its training camp and said the team wants to participate in the World Cup.

"They [Iran's players] should play – sports should be outside of politics," Infantino said.



FIFA President Gianni Infantino speaks during the 2026 Semafor World Economy conference in Washington, DC, US, on April 15, 2026.

● AFP

intact and together, well, we [FIFA] are doing that."

Iran, one of the first teams to qualify for the World Cup, are scheduled to play all three of their group stage games on the US West Coast. Team Melli are slated to open against New Zealand on June 15, then face Belgium on June 21, with both matches in Los Angeles. On June 26, Iran play against Egypt in Seattle.

Should they advance to the knockouts, the rest of Iran's games would also be held in the US.

Faraji to continue preparation in Japan ahead of Youth Olympics

Sports Desk

Iranian young table tennis star Benyamin Faraji is undergoing a crucial one-month training camp in Japan as he prepares for the 2026 Summer Youth Olympics – starting October 31 in Dakar, Senegal. Faraji will remain in the country for another month before returning to Iran, ISNA reported.

Faraji earned his place at the multi-sport event after winning a bronze medal at the 2025 Asian Youth Games in Bahrain and securing a spot among the



● ISNA

world's top 10 under-19 players in the latest ITTF World Rankings.

Faraji was also part of the Iranian trio – alongside Amirhossein Hodaei and Seyyed Mohammad

Mousavi-Taher – that won the men's team silver medal at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh last November. He then teamed up with Mousavi-Taher for a bronze in the doubles

event in the Saudi capital. While Faraji continues his intensive preparations in one of table tennis's powerhouse nations, attention now turns to the Iranian Table Tennis Federation's plans for his pre-Olympic schedule. It remains to be seen what friendly matches or warm-up competitions will be arranged to ensure he arrives in Senegal in peak form.

The fourth edition of the Games will take place across 25 competitive sporting events in three host cities of Dakar, Diamniadio, and Saly.

Iran targets wrestling glory at Asian Beach Games

Sports Desk

Iran's national beach wrestling head coach Mohammad Naderi has set his sights on a glorious campaign at the 6th Asian Beach Games, which will kick off on Wednesday in Sanya, China.

"We aim to achieve the best possible results and raise the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Naderi said ahead of the

competition. Naderi noted that Iran's wrestlers have reached 70 to 80 percent readiness after several training camps in Iran and one week of fine-tuning in China. "We have prepared well," he added.

But the coach warned of strong opposition. "Bahrain has four Russian-born wrestlers in its squad. Pakistan and India are also among the favor-

ites in this sport and hold numerous competitions in their countries. We should not underestimate them."

Naderi expressed gratitude to the National Olympic Committee for ensuring a smooth departure despite challenging circumstances at home.

He added: "I hope the entire delegation achieves favorable results, and we

witness Iran's flag raised at this event."

Iran will be represented by 57 athletes across 10 sporting events – including beach wrestling, beach volleyball, beach handball, beach soccer, jiu-jitsu, beach kabaddi, athletics, 3x3 basketball, sport climbing, and water polo – at the Games, which will resume after a decade, following Da Nang 2016 in Vietnam.