

# Asian Weightlifting Championships: Yousefi makes statement comeback with C&J gold, new world record

## Sports Desk

Iranian weightlifter Alireza Yousefi marked his return to the global stage in style by setting a new world record of 261kg to win the clean & jerk gold in the men's superheavyweight event at the Asian Weightlifting Championships in Gandhinagar, India, on Sunday.

Making his first international appearance in 18 months after recovering from knee surgery, the 22-year-old prodigy added snatch bronze and total silver to his haul as the Iranian two-man squad finished fifth in the overall medals table – which also featured the women's competition – with two golds as well as one silver and one bronze apiece.

Yousefi began his campaign with a 177kg lift in the snatch and then posted a successful 184kg effort before failing with his 189kg attempt, finishing third in the category behind Bahrain's Olympic bronze medalist Gor Minasyan (212kg) and Amir Abdullaev (189kg) of Uzbekistan. The Iranian, however, was in his

own league in the clean & jerk event later in the afternoon, lifting 248kg with his first effort to secure the top prize.

Following last year's weight class adjustments, new standard records were set by the International Weightlifting Federation, including 260kg for the clean & jerk in the men's +110kg division. Yousefi's second attempt ended in vain, but he bounced back to exceed the mark by one kilogram with his final lift of the day.

Minasyan settled for silver with 245kg – four kilograms clear of South Korean bronze winner Song Yeong-hwan. Yousefi registered 445kg for the total silver, trailing Minasyan by 12 kilograms, while Song claimed his second bronze with 416kg. Sunday's medals were the latest testament to Yousefi's emergence as a contender to dominate the superheavyweight class in the post-Lasha Talakhadze era. The two-time world junior champion made his senior international debut at the 2024 World Championships in impressive fashion,



Iran's Alireza Yousefi makes a lift during the men's superheavyweight event at the Asian Weightlifting Championships in Gandhinagar, India, on May 17, 2026.

● AWF

stunning fellow Iranian Alireza Davoudi and Armenian Olympic silver medalist Varazdat Lalyan to claim the C&J gold with a then-continental record lift of

262kg, before winning bronze in the total with 456kg. Alireza Nasiri, also a two-time world junior gold medalist, was the other Iranian in action at the

Asian Championships, after the national governing body decided to dispatch a depleted squad amid the wartime circumstances in the country, and with Septem-

ber's Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games and October's World Championships on the horizon in a congested international season.

Nasiri had to recover from a disappointing start to his 110kg campaign on Saturday to finish with the clean & jerk gold. The 20-year-old Iranian had three failed attempts (187kg, 188kg, 189kg) and missed out on the snatch podium, but delivered a much-improved performance in the clean & jerk, starting with 221kg. He then registered 231kg with his second effort, which proved enough for the Iranian prodigy to beat reigning Olympic champion Liu Huanhua of China to the top podium by one kilogram. China dominated the medals table with a remarkable 21 golds, followed by North Korea, which collected 18 golds, Chinese Taipei (3) and Bahrain (3).

## AVC Men's Champions League:

# Keita on fire as Foolad falls short in final



Jakarta Bhayangkara Presisi's Malian opposite Nourmory Keita (R) hits a spike against Foolad Sirjan's Aleksandar Nikolov during the AVC Men's Champions League final in Pontianak, Indonesia, on May 17, 2026.

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## Sports Desk

Iranian club Foolad Sirjan was denied a third continental crown in five years after suffering a 3-1 setback (25-20, 24-26, 25-23, 25-23) against Jakarta Bhayangkara Presisi in Sunday's AVC Men's Champions League final in Pontianak, Indonesia.

Malian opposite Nourmory Keita made the difference between the two sides, chipping in a remarkable 38 points, including six aces, for the Indonesian outfit, which was backed by a crowd of more than 5,000 at the Terpadu Gymnasium.

The pinnacle of Keita's performance perhaps came in the closing stages of the fourth set when, with the score level at 23-23, he nailed back-to-back aces to secure a maiden continental title for

Indonesian volleyball. Slovenian outside hitter Rok Mozic added another 16 points, including two aces, for the host team, while his teammate Farchan Vachrezy Surya Putra put away 11 points, and Cuban middle blocker Robertlandy Simon contributed six.

Middle blocker Amirhossein Toukhteh and outside hitter Pouria Hosseinkhanzadeh led the scoring for Foolad with 13 points apiece, while Bulgarian outside Aleksandar Nikolov – who joined the club on a short-term contract for the showpiece – finished on 12, including three aces.

Earlier in the day, JTEKT Stings Aichi hammered out a 3-0 (25-19, 25-19, 25-21) shutout of Hyundai Capital Skywalkers – thanks to a match-high 24 points from French opposite Stephen Boyer,

including three kill blocks – to claim the bronze medal. Brazilian star outside hitter Ricardo Lucarelli delivered 11 points toward the Japanese side's victory, while Chinese opposite Jiang Chuan was the South Korean Skywalkers' leading scorer with 14 points.

There was, however, a bit of consolation for Foolad in the award ceremony, as three of Behrouz Ataei's men were named in the tournament's Dream Team, collecting individual prizes.

Nikolov and Hosseinkhanzadeh jointly received the Best Outside Hitter honors, with Ali Ramezani picking up the prize for Best Setter.

Keita, who also won the Asian title with Qatar's Al Rayyan last year, was named Most Valuable Player and Best Opposite, while

teammates Simon and Gumilar Ahmad earned the Best Middle Blocker awards.

JTEKT Stings Aichi's Takahashi Kazuyuki was honored as Best Libero.

Foolad began the eight-team knockout tournament with a straight-set victory over Jakarta Garuda Jaya and then routed JTEKT Stings by the same scoreline to reach the final, making amends for last year's setbacks against Japanese opposition in the semifinal and bronze-medal contest in Kyoto. Despite the final heartbreak, Foolad will still join Bhayangkara Presisi in representing the continent at the FIVB Men's Club World Championship later this year, returning to the global showpiece after a bronze-winning campaign at the 2024 edition in Uberlândia, Brazil.

# Iranian coach Mortezaei parts ways with Afghanistan futsal team

## Sports Desk

Iranian coach Majid Mortezaei has officially ended his tenure as head coach of Afghanistan's men's national futsal team, the Afghanistan Football Federation announced.

The sport's national governing body confirmed that negotiations over a contract extension failed to yield a final agreement, bringing the curtain down on a history-making era for Afghan futsal. The Iranian led Afghanistan to its AFC Futsal Asian Cup debut in 2024, where his team suffered a quarterfinal setback against Tajikistan, but bounced back to beat Iraq and Kyrgyzstan in the playoffs to secure a maiden spot at the Futsal World Cup in Uzbekistan later that year.

Afghanistan delivered impressive performances in the global

showpiece, beating Angola 6-4 before suffering defeats against Argentina (2-1) and Ukraine (4-1) – the two eventual semifinalists – to advance to the knockout stage. Their campaign, however, finished with a 3-1 setback in extra time against Paraguay in the round of 16.

Upon returning to the Asian Cup, Afghanistan again made it to the knockout stage in January – thanks to a runner-up finish behind Iran in the group – but was undone 6-0 by four-time champion Japan in the last eight.

Mortezaei was also in charge when Afghanistan held Asian powerhouse Iran to a 2-2 draw at the Islamic Solidarity Games last year, though his team ultimately missed out on a semifinal spot after finishing behind African champion Morocco and

Iran in the group table.

"People in Afghanistan now recognize futsal as their number one sport, which is a source of pride for me," Mortezaei told ISNA, adding: "However, given the circumstances, repeating our previous achievements was not possible."

"When I took over, Afghanistan was ranked 109th in the world and 24th in Asia. Thank God, at the time of handing over the team, their world ranking was 21st and they were fifth in Asia. Finishing as runners-up in the CAFA championship, qualifying for the World Cup, and securing fifth place in the last Asian Cup were among the achievements we accomplished in Afghanistan," added the Iranian, who was shortlisted for Best Men's National Team Coach in the World at the Futsalplanet

Awards 2023, but eventually lost out to Morocco's Hicham Dguig. Mortezaei explained that Afghanistan's improved status brought higher expectations, but fundamental changes to facilities, scouting, and player development were not feasible.

"I didn't want to harm my reputation among the Afghan people, which is why, in an amicable atmosphere, we decided to part ways after four years."

When asked about his future plans, Mortezaei said: "I have had talks with an Iranian top-flight side and have also been approached by two national teams, though the outcomes remain uncertain.

"We have submitted a proposal to a Premier League team and are awaiting their response. My priority would be to work with national teams," he said.



Afghanistan head coach Majid Mortezaei celebrates his team's playoff victory over Kyrgyzstan in the 2024 Futsal Asian Cup, which saw them secure a maiden World Cup qualification.

● AFC

"It matters to me that I work with teams that have room for improvement – teams with un-

tapped talent like Afghanistan, where good coaching and facilities can make a real difference."