

# Asian Taekwondo Championships: Hajimousaei grabs gold as Iran closes in on men's title

## Sports Desk

Mahdi Hajimousaei secured Iran's fourth gold medal at the Asian Taekwondo Championships on Saturday as Iran closed in on defending its men's kyo-rugi team title in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

A world silver medalist last October, Hajimousaei defeated former Olympic bronze medalist and 2019 world champion Jang Jun of South Korea in straight rounds to add the -63kg gold to his -58kg glory from the 2024 edition.

Reigning Olympic champion Arian Salimi had opened Iran's gold account in the Mongolian

capital with a dramatic victory in Thursday's +87kg showdown, before world champion Abolfazl Zandi (-58kg) and Amir-Sina Bakhtiari (-74kg) claimed the top prize in their respective divisions on Friday.

Yasin Valizadeh, meanwhile, marked his senior debut at the Asian Championships with an impressive silver medal in the -54kg division.

Mohammad-Hossein Yazdani and Ali Ahmadi were the other two Iranians in action in the men's event on Saturday, finishing empty-handed in the -87kg class.

Meanwhile, Iran endured another dreadful day in the women's

competition on Saturday after all three Iranian girls crashed out in the early stages of their respective events.

Olympic bronze medalist and world U21 champion Mobina Nematzadeh entered the -53kg contest with high hopes of ending Iran's women's drought in Ulaanbaatar, but her campaign finished after a third-round setback against her South Korean opponent. Fereshteh Fat'hi and Saghar Moradi were both knocked out by China's Jiani Xing in the -67kg category. Masoumeh Ranjbar (-46kg), Fatemeh Ahmadi (+73kg), Baran Nemati (-73kg), and Mahla Momenzadeh (-49kg) had already missed

out on a podium finish earlier in the women's contests.

Iran will still hope to have something to cheer about in the women's event when Olympic silver medalist and former world champion Nahid Kiani (-57kg) — who has recently recovered from knee surgery — and Yalda Valinejad (-62kg), a silver medalist at last year's Islamic Solidarity Games, get their campaigns underway at the M Bank Arena today.

The final day's action will also see Amir-Abbas Rahanama and Mohammad-Hassan Palangafkan vie for glory in the -68kg contest, with Amirreza Sadeqian part of the -80kg draw.



Iran's Mahdi Hajimousaei won the men's -63kg gold at the Asian Taekwondo Championships in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. ● IRNA

# Dabir hints at petition to move 2027 Wrestling Worlds from Las Vegas

## Sports Desk

Alireza Dabir, the chairman of the Iranian Wrestling Federation, has said he might launch a petition to strip the United States of hosting the 2027 Senior World Championships should Iranian wrestlers be denied entry visas for the upcoming U23 Worlds — starting October 12 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Las Vegas has also been named the host city of next year's Senior World Championships, which will serve as part of the qualification pathway for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games.

Iranian sport has struggled with entry visa complications in recent years, especially since a military conflict between Iran and a U.S.-Israeli coalition began on February 28.

With the FIFA World Cup, co-hosted by the United States,



● IAWFIR

Mexico, and Canada, less than three weeks away, questions remain as to whether all members of the Iranian squad will be able to take part in Team Mell's Group G campaign in Los Angeles and Seattle.

Meanwhile, the Iranian weightlifting squad had to make a late arrival in Ismailia, Egypt, for the

World Junior Championships earlier in May after a visa delay threatened to derail their men's title defense, while the country's fencing team was ruled out of Friday's Saber World Cup in Cairo for the same reason.

"I told the United World Wrestling president that Iran, the United States, and Russia are ti-

tle rivals. If they want to deplete our squad to make us lose to them, it's not acceptable," Dabir said this week, recounting his recent conversation with Serbian Nenad Lalović, the head of the sport's international governing body, regarding Iran's participation in October's U23 event.

"In football, if two players are missing the team might suffer, but two others could still step in and replace them. In wrestling, however, if a 10-man team is reduced to eight, it means losing 50 points in the title race, and there's no way Iran can finish first," added the former world and Olympic champion.

Iran won the Greco-Roman team trophy while finishing runner-up to the U.S. in freestyle at last year's U23 Worlds in Novi Sad, Serbia, having missed the 2024 edition in Tirana due to visa denials by Albania.

"Let me give you an example. Sajjad Gholami fell ill at the U23 World Championships in 2022, and based on the team doctor's recommendation, he received an injection. The president of the American federation protested, and Gholami was disqualified. That single decision cost our team the freestyle title, and we finished second. That's just how strict they were on the issue, so why should we go easy on visas?" Dabir added.

"That's what I told Mr. Lalović: If they don't want to grant us visas this year, they will do the same again to Iranian and Russian wrestlers for the 2027 Senior Worlds, leaving the Americans with an easy path to secure Olympic berths while we chase quotas in other tournaments. "I'm concerned they are planning to do the same to us for the Olympics. We have been in these circumstanc-

es for three years now, and I know exactly how they operate.

"I said, if that's the case, we should submit a petition to change the 2027 host, just like the 2026 event was moved from Bahrain. We are seriously pursuing this. If our U23 team doesn't receive full visas, I will be among those speaking with other federations to collect signatures to move the 2027 Worlds to another country. That event has Olympic quotas, and we cannot afford to jeopardize our young athletes' careers." The UWW confirmed on Friday that Astana, Kazakhstan, will host the 2026 Senior World Championships — originally scheduled to take place in Manama — from October 24 to November 1, citing the "current geopolitical situation, particularly the ongoing uncertainty and impact on international travel" in the region.

# Para Powerlifting African Open Championships:

## Jafari, Bakhtiar sweep men's -72kg golds in Oran

### Sports Desk

Iranian para powerlifters Amir Jafari and Mohsen Bakhtiar stole the show in the men's -72kg contests at the African Open Championships, grabbing two golds and a silver medal in Oran, Algeria, on Friday.

A Paralympic silver medalist in Tokyo 2020, Jafari began his campaign with a 196kg lift but failed with his 205kg effort on his second attempt, before bouncing back to overcome the weight with his final lift to pip Bakhtiar, who also posted a best lift of 205kg, for the top prize. The closely contested race saw Iraq's Ahmed Al-Karkhi settle for bronze, trailing the top two Iranians by one kilogram.

Reigning Paralympic bronze medalist Bakhtiar, meanwhile, went on



Iranian para powerlifters Amir Jafari (2nd R) and Mohsen Bakhtiar (1) pose with their men's -72kg medals at the African Open Championships in Oran, Algeria, on May 22, 2026. ● IPC

to clinch the total gold with an impressive tally of 605kg. High-profile Algerian Hocine Bettir — a winner of five world medals and back-to-back Paralympic bronzes — posted 581kg for the silver, with Uganda's Ismail Issa Ssebagala finishing on 506kg to take

the bronze. Jafari finished sixth in the total standings with 401kg. Friday's results came after Iran's Alireza Izadi and Mahdiyeh Mohamadian had collected four medals between them on the first day of the competition.

Competing in the men's -59kg weight class, Izadi posted three successful efforts to bag the bronze on 183kg before winning the total gold with a 542kg tally.

In the women's -55kg competition, Mohamadian also registered three successful lifts (95-102-105) to finish with bronze and the total silver.

Featuring more than 150 contestants from 20 countries, the event, which marks the third regional championships in this year's four-event series, will conclude today.

With the regional championships forming a mandatory part of the LA28 Paralympic qualification pathway, athletes aim to secure valuable ranking points and set new continental benchmarks ahead of other major events in 2026.

# AVC Girls' U18 Championship: Iran pitted against Japan, Philippines, Indonesia in pool phase

## Sports Desk

Iran has been drawn against Japan, the Philippines, and Indonesia in Pool C of the upcoming AVC Girls' U18 Volleyball Championship, which will begin on July 1 in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand.

The draw for the 16th edition of the tournament was held on Saturday, with 16 teams split into four groups.

Iran will make its ninth successive appearance at the continental showpiece, with its best result coming in the previous edition in 2024, when the Iranian girls progressed to the main-round group stage before settling for sixth place in Thailand.

The Iranian side faced both the Philippines and Japan in the 2024 preliminary group stage, defeating the Filipinos in straight sets but falling to Japan — the most decorated team in the competition with nine titles — by the same scoreline.



● AVC

Elsewhere in Saturday's draw, host Thailand was handed tests against Uzbekistan, Australia, and Mongolia in Pool A, while five-time champion China — which beat Japan in the 2024 final — will begin its title defense against Kazakhstan, Hong Kong, and

Kyrgyzstan in Pool B. Chinese Taipei, the bronze medalist in 2024, is joined by South Korea, India, and Vietnam in Pool D. The four semifinalists in Nakhon Ratchasima will qualify for the 2027 FIVB Girls' U19 World Championship.