

# Three slots up for grabs as Iran names Greco-Roman squad

## Sports Desk

With two major wrestling tournaments fast approaching in the coming months, head coach Hassan Rangraz is yet to decide on three slots in the Iranian Greco-Roman 10-man squad. Rangraz called up a 13-man roster for a training camp – starting Wednesday in northern Iran – as the national team is set to step up preparation for September's Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan, followed by the Senior World Championships in October. Manama had originally been named host of the world showpiece, but the hosting rights have been withdrawn from the Bahraini capital amid the military conflict in the Middle East, with United World Wrestling yet to announce the new host nation.

Reigning world and Olympic champions Saeid Esmaili (67kg) and Mohammad-Hadi

Saravi (97kg), as well as world silver medalist Payam Ahmadi (55kg), Ali Ahmadi Vafa (60kg) – who won a bronze medal at the Asian Championships in April – Ali Oskou (77kg) – silver winner at the Asian event – senior and under-23 world champion Gholamreza Farrokhi (82kg), and world and Olympic silver medalist Alireza Mohmadi (87kg) have already secured their places in the national team, with the 63kg, 72kg, and 130kg slots up for grabs in the coming months. All eyes will be on the super-heavyweight class, where two-time defending world champion Amin Mirzazadeh – also a bronze medalist at the Paris 2024 Olympics – will face domestic rivalry from 21-year-old prodigy Fardin Hedayati, a world U23 champion for the past two years.

Hedayati, who made his senior international breakthrough in style at the 2024 Ranking Series event in Budapest – defeating



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Turkish great Riza Kayaalp and Georgian Olympic silver winner Iakobi Kajaia en route to the top of the podium – will have every reason to fancy his chances of

going all the way on a potential debut at the Senior Worlds. The two-horse race in the 63kg category will feature Mohammad-Mahdi Keshtkar and Er-

fan Jarkani. Keshtkar enjoyed a decent run of results last year, bagging silver at the Asian Championships before claiming an impressive bronze on

his debut at the World Championships. Former junior and under-23 world bronze medalist Jarkani, meanwhile, will be looking to build on an Asian silver-winning campaign in Bishkek, where he suffered a final loss to the host nation's Aftandil Taalaibek Uulu.

In 72kg, world bronze medalist Danial Sohrabi will take on Mohammad-Javad Rezaei, who tops the 2026 domestic selection cycle and also settled for silver at the Asian Championships after being pinned by Kazakhstan's Almatbek Amanbek in the final.

The decisive trials for these three weight categories are expected to be held in May or June, either in the form of domestic wrestle-offs or through assignment to an international tournament. Given the current wartime circumstances in the country, the coaching staff may lean toward holding domestic head-to-heads.

## IHF Beach Handball World Championships: Iran to face Spain, Portugal, USA in men's group phase



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## Sports Desk

Iran has been drawn against Spain, Portugal, and the USA in Group A of the upcoming IHF Beach Handball World Championships – starting May 23 in Zagreb, Croatia.

The draw for the 12th edition of the global showpiece was held in the Croatian capital on Saturday, where 16 men's teams were split into four preliminary groups.

Iran finished as runner-up at the Asian Championships in Muscat last year to secure a fourth participation at the world event, joining champion Oman as the continent's two representatives.

Iran's most successful campaign at the World Championships came in the 2018 edition in Kazan, Russia, when the country progressed to the quarterfinals before suffering a 2-0 setback against Sweden.

Iran will enter the tournament fresh off a glorious run at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China, last week, which

saw Mahdi Qashqaeirad's men bag the gold medal thanks to a shootout victory over Qatar in the final.

Spain will make a 10th appearance at the tournament, having achieved its best result in its maiden participation in 2006 – a third-place finish in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Spaniards will look to surpass that feat after an impressive silver-winning run at the European Championships last July.

Portugal, meanwhile, will be part of the World Championships for only a second time. The European side will still be among the teams to watch in Zagreb after claiming the bronze medal in the previous edition in China two years ago.

The United States will make a fifth appearance at the tournament, with their best result being an 11th-place finish in 2016. Elsewhere in the draw, two-time defending champion Croatia, which had the right to choose its own group as the host, picked Group D alongside debutant France, Oman,

and Australia. Denmark – beaten by Croatia in the last two finals – will be joined by 2010 silver medalist Hungary, Tunisia, and Puerto Rico in Group B.

An anticipated Group C will see Brazil – the most decorated team in the competition with three titles – and two-time champion and reigning European gold medalist Germany headline the group fixtures, with Argentina and debutant Italy also in the group.

The top three teams from each of the four groups will advance to the main round, which will feature two six-team groups, with the top four from each then moving through to the quarterfinals.

The bottom team in each of the four preliminary groups will continue in a round-robin consolation round.

The full schedule of the six-day World Championships, which will also feature the women's 16-team competition, is yet to be announced by the International Handball Federation.

## Qolizadeh a World Cup doubt after injury blow in Polish league

## Sports Desk

Iranian midfielder Ali Qolizadeh faces a race against time to be fit for the upcoming FIFA World Cup – co-hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada from June 11 – after suffering a knee injury while in action with Lech Poznań in the Polish Ekstraklasa on Saturday.

The 30-year-old winger, who was also ruled out of nine games in the early stages of the Polish top-flight season due to a torn thigh muscle, was forced off only 19 minutes into the away game against Motor Lublin.

"Ali will undergo an MRI scan on Sunday, with the result expected by Monday afternoon to determine the timeframe of his return," Lech Poznań's press officer Adrian Gatuszka said after the game.

The Iranian was trying to

jump over an opponent's tackle but twisted his previously operated right knee upon landing and clearly appeared to be in pain as he was stretchered off the pitch.

Lech Poznań still managed to win the game 1-0 – courtesy of Swedish midfielder Leo Bengtsson's 40th-minute strike – and retain top spot in the table with 55 points, six clear of nearest rival Górnik Zabrze, which has a game in hand, with three rounds of fixtures remaining, closing in on a record-extending 10th league title – its second in succession.

Qolizadeh has been in flying form in recent months, contributing six goals and four assists in 15 appearances since December, while playing a role in 14 of the club's last 18 league goals.

His potential lengthy spell on the sidelines would be



Iranian winger Ali Qolizadeh (8) is helped off the pitch by Lech Poznań teammates after a 1-0 victory over Motor Lublin in the Polish Ekstraklasa in Lublin, Poland, on May 2, 2026.

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a massive blow for national team head coach Amir Ghalenoei, who will likely have to build the team around overseas players, as domestic league players will be without competitive action until the World Cup following the top flight's postponement since the United States and Israel

launched a war campaign against Iran on February 28.

Iran is set to begin its Group G campaign at the global showpiece against New Zealand in Los Angeles on June 15, where it is also due to play Belgium six days later, before taking on Egypt in Seattle on June 26.

## Iranian judokas finish empty-handed on IJF Grand Slam return

## Sports Desk

All three members of the Iranian men's judo team suffered early exits at the Dushanbe Grand Slam in the country's first participation at the International Judo Federation's annual showpiece in six years.

A gold medalist at the Casablanca African Open in January, Elyas Parhizgar fell to a first-round defeat against Ukraine's Vladyslav Ukrkolobov in the -81kg class, while Amirabbas Choopan – a bronze medalist at February's Tunis African Open – was beaten by Kazakhstan's Daniil Krylov in his

first bout in the -90kg division.

Iranian prodigy Mohammad-Pouria Banaeian, who

claimed an impressive junior gold medal in the Tunisian capital, was undone by Azerbaijan's Ushangi Azekokauri in the +100kg contest.

Next for the Iranian trio will be the Astana Grand Slam, starting on Friday in Kazakhstan.

The two tournaments will serve as a significant part of Iran's preparation for the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in September, after the country missed out on April's Asian Championships in Ordos City, China, as a result of the military conflict with the United States and Israel.



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