

Wrestling U17 Asian Championships: Iran crowned freestyle champion, sweeps team trophies

Sports Desk

Iran bagged eight medals – including four golds – across 10 weight classes to claim the freestyle title at the Wrestling U17 Asian Championships in Da Nang, Vietnam, on Sunday.

Iranian boys concluded with 178 points – 13 clear of second-place Japan – to complete a clean sweep of team trophies.

Unlike the Greco-Roman contests, where Iran celebrated an early title with six golds on the first day of the event, the freestyle race went down to the wire and was perhaps decided when two Iranian wrestlers defeated their Japanese opponents in the final showpiece of their respective classes.

Benyamin Ashofteh beat Masamune Ushimado 5-1 in the 51kg showdown, before Arman Elahi outmuscled Kyosuke Ikeda 8-3 for the top prize in the 55kg division.

Mahdi Damercheli had opened Iran's gold account on the final day thanks to an emphatic 10-0 victory over Uzbekistan's Mukhammad Rakhimjonov in the 45kg final – his third superiority win in as many outings.

The other final bout featuring Iranian and Uzbek wrestlers, however, saw Amirali Ragh



Iranian wrestlers and coaching staff pose with the freestyle team trophy at the U17 Asian Championships in Da Nang, Vietnam, on May 31, 2026.
● IAWFIR

suffer a 10-0 setback against Farrukh Makhmudov, with Iran's second silver medal coming in the 110kg category, where Amirali Esmali was beaten 4-1 by India's Arush Rana.

Elsewhere on the closing day, Mohammadtaha Ganjeh

bounced back from a 10-4 loss to Kazakhstan's Mardan Orynbassar in the 60kg semifinals to hammer Mongolia's Shagaikhuu Munkhzul 12-2 for a consolation bronze.

Amirali Ferasati had secured the 80kg title in style on the penultimate day of action in Da Nang by routing India's Mandeep Mandeep 10-0 in the final, recording his third superiority victory in four bouts.

Amir-Abbas Lotfinejad, meanwhile, finished his 65kg campaign with something to cheer about, recovering from a last-four setback (4-3) against eventual champion Rihito Hiura of Japan to beat Kyrgyzstan's Khantemir Ismanov 5-2 in the bronze-medal contest.

Kiarash Torabi and Mohammadreza Issazadeh were the two Iranians to finish empty-handed in the freestyle event.

Torabi suffered a second-round exit in the 71kg category, falling 2-1 to Tajikistan's Idris Bakhromov, while Issazadeh's campaign finished after a single bout as he was stunned by a fall defeat against Japan's Shu Yoshida while leading 8-4.

Iranian freestyle head coach Sadeq Goudarzi was full of praise for his boys, who showed "true spirit and determination despite all the difficulties they faced in the buildup to the tournament."

"Most of our wrestlers were competing in an international tournament for the first time," said the former Olympic silver medalist, adding: "Unfortunately, because of the wartime situation in the country, we were unable to hold two training camps that had been planned. The Abdollah Movahed Cup was also canceled under the circumstances, and we were unable to participate in a scheduled tournament in Türkiye. As a result, our wrestlers entered these championships without any previous international experience."

"Despite all the problems, the boys performed very well and showcased the hallmark Iranian art of leg grappling and take-downs throughout the competition, which demonstrated both their technical potential and the

bright future that lies ahead for them," Goudarzi added.

Earlier in Da Nang, Iran had dominated the Greco-Roman event with a remarkable haul of six golds plus one silver and one bronze apiece.

Armin Esmaeil (45kg), Ali Esmaeili (48kg), Vahid Ashiri (55kg), Amirreza Tahmasbpour (60kg), Amirreza Mehri (92kg), and Ali-Akbar Akoo (110kg) were the Iranian gold medalists, while Esmaeil Zaherdoust settled for 71kg silver and Mahdi Gholamian took the 80kg bronze.

"Every team arrived with its strongest lineup and competed at full strength. The wrestlers from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, in particular, were exceptionally strong," said Iranian Greco-Roman head coach Mohsen Sourian.

"A fifth consecutive Asian Greco-Roman crown underscores both Iran's dominance and the strong pipeline of technically skilled wrestlers being developed for the future."

"However, we must remain realistic. The challenge facing us at the upcoming World Championships will be significantly tougher, particularly with the Russian team in the mix and Azerbaijan enjoying home advantage," added Sourian.

Sepahan ruled out of Asian competition as three clubs vie for Iran's final spot

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League club Sepahan has been officially ruled out of next season's AFC Champions League Two after failing to obtain the AFC's professional license required for participation in continental competitions, leaving the Iranian Football Federation facing a difficult decision over the country's third representative in Asia.

an appeal. The issue was effectively settled after it emerged that the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) would not grant Sepahan an additional opportunity to submit the required documentation.

With Sepahan removed from the equation, three clubs have emerged as potential replacements: Golgozar Sirjan, Chadormalu and Persepolis. Federation officials are understood to favor selecting the

are fully balanced could trigger objections from the two clubs directly behind them.

A second and potentially more significant complication involves an unresolved disciplinary case between Golgozar and Chadormalu.

Following Golgozar's 5-1 defeat to Chadormalu on Matchday 22 of the league season, the Sirjan-based outfit filed a complaint alleging that Paraguayan player Mauro Caballero had been ineligible to play for Chadormalu.

The case has reportedly been reviewed three times by the disciplinary committee in recent weeks, but no final verdict has been issued. Given the importance of the matter, any ruling is expected to be appealed by one of the parties, potentially extending the process further and delaying a final decision on Iran's third AFC Champions League Two representative.

Amid the uncertainty, reports have circulated suggesting that a three-team playoff tournament involving Golgozar, Chadormalu and Persepolis could be organized to determine the final Asian berth, but no official from the national governing body has confirmed such a plan. According to the federation, the AFC has agreed to extend the deadline for announcing Iran's clubs by two weeks, which could provide sufficient time for pending disciplinary cases and other outstanding issues to be resolved before a final decision is made.

next highest-ranked team in the league standings, meaning Golgozar would receive the vacant berth.

Golgozar currently sits fourth in the league table with 36 points from 23 matches. Chadormalu is fifth with 35 points from 22 matches, while Persepolis is sixth with 34 points, also from 22 matches. However, Golgozar's advantage is complicated by the fact that the club has played one more match than both Chadormalu and Persepolis. Awarding the Asian berth to Golgozar before the standings

Nematzadeh to miss Asian Games with torn ligament

Sports Desk

Iranian taekwondo has been dealt a major blow as women's young prodigy Mobina Nematzadeh will miss September's Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games due to a torn ligament injury. An Olympic bronze medalist at Paris 2024, Nematzadeh – who also claimed gold at the U21 World Championships last December – was part of the Iranian roster at the Asian Championships last week but endured a below-par campaign in Ulaanbaatar, suffering a third-round exit against South Korea's Seo Yeon-won in the -53kg class.

"I tore my ACL a month before the Asian Championships, and only my family knows what I went through. My goal was to make my people happy by winning the gold, but the knee injury simply did not allow me to perform at my best," Nematzadeh said on Sunday.

"I will be sidelined for around nine months and miss the Asian Games. A selection trial between Nahid Kiani and me had been planned to decide the Asian Games spot, but it is now called off as I'll have to undergo surgery next week."

"I would like to ask my people to send me their positive thoughts and support," added the 20-year-old.

Her injury setback marks another twist in the two-horse race with Kiani for a place at the 2028 Olympics, though the 20-year-old remains confident of her chances to secure a quota for the Los Angeles Games.

"This year's Grand Prix tournaments are not especially significant in terms of Olympic qualification. From next year onward, points earned at the World Championships and at a Grand Prix event held before the world showpiece will be taken into account, and I



● EUROPA PRESS

believe that winning the world gold medal could completely turn things around for me," said Nematzadeh.

On her domestic rivalry with Kiani, Nematzadeh said, "We are like two friends in national team training and two rivals who can help each other improve."

"I'm not really into bragging, and I think my victories against her in the previous two meetings at the President's Cup and the Iranian league last year speak for themselves. I'm sure I'll be back at my best once I recover from this injury."

Iran will still fancy a successful -57kg campaign at the Asian Games, as Olympic silver medalist Kiani is all but guaranteed a berth at the multi-sport showpiece.

Kiani, who had recovered from knee surgery in time to make it to the Asian Championships, defeated Uzbekistan's Madina Mirabzalova in straight rounds in the -57kg final to add to the continental title she won in 2022.

Her triumph in the Mongolian capital, coupled with Yalda Valinejad's bronze in the -62kg division on

the final day, saved the day for the Iranian women's squad, who had been left empty-handed across the other six categories.

"Three or four of our athletes fell short of expectations. We had expected more from them, but they were unable to implement the technical aspects of their game effectively during the competition," said Iranian head coach Mahrouz Saei, whose team finished fourth in the women's standings.

"Expectations were particularly high for Mobina. It is true that she was dealing with a serious ACL injury, but if we had believed she was not fit enough to compete, we would not have sent her to the tournament."

"Overall, I am pretty satisfied with the team's performance. Since these championships also served as the qualifiers for the Asian Games, we took a significant risk by sending five unranked athletes. "I have a high tolerance for risk when it comes to trusting youth, and thank God, even though some of the athletes did not win medals here, we still secured full qualification quotas," Saei added.



● KHABARVARZESHI

The federation had initially named Esteghlal and Tractor – the top two in the league table – as Iran's teams for the AFC Champions League Elite, after the domestic top-flight was canceled following the outbreak of the country's military conflict with the United States and Israel on February 28. Third-placed Sepahan had been lined up for the continent's second-tier competition. However, Sepahan's unsuccessful attempt to secure a professional license resulted in the Isfahan-based club losing its place despite lodging