

U17 Wrestling World Championships:

Iran's Greco-Roman title streak snapped by Russia

Sports Desk

The Greco-Roman competition at the UWW U17 World Championships proved one to forget for Iranian wrestling as the country missed out on a fifth successive team title in Baku.

A haul of two golds and two bronzes saw Iran finish third in the team standings with 96 points. Russia, which was eligible for team points for the first time since the 2021 edition, claimed the title with 127 points, while host Azerbaijan finished runner-up with 107 points despite failing to win a single gold medal across the 10 weight classes.

Iran might have enjoyed a better finish had it not been for the bizarre manner in which Armin Esmaeili exited the 45kg competition.

The U17 Asian champion began his campaign with a 9-1 superiority victory over Türkiye's Kerem Derman before defeating Kazakhstan's Nurislam Pakhitzhan 6-4 later in Tuesday's morning session to advance to the semi-finals.

However, Esmaeili was disqualified after failing to report for his semifinal bout against Azerbaijan's Ali Javadli in what Iranian head coach Mohsen Sourian said was the result of a sudden change to the evening-session schedule.

Amirreza Tahmasbpour still provided Iran with some relief on the final day by claiming gold in the 60kg division thanks to an 8-6 victory over Tajikistan's

Makhdi Barotov in a dramatic final.

At one stage, Barotov appeared destined to win Tajikistan's first-ever Greco-Roman world title across all age groups. Tahmasbpour scored a takedown and two trap-arm turns to build a 6-0 lead inside the opening minute, but the bout was turned on its head before the break. Barotov countered an attempted duck-under to force Tahmasbpour backward for two points. Moments later, he secured double underhooks and launched the Iranian with a throw. The officials initially awarded four points to Tahmasbpour, but a successful challenge overturned the decision and awarded the points to Barotov instead, putting the Tajik ahead 6-6 on criteria.

Tahmasbpour, however, sensed that Barotov was tiring and began repeatedly snapping him down. After one of those snaps, he spun behind his opponent for the decisive takedown to seal an 8-6 victory, adding the world title to the 55kg bronze medal he won in Athens last year.

Iran collected another medal on the final day as Amirreza Mehri claimed bronze in the 92kg division.

Mehri suffered a disappointing start to his campaign with a 6-2 defeat to Ukraine's Hlib Yevsieiev but bounced back to defeat American William Etu and Azerbaijan's Zohrab Safarov 4-3 in the repechage before beating Uzbekistan's Mirjalol Shovkatov by the same scoreline in the

bronze-medal match.

Alireza Rezaei had opened Iran's account on Tuesday by winning gold in the 80kg category.

Rezaei enjoyed a comfortable run to the final, outscoring his opponents 26-1 across four bouts, but had to dig deep against Azerbaijan's Isfahan Hasanov, rallying from behind to edge the home favorite 2-1.

Ali-Akbar Akou, meanwhile, recovered from a 5-4 quarterfinal defeat to Ukraine's Tymofii Prykhodko by beating Georgia's Saba Takidze 7-3 before edging Russia's Fedor Sukharev 1-1 on criteria to secure bronze in the 110kg division.

"The team's result and performance were weaker than in previous years because there is a continuous generational change at this age level and you don't get to work with the same group of wrestlers for several years," Iranian head coach Sourian said.

He added that his squad had only five seven-day training camps under his supervision before the tournament and missed several warm-up events, including April's Victory Cup in Antalya, because of the wartime conditions in Iran.

Sourian also acknowledged that his wrestlers were below their best physically but insisted the federation's long-term development strategy deliberately avoids placing excessive physical demands on teenage athletes.

"Yes, they weren't in ideal physical condition and looked drained toward the end of their bouts,"



Iran's Amirreza Tahmasbpour (red) scores a takedown against Tajikistan's Makhdi Barotov during the Greco-Roman 60kg final at the U17 Wrestling World Championships in Baku, Azerbaijan, on July 29, 2026.
● AMIRREZA ALIASGARI/UWW

he said. "But we have always believed we should not put too much pressure on young wrestlers. During my years in charge of this age group, our ultimate goal has always been to develop wrestlers for the junior and senior national teams, not simply chase results at any cost." The coach noted that all 10 members of Iran's current junior national team had previously competed under him at U17 level,

while senior national team members Payam Ahmadi and Ali Ahmadvafa also emerged through the same development pathway. Sourian also accepted full responsibility for Esmaeili's disqualification, apologizing "to him, his family and his personal coach."

Despite missing out on the team title, Sourian rejected suggestions that Iran's overall cam-

paign should be viewed as a failure.

"Taking everything into account, the result was not bad," he said. "Azerbaijan didn't win any gold medals, while we and Russia each won two. Expectations are naturally very high because we had won the title four years in a row, but people also have to consider the circumstances we had to deal with in the buildup to the event."

33-member Iranian squad named for WT President's Cup in Lahore

Sports Desk

Iran will dispatch a 33-member squad to compete at the upcoming World Taekwondo President's Cup – Asia, which will kick off on August 18 in Lahore, Pakistan.

The G3-ranked event will feature 323 athletes from across the continent and offers valuable ranking points on the road to Olympic qualification, with gold medalists earning 30 points in the World Taekwondo rankings.

Iran's delegation will feature 18 male and 15 female athletes.

Paris Olympic gold medalist Arian Salimi and reigning world and Asian champion Abolfazl Zandi spearhead a star-studded men's roster.

Mahdi Razmian, Yasin Valizadeh, Amir Mohammad Nasirahmadi, Ali Asghar Moradian, Mahdi Hajmoussaei, Amirabbas Rahnama, Danial Bozorgi, Martin Rezaei, Amirsina Bakhtiari, Radin Zeinali, Reza Kalhor, Amirreza Sadeghian, Mehran Barkhordari, Amirreza Gholami, Mohammad Hossein Yazdani, and Ali Najafi have also been called up by head coach Payam Khanlarkhani.

Among the notable selections are Bozorgi and Kalhor, who return to international competition after serving three-year suspensions. Their inclusion is expected to



Abolfazl Zandi (blue), seen in action at last year's World Taekwondo Championships, will be part of Iran's men's squad at the World Taekwondo President's Cup in Lahore, Pakistan.
● WORLD TAEKWONDO

strengthen the national team, particularly in the men's under-68kg division.

In the women's competition, Olympic silver medalist and Asian champion Nahid Kiani will be Iran's leading contender, while reigning two-time world junior champion Hana Zarrinkamar will look to build on her senior breakthrough at the Chuncheon Korea Open in July, where she claimed gold in the +73kg category.

Yalda Valinejad, Hasti Moham-madi, and Fatemeh Ahmadi, who were part of the Iranian team that won bronze at the World Cup Team Championships a fortnight ago, have also been named in the

squad. Saina Karimi, Masoumeh Ranjbar, Mahla Momenzadeh, Maryam Malekoutikhah, Anahita Ramezani, Nastaran Valizadeh, Fereshteh Fathi, Saghar Moradi, Elham Haghighi, and Sara Soufi complete the lineup.

Meanwhile, Iran will once again have no representative in the women's under-53kg division, marking the second consecutive international event after the Korea Open in which the weight class has been left vacant.

The registration deadline for the President's Cup has not yet passed, meaning changes to Iran's squad remain possible before the competition begins.

FIE World Rankings:

Iran up to 27th in men's saber despite dismal World Championships

Sports Desk

Iran's men's saber team climbed one place to 27th in the latest FIE World Rankings.

The rankings were released by the international fencing governing body on Friday, a day after the conclusion of the World Championships in Hong Kong, where Iran endured a disappointing campaign across the individual and team saber events.

A 45-35 defeat to Japan saw the Iranian quartet of Ali Pakdaman, Mohammad Fotouhi, Nima Zahedi, and Taha Kargarpour suffer a first-round exit in the men's team saber competition on Thursday.

Pakdaman was Iran's best performer at the global showpiece, reaching the last 16 of the men's individual event.

The former Asian champion claimed five successive victories to advance from the preliminary rounds. He then defeated Matteo Neri – a member of Italy's team that won gold at the previous World Championships – 15-13, before overcoming American William Morrill by the same scoreline. His run ended with a 15-6 defeat to Egypt's Mohamed Amer.

Fotouhi, Zahedi, and Kargarpour also progressed from the preliminary phase but failed to advance beyond the round of 64. Zahedi was beaten 15-13 by Uzbekistan's Sardor Abdukarimbekov in his second knockout bout, while Kargarpour defeated Ukraine's Oleksiy Statsenko 15-13 before losing 15-11 to Russia's Kamil Ibragimov. Fotouhi suffered a 15-10 defeat to Saudi Arabia's Adel Almutairi in the opening knockout round. Pakdaman remained the highest-ranked Iranian in the men's individual saber rankings, retaining 41st place. He is followed by Kargarpour (111th), Za-

hed (115th), and Fotouhi (174th).

France climbed to the top of the men's team rankings after winning the world title on Thursday, followed by runner-up South Korea, bronze medalist Romania, Hungary, and the United States.

France's Sébastien Patrice retained the No. 1 spot in the men's individual rankings despite exiting in the last 16 in Hong Kong.

South Korea's Do Gyeong-dong and Oh Sanguk complete the top three, while France's Maxime Piana-fetti and Russian world champion Kamil Ibragimov round out the top five.



● FIE