

# Yazdani survives Azarpira test, secures bid for fourth gold at Wrestling Worlds

## Sports Desk

Iranian wrestling sensation Hassan Yazdani will be chasing the eighth World Championships medal of his career after overcoming Amirali Azarpira in the national team trials on Friday to secure the freestyle 97kg spot for October's showpiece in Astana. According to selection criteria set by the Iranian Wrestling Federation, Azarpira – a world silver medalist last year – needed a single victory in the best-of-three series in Kerman to punch his ticket to Astana. However, Yazdani pulled off back-to-back wins, 4-2 and 5-3, to claim the berth.

Still, the three-time world champion, who has moved up two weight classes since recovering from an 18-month shoulder injury last December, was barely convincing, managing only a single takedown across 12 minutes of action.

In the first bout, Yazdani scored three stepouts and a point for passivity, while Azarpira scored a takedown to cut the deficit but could not find either another takedown or the two one-point scoring actions needed to win.

An hour later, Olympic bronze medalist Azarpira fought back from three points down to lead 3-3 on criteria in the second period.

In the final minute, Azarpira pressured Yazdani toward the



Freestyle wrestler Hassan Yazdani (red) has his hand raised as the winner against Amirali Azarpira in the Iranian national team trials in Kerman, Iran, on June 19, 2026.

● ADIB MOHMADI/IAWFIR

booked their places in the freestyle squad as Iran confirmed its 10-man freestyle roster for the world event.

A winner of world silver medals at both 65kg and 70kg, Yazdani came out on top in consecutive bouts against Younes Emami in the 74kg class, avenging last year's trials defeat to the former world bronze medalist.

In two high-scoring contests, Yazdani won 10-6 and 11-7, relying largely on his counterattacks in the zone to secure his place on the team.

At 92kg, world bronze medalist Amirhossein Firouzpour, who also needed only one win in the series, secured a hard-fought 2-1 victory over world U23 champion Mobin Azimi in the second matchup to join the national team.

Azimi won the opening bout 2-2 on criteria, scoring a late stepout after three points had been awarded for passivity. However, there was no such comeback in the second contest, as Firouzpour protected his lead to clinch the series.

The winners of Friday's deciders will join reigning world

champions Rahman Amouzad (65kg) and Amirhossein Zare' (125kg), alongside Milad Valizadeh (57kg), Ahmad Mohamadnejad Javan (61kg), Sina Khalili (70kg), Mohammad Nokhodi (79kg), and two-time world champion Kamran Qasempour (86kg), as Iran looks to defend its freestyle team title in the Kazakh capital.

The country also completed its Greco-Roman roster last week after Fardin Hedayati pulled off a major upset on Tuesday, defeating reigning world super-heavyweight champion Amin Mirzazadeh to book the 130kg berth.

The 22-year-old, who owns five world gold medals across various age groups, claimed a commanding 5-1 victory in the opening bout before being awarded the second after Mirzazadeh withdrew through injury.

Reigning world and Olympic champions Saeid Esmaili (67kg) and Mohammad-Hadi Saravi (97kg) will spearhead Iran's Greco-Roman title defense.

They will be joined by world silver medalist Payam Ahmadi (55kg), Ali Ahmadi-Vafa (60kg), Mohammad-Mahdi Keshtkar (63kg), Danial Sohrabi (72kg), Ali Oskou (77kg), world champion Gholamreza Farrokhi (82kg), and Alireza Mohmadi (87kg), who has claimed back-to-back world silver medals on either side of his Olympic silver at Paris 2024.

zone, and just when it seemed he had scored a stepout, Yazdani circled back and secured a takedown to take a 5-3 lead. A stunned Azarpira protested the decision, but he had no challenge left after unsuccessfully using one in the first period.

Yazdani held on to his two-point cushion to confirm his return to the World Championships for the first time since his 86kg final loss to familiar American foe David Taylor in 2023.

The defeat means Azarpira will represent Iran at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in September. Yazdani, meanwhile, will need

significant improvement if he is to add to his tally of 10 major medals in four months' time.

The 97kg division is expected to feature a star-studded cast in Astana, with American Kyle Snyder defending his title, while former world and Olympic champion Abdurashid Sadulaev will also be in the mix if he earns a place on the Russian team.

Reigning Olympic champion Akhmed Tazhudinov of Bahrain and Japanese world bronze medalist Arash Yoshida, who defeated Azarpira for the Asian title in April, will also fancy their chances in Astana.

Georgian Olympic silver medalist Givi Matcharashvili and former world 92kg champion Rizabek Aitmukhan of Kazakhstan will also pose a threat to the 31-year-old Iranian, who was unimpressive by his own standards on his 97kg international debut in February, suffering the first superpriority loss of his career against unheralded American Stephen Buchanan in the Zagreb Open final.

## FS lineup confirmed

Elsewhere in Friday's trials, Airmohammad Yazdani and Amirhossein Firouzpour also

## Asian Karate Championships: Iran storms into men's, women's team kumite finals

### Sports Desk

Iran advanced to the men's and women's team kumite finals at the AKF Asian Karate Championships in Bali, Indonesia, securing places at the Team World Cup in Hangzhou, China, in November.

meh-Zahra Saeidabadi, and Hannaneh Salehi, the Iranian women's team, meanwhile, began its campaign with a 2-1 (17-4) victory over Chinese Taipei. Bahmanyar fell short against her opponent, but Saeidabadi and Heidari posted 11-1 and 5-0 victories, respectively,

team gold since 2019 in today's showdown is Japan – last year's joint bronze medalist alongside Iran – which defeated South Korea, Indonesia, and Thailand en route to the final. Brothers Morteza and Mahmoud Nemati will also be chasing gold medals in

Japan's Kentaro Yamauchi. The Iranian will also face a reigning Asian champion in today's final, taking on Saudi Arabia's Sanad Sufyani.

Former world bronze medalist Asiabari, meanwhile, fell short of advancing to the -84kg final after suffering a 13-9 defeat to defending champion Mohammad Al-Jafari of Jordan. He bounced back from the semifinal setback to beat India's Chetan Bhatt 16-7 for a bronze medal on Friday, taking Iran's haul to five bronze medals by the end of the second day of action in Bali.

Mehrnegar Ahmadi also claimed a kumite bronze medal thanks to a 6-1 victory over Vietnam's Nguyen Thi Man in the women's -61kg division, while the Iranian trio of Fatemeh Sadeqi, Sepideh Amini, and Zeinab Hosseini defeated Hong Kong 5-2 in the bronze-medal playoff of the women's team kata event.

It was Sadeqi's second bronze medal in Bali after she had defeated China's Tao Yiwei 6-1 to secure a third-place finish in individual kata on the opening day – the Iranian's fifth bronze medal in the history of the competition. Ali Zand had opened Iran's account with a bronze medal in the men's individual kata on Thursday, courtesy of a 7-0 victory over China's Zheng Qianqu in the third-place match.



● IKF

The Iranian men's team of Saleh Abazari, Esmail Motamedi, Mahdi Ashouri, Mahdi Shagol, Bahman Asgari, and Aliasghar Asiabari overcame Nepal and Vietnam before defeating Japan in the semifinals. Abazari, Motamedi, and Asiabari won their bouts, while Ashouri suffered a defeat in the semifinal clash. Iran will look to avenge last year's final loss to Jordan in today's gold-medal contest. Featuring Sara Bahmanyar, Mobina Heidari, Fate-

to send Iran through. Saeidabadi and Heidari again emerged victorious as Iran defeated Uzbekistan 2-0 (7-0) to set up a semifinal showdown with Vietnam. Salehi gave Iran a flying start against the three-time defending champion, winning 7-4, before a third victory of the day for Saeidabadi, a commanding 10-0 result, sealed a 2-0 triumph for head coach Pegah Zangeneh's team. Standing between the Iranian women and a first Asian

their respective men's kumite events today. A silver medalist in Tashkent last year, Morteza Nemati outclassed Japan's Sakiyama Yusei 9-2 to progress to the -75kg final, where he will look to make amends for last year's title-match defeat to Kazakhstan's Nurkanat Azhikanov, who is targeting a third title in four continental championships. Mahmoud Nemati then capped an emphatic semifinal performance in the +84kg class with an impressive 12-2 victory over

## Sayyadmanesh joins Polish champion Lech Poznań



Iranian winger Allahyar Sayyadmanesh poses with the Lech Poznań kit after signing for the Polish club in Poznań, Poland, on June 19, 2026.

● LECHPOZNA.N.PL

### Sports Desk

Iranian winger Allahyar Sayyadmanesh has joined Lech Poznań on a three-year contract, the Polish top-flight champion announced on Friday. Sayyadmanesh, 24, arrives as a free agent from KVC Westerlo, where he spent the previous two seasons, registering 14 goals and 13 assists in 84 appearances for the Belgian outfit. He found the net on seven occasions and provided five assists in 31 outings as Westerlo reached the Jupiler Pro League Europe playoffs in the recently concluded season, but ultimately missed out on a

place in continental club competitions.

His impressive campaign still did little to convince national team head coach Amir Qalenoee to include the versatile attacker, who has scored one goal in nine international appearances, in Iran's squad for the ongoing FIFA World Cup.

"Despite his young age, he already has extensive experience in both the Turkish and Belgian leagues. The 24-year-old will strengthen the competition in virtually every offensive position, as he can play on the right or left wing, as well as in attack," Lech sporting director Tomasz Rząsa said after seal-

ing the deal for the Iranian. Sayyadmanesh has also played for Turkish clubs Fenerbahçe and Istanbulspor, Ukraine's Zorya Luhansk, and English second-tier outfit Hull City since being introduced to European club football at the start of the 2019/20 season.

At the record 10-time Polish champion, Sayyadmanesh will link up with fellow Iranian winger Ali Qolizadeh.

However, it may take some time before the two Iranians play alongside each other, as Qolizadeh suffered a torn ligament injury in May and is expected to face a lengthy spell on the sidelines.