

Iran freestyle wrestlers face stern test at Asian Games

Sports Desk

Iran's freestyle wrestling team will face a formidable challenge in its bid to cement its status as the continent's dominant force when the wrestling competition at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games gets underway in Japan on Sept. 30.

With the wrestling event in Nagoya and the World Championships, which begin on Oct. 24 in Astana, Kazakhstan, separated by less than 30 days, the Iran Wrestling Federation and the national coaching staff have opted to field different lineups for the two competitions. Even so, Iran's six-man freestyle squad for the Asian Games will still feature a star-studded cast.

Reigning two-time world champion and Olympic silver medalist Amirhossein Zare will headline the Iranian roster as he bids to win his second consecutive Asian Games gold medal in the 125kg division.

Joining Zare in the Iranian

freestyle squad are world silver medalist Amirali Azarpira (97kg), as well as Younes Emami (74kg) and Mohammad Nokhodi (86kg), who have won seven senior world medals between them. The lineup is completed by former U23 world bronze medalists Ali Mo'meni (57kg) and Abbas Ebrahimzadeh (65kg).

The Iranian freestyle team enjoyed an impressive campaign in Hangzhou in 2022, claiming three gold and two silver medals. Wrestling remains Iran's most successful sport in Asian Games history, accounting for 74 of the country's 192 gold medals since its debut at the 1951 Games in New Delhi.

However, the task is expected to be considerably tougher this time as host Japan, along with India, Uzbekistan, North Korea, Mongolia, and Bahrain, is set to field world-class contenders across the six weight classes.

At 57kg, Mo'meni is likely to face stiff opposition from wrestlers represent-



Iranian freestyle wrestlers are pictured during a training session in Tehran, Iran, on July 18, 2026.

● FARSHAD BANDANI/LAWFIR

tougher.

At 97kg, a second showdown in less than six months could be on the cards between Azarpira and Japan's Arash Yoshida after the Iranian suffered a surprise 4-0 defeat in the final of the Asian Championships in April.

While every Iranian representative is expected to face formidable opposition, Zare appears to be the country's strongest gold medal prospect, entering the Games as the wrestler to beat in the heavyweight division.

With the level of competition continuing to rise across Asia, Iran's freestyle wrestlers will need to overcome a host of established international stars if they are to match their medal haul from the previous Games and return home with multiple gold medals.

ing Japan, North Korea, India, and Mongolia, while the 65kg category could largely depend on Japan's final selection. If Olympic champion Kotaro Kiyooka is not included in the host

nation's lineup, Kaiji Ogino will still be regarded as one of the leading gold medal contenders, presenting a major obstacle for Ebrahimzadeh, who lost to the Japanese wrestler in the

semifinals of the 2024 U23 World Championships. The 74kg division also promises to be highly competitive, with Uzbekistan's reigning Olympic champion Razambek Jamalov and

Japan's Daichi Takatani – who lost to Jamalov in the Paris 2024 Olympic final – among the favorites should they compete in Nagoya, making Emami's path to the podium considerably

Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships: Iranian swimmers impress with nine medals

Sports Desk

Iran's six-man swimming squad enjoyed a prolific campaign at the Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships in Bangkok, Thailand, collecting nine medals, including two golds, across

Iranian swimmer won the gold medal in the men's 100m butterfly event at the Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships.

● IR IRAN AQUATICS

multiple events.

Alireza Arab and Mohammad-Mahdi Gholami headlined the country's medal haul by claiming gold in their respective disciplines. Arab clocked 28.22 seconds in the final to win the men's 50m breaststroke title, while Gholami topped the podium in the men's 100m butterfly after producing a winning time of 55.46 seconds.

There was further success for the two Iranians in the relay events.

Gholami teamed up with Kiararam Kiani, Amirali Sabeti, and Danial Jahangiri to win silver in the men's 4×100m freestyle relay, adding to his impressive list of achievements after claiming two gold medals at the Asian Youth Games and a bronze at last year's Islamic Solidarity Games.

Arab, meanwhile, joined Gholami, Jahangiri, and Parsa Shahshahani in the Iranian quartet that finished runner-up in the men's

4×100m medley relay.

Iran's other relay medal came in the men's 4×200m freestyle, where Kiani, Gholami, Sabeti, and Jahangiri claimed bronze.

Coached by Meisam Sa'adati, the Iranian squad also secured four bronze medals in the individual events through Jahangiri in the men's 100m and 200m freestyle, Shahshahani in the men's 200m backstroke, and Sabeti in the men's 50m freestyle.



Persian Gulf Premier League to kick off on Aug. 14

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The 2026-27 Persian Gulf Premier League (PGPL) season will kick off on Aug. 14, the League Organization of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) announced.

The full fixture list for the upcoming campaign will be unveiled during a draw ceremony at Tehran's Olympic Hotel on Tuesday.

The new season will feature 18 teams, an expansion of two clubs from the previous edition. The decision was made after last season was declared null and void with seven rounds of matches remaining because of a military conflict between Iran and a U.S.-Israeli coalition, which began on Feb. 28. As a result, no teams were relegated, offering a lifeline to Zob Ahan and Mes Rafsanjan, both of which were in the relegation zone when the season was abandoned. Nassaji Mazandaran won the Azadegan League title

last week to return to the top flight after spending one season in the second tier. Mes Shahr-e Babak, meanwhile, finished runner-up to Nassaji to secure promotion and will make its Persian Gulf Premier League debut this season.

Esteghlal and Tractor occupied the top two places in the standings when the league was halted and will represent Iran in the new AFC Champions League Elite.

Esteghlal is expected to receive a direct place in the league phase of Asia's pre-

mier club competition, while Tractor will have to secure its berth through the qualifying playoffs.

For only the second time in the league's 26-season history, every top-flight club will begin the campaign with an Iranian head coach.

The only previous instance came during the pandemic-affected 2020-21 season. The preceding campaign had begun with seven foreign managers across the league's 16 clubs, but COVID-19, travel restrictions, and mounting financial problems triggered a mass exodus.



CAFA U20 Women's Championship:

Iran fights back to beat Tajikistan in opener

Sports Desk

Iran got off to a winning start to the CAFA U20 Women's Championship in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, rallying from behind to beat the host 3-2 on Tuesday.

Mehrsa Barari, Yasna Ja'farnia, and Maryam Khalilifar, who went on to pick up the Player of the Match prize, were on target as Iran pulled off a sensational comeback in the second half to overcome a two-goal halftime deficit.

Iran head coach Maryam Jahannejati praised her team's fighting spirit, saying the tournament is part of the federation's long-term plan to develop the next generation of national team players.

"I would first like to congratulate the Tajikistan team on its performance. They have made significant progress and played a very good match," Jahannejati said after the victory.

"We came to this tournament with a squad made up of around 70 percent under-17 players and also

promoted even younger players to this age group. Our goal is to start building for the future of national team by giving new players valuable international experience."

Iran endured a difficult start, conceding twice through individual errors in the third and 10th minutes before mounting a second-half comeback.

"We spoke to the players at halftime and tried to prepare them

mentally to return to the game with greater focus," Jahannejati said.

"Players at this age are naturally more vulnerable psychologically, and the early goals affected them. But they gradually settled into the match, grew in confidence, and eventually completed the comeback."

Jahannejati believes the final outcome reflected her players' mental strength.

"Fortunately, the players produced an excellent second-half performance. They overturned the deficit by scoring three goals, and the comeback showed they have strong character and the determination to fight back in difficult situations," she said.

