

U20 Wrestling World Championships:

Reality check as Iran falters in freestyle

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestling was handed a harsh reality check at the U20 World Championships in Bratislava, Slovakia, after a run of poor results across different weight classes saw the country miss out on a top-three finish in the freestyle team standings for the first time in a decade. Abolfazl Rahmani settled for silver in the 92kg division on Saturday – a day after Ahoura Khateri had won bronze in the 61kg class – while Sina Khalili (70kg) and Abolfazl Mohammadnejad (125kg) reached the final in their respective events. However, it proved far from enough for Iran – three-time champion in the past five editions – to even match last year's third-place finish, after six other members of the squad finished their campaigns empty-handed. A silver medalist at June's U20 Asian Championships, Mohammad-Mahdi Mamivand saw his 74kg campaign come to an end after just one bout following an 8-2 defeat against Germany's Manuel Wagin, while Tohid Nouri crashed out of the 97kg event after suffering an 11-0 defeat against Georgia's Konstantine



Iran's Arman Elahi (R) is seen in action during a first-round defeat against Kyrgyzstan's Nurtilek Zamirbekov in the freestyle 57kg category at the U20 Wrestling World Championships in Bratislava, Slovakia, on Aug. 21, 2026.
● IAWFIR

Petriashvili in the second round. In 65kg, Ali-Asghar Tat fell to a 5-3 defeat against Russia's

Zalimkhan Umarov in the quarterfinals, with Asian U20 champion Sobhan Esmi losing 6-3 to Ukraine's Bohdan Oleksienko in the 79kg repechage. Abolfazl Shamsipour also failed to seize his repechage opportunity in the 86kg class, losing 4-0 to Kazakhstan's Askhab Khajiev, while Arman Elahi was knocked

out of the 57kg event following a 12-6 setback against Kyrgyzstan's Nurtilek Zamirbekov in his first bout. Rahmani, meanwhile, enjoyed an emphatic run by securing three successive superiority wins before being undone by a 5-2 defeat against Georgia's Sandro Kurashvili in the 92kg final.

Kurashvili used a last-ditch body throw to beat Rahmani. The Iranian led 2-0 with six seconds remaining when he glanced at the clock, and Kurashvili capitalized on the lapse in concentration, throwing him for four points with less than a second left on the clock. Iran, despite knowing there was still time for the

throw, desperately challenged the decision but lost. The disappointing results left Iran languishing in sixth place in the team table with 51 points by the end of the penultimate day of action in the Slovak capital, meaning even two more golds through Khalili and Mohammadnejad on the final day would not see the country climb above fourth place. The United States all but secured a third successive team title after having seven wrestlers in the final, with Russia – eligible for team points for the first time since 2022 – followed by Japan and Kazakhstan in the next spots. The dreadful freestyle campaign came after Iran also had a Greco-Roman tournament to forget, at least by its own standards, earlier in Bratislava, missing out on a fifth successive team crown. Armin Shamsipour was the only Iranian gold medalist across 10 divisions, triumphing in the 55kg class, while Amirali Heidari (60kg), Ali Gharibi (63kg), Amirmahdi Saiedi-Nava (77kg), and Ali Nematzadeh (87kg) added four bronzes to the medal haul, as Iran settled for the runner-up spot with 109 points – 33 behind Russia, which collected three golds, two silvers, and one bronze.

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Iranian international striker Mahdi Taremi embarked on a new chapter in his career by signing for UAE Pro League club Al Wasl on Saturday, returning to Asian club football after seven prolific seasons in different European leagues. Al Wasl did not disclose the financial terms of the move for the 34-year-old Iranian, who joins from Greek giant Olympiacos on, according to Transfermarkt, a season-long contract. Taremi enjoyed an impressive debut campaign with Olympiacos last season, registering 16 goals – including two Champions League strikes against Real

Madrid and Bayer Leverkusen – and six assists in 39 appearances across all competitions. However, the Iranian opted to bring a premature end to his two-year contract after falling down the pecking order under Spanish head coach José Luis Mendilibar, who favored Moroccan international Ayoub El Kaabi as his first-choice striker. Taremi was first introduced to European football in the 2019/20 season, when he joined Portuguese top-flight side Rio Ave from Qatari outfit Al Gharafa. A remarkable tally of 21 goals – including 18 in Liga Portugal – and five assists in 37 games convinced Portuguese heavy-

weight Porto to secure his signing after just one season. Taremi spent four glorious seasons with Porto, helping the club lift seven domestic trophies – including a Portuguese league and cup double in the 2021/22 campaign – while he bagged 91 goals in 182 appearances to become the Dragons' third all-time top scorer behind retired Brazilian Mario Jardel and Colombian Jackson Martínez. His season-long spell at Serie A powerhouse Internazionale was hardly one to remember, as the Iranian was limited to just three goals and nine assists in 43 games – most of which came as cameo appear-

ances – in Nerazzurri colors. However, he became only the second Iranian to reach the UEFA Champions League final, after legendary Ali Daei, where Inter was hammered 5-0 by Paris Saint-Germain in the 2024/25 final. Al Wasl, meanwhile, has enjoyed a flying start to its domestic league season, sitting atop the table with six points from two games. The Emirati outfit will also be part of the West Zone's 16-team league phase in the expanded AFC Champions League Elite, where Taremi will likely lead the line against Iranian top-flight duo Tractor and Esteghlal.

Taremi signs for Al Wasl in Emirati top flight



● AL WASL FC

Piazza hails Iran's winning mentality after Cuba sweep

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Roberto Piazza praised his players for their winning mentality after they produced a dominant 3-0 (25-16, 25-19, 25-22) victory over Cuba in their second match at the Ufa Cup in Russia on Saturday. Piazza said Iran's approach from the opening point played a key role in securing the victory, with his side establishing comfortable leads early in the second and third sets. "The Iranian team really started well today. We entered the court with a mentality that showed we had come to win, and this was one of the keys to our success," said the Italian, whose team suffered a 3-1 loss to European powerhouse Russia in its first game in the four-team tournament, which also features Belarus. Piazza noted that Cuba had entered the match looking to avenge its previous de-



Iranian opposite Amin Esmaelnejad (10) spikes the ball during a 3-0 win against Cuba in Ufa, Russia, on Aug. 22, 2026.
● PAYAM SANI/volleyball.ir

feat to Iran, when the teams met in the Volleyball Nations League preliminaries in June, and collect valuable world ranking points. "The difference in this match was also related to the world ranking," he said. "We had previously beaten Cuba in France and earned good ranking points from that victory. Cuba came into today's match looking to make up for that result

and earn points." According to Piazza, Cuba started with almost its strongest lineup, including star middle blocker Robertlandy Simón. "Cuba started the match with almost its full-strength lineup, and Simón is a player of great importance to the team," Piazza said. "However, they later decided to make changes to the lineup, which, in my

opinion, was the result of an inappropriate mindset." The Italian coach emphasized that maintaining the right mentality was particularly important for Iran. "This is not necessarily the same for every team, but having the right mentality is very important for us," he said. "When we enter a match with this mentality, we can start the game very well." Iran raced to an 8-2 lead in the second set and opened the third with a 7-2 advantage, putting itself firmly in control on both occasions. "These starts show that Iran has the ability to score several points in a row and build an advantage from the beginning of a set," Piazza said. "In our current situation, this is the most important thing for us," added the Italian, whose side endured a dire VNL campaign, suffering nine defeats in 12 outings to finish 14th in the 18-team preliminary-round stand-

ings. Piazza's men are preparing for the upcoming Asian Championships, which will kick off Sept. 4 in Kitakyushu, Japan. As if Iran needed extra motivation to chase a fifth continental title in eight editions and avenge its 2023 final heartbreak against Japan on home soil, an Olympic qualification berth will also be on the line, with the champion securing direct qualification for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games. Iran will get its Pool B campaign underway against New Zealand on the opening day of the competition, before taking on India on Sept. 6 and China on Sept. 9. The tournament will be followed by the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games, which begin on Sept. 19, with Iran looking to secure a fourth successive men's volleyball gold at the multi-sport event.

FIBA U18 Asia Cup:

Iran beaten by Japan to finish sixth

Sports Desk

Iran settled for a sixth-place finish at the FIBA U18 Asia Cup after suffering an 88-83 defeat to Japan in Ahmedabad, India, on Sunday. Kaito Nakamura dropped a game-high 30 points to help Japan rally from a three-point halftime deficit and win the game. He scored 14 points in the fourth quarter alone, contributing to a 9-0 run that gave Japan a 69-58 advantage with 8:33 remaining on the clock. The lead grew to a game-high 13 points, at 82-69, approaching the final four minutes following an 11-0 run, with the Japanese forward scoring eight points during the surge. Mohammad-Yashar Kamal

Khaledi led Iran's scoring with 26 points, while Mohammad Shamsi and Amirreza Azari added 15 and 14, respectively. Iran secured comprehensive victories over Qatar (94-69) and Sri Lanka (110-42) before falling 96-58 to China to finish second in Group C and advance to the playoff round, where Ali Hassani's team defeated India 83-66 to set up a quarter-final clash with defending champion Australia. A 90-69 loss to Australia saw Iran miss out on qualification for next year's FIBA U19 World Cup and left the team to seek a consolation fifth-place finish. Iran bounced back to beat Chinese Taipei 105-84 in its first classification match on Saturday before falling short against Japan.