

U20 Wrestling World Championships:

Khalili, Mohammadnejad win freestyle golds, but Iran hits decade-low finish

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestlers ultimately enjoyed a taste of freestyle glory at the U20 Wrestling World Championships, winning two gold medals through Sina Khalili and Abolfazl Mohammadnejad on the final day in Bratislava, Slovakia, on Sunday. However, the two golds, coupled with Abolfazl Rahmani's 92kg silver and a 61kg bronze for Ahoura Khateri on the preceding days, did little to prevent Iran, which had been crowned champion three times over the previous five editions, from recording its lowest finish in the freestyle standings in a decade. With six other members of the squad finishing empty-handed in their respective categories, Iran had to settle for fourth place with 103 points. The United States, which completed a clean sweep of medals across all 10 classes, including four golds and three silvers, collected 205 points for a third successive team crown. Eligible for team points for



Iranian freestyle wrestlers Sina Khalili (L) and Abolfazl Mohammadnejad are pictured after securing gold medals in their respective divisions at the U20 Wrestling World Championships in Bratislava, Slovakia, on Aug. 23, 2026.

UWW

the first time since 2022, Russia finished runner-up with 155 points, thanks to a seven-medal haul, including two golds. Japan was third with 130 points, bagging one gold, two silvers and three bronze medals.

Golds bring relief

It was perhaps destiny that Khalili met Haji Karimov in the 70kg final, after the Iranian had suffered a final defeat against another Azer-

baijani opponent in Kanan Heybatov at the U23 World Championships last year. A former U17 world champion, Khalili did not take any chances in Sunday's showdown, starting on an aggressive note and keeping Karimov, who was soon called for passivity, on the back foot. Khalili worked on his snap-downs and scored a takedown for the first points of the final before wrapping

the Azerbaijani wrestler's legs around his head and turning him three times to lead 7-0 in the first two minutes. Khalili decided to switch his strategy in the second period and sat on his lead. Karimov managed a stepout and a takedown, but that was never going to trouble Khalili, who captured Iran's first freestyle gold with a 7-3 victory. "I had some really tough



opponents, including wrestlers from the United States and Azerbaijan," Khalili said. "They were strong competitors, but I was able to perform at my best and win the gold medal. "Last year at the U23 Worlds, I lost to Heybatov after one moment of carelessness. When I saw that another Azerbaijani wrestler had reached the final, I was even happier, and it gave me even more motivation."

Later in the day, making amends for his defeat in the 2025 final, reigning U23 world champion Mohammadnejad defeated American Dreshaun Ross 5-3 in the 125kg final. Ross was put on the activity clock after some early hand-fighting, while Mohammadnejad was in trouble when the American caught his leg. However, the Iranian was quick to escape the hold and count-

er Ross for a stepout. Once the activity clock expired, Mohammadnejad led 2-0. A later stepout stretched his advantage to 3-0.

In the second period, Ross shot a double-leg, but Mohammadnejad managed to counter with a takedown to lead 5-0. Ross bounced back with a stepout and a takedown in the final five seconds, but it was too little, too late.

The under-par freestyle campaign came after Iran also endured 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 the 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.

Iran settled for the runner-up spot with 109 points, 33 behind Russia, which collected three golds, two silvers and one bronze.

AFC Women's Champions League:

Didar double seals comeback win as Khatoon advances to group stage

Sports Desk

Iranian international striker Sara Didar netted twice as Bam Khatoon FC came from behind to beat Jordan's Etihad Club 3-1 in a must-win game in Hisor, Tajikistan, on Sunday and qualify for the group stage of the AFC Women's Champions League. Second to Etihad on goal difference prior to the contest, Khatoon knew that nothing short of maximum points would be enough to go through, and the Iranian

side rose to the occasion, keeping calm despite going behind early in the game. Leen Al-Btoush, taking advantage of shoddy defending, put Etihad Club ahead in the 10th minute when she stole in from the back, picked up a cutback from Carrie Consolino and curled the ball past a rooted Raha Yazdani. The 12-time Iranian top-flight champion's efforts to find an equalizer were hampered by poor finishing from Didar and Maryam Dini, as well as the efforts of Etihad keeper Sherin Al Shalabe,

who repeatedly read their attacks in advance. The custodian, however, failed to detect a lurking Didar in the 32nd minute, with the striker latching on to Melika Motevalli's cross and guiding a looping header beyond Al Shalabe and into the bottom-left corner. Fatemah Shaban and Roujin Tamrian thought they had put Khatoon ahead late in the first half, only to see their strikes ruled out for offside. Motevalli and Fatemah Amineh came close to giving

the Iranian outfit the lead after the break, but they had to wait until the 71st minute, when Shaban outpaced defender Alanoud Al Zabrey on the left and steered her shot beyond Al Shalabe into the right corner. Didar then sealed the match with her second goal in the 76th minute – and fifth in three outings – after collecting a pass from Dini and, running parallel to the goal, chipping the ball past the lunging custodian. A second win in three games saw Khatoon win



Bam Khatoon striker Sara Didar celebrates after scoring in a 3-1 victory over Jordan's Etihad Club in AFC Women's Champions League preliminary stage in Hisor, Tajikistan, on Aug. 23, 2026.

AFC

Group E with seven points – two clear of Saudi champion Al Nassr, which demolished CSKA Dushanbe 12-1 later on Sunday – and earn its third consecutive

group-stage appearance in the continent's elite club competition. A quarterfinalist in the 2024/25 season, Khatoon began its preliminary cam-

paign with a 3-0 victory over CSKA Dushanbe before Didar's 95th-minute strike salvaged a point in a 1-1 draw against Al Nassr on Thursday.

Iran names basketball squad for World Cup qualifiers, Asian Games

Sports Desk

Greek head coach Sotiris Manolopoulos has named Iran's 14-man basketball roster for the upcoming FIBA World Cup Asian Qualifiers and the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games. Having won the first-round group thanks to two victories over Syria either side of an impressive win against Jordan in July, Iran will resume its World Cup qualifying campaign against New Zealand in the second-round Group E opener in Pasay, Philippines, on Friday, before

taking on the Philippines two days later. The crucial double-header will be followed by the basketball event at the Asian Games, which will get underway on Sept. 10. A silver medalist in 2014 and 2018, Iran will chase a fourth men's basketball medal at the multi-sport event. Iran has been drawn into a tough Pool B alongside Jordan – the silver medalist at Hangzhou 2022 – Chinese Taipei, which reached the semifinals in the previous edition, and Qatar. The national squad fea-

tures a noticeable influx of young players and a significantly lower average age, signaling a generational shift in Iranian basketball. The most notable inclusion, however, is the return of veteran Mohammad Jamshidi, whose most recent international appearance came during the 2023 FIBA Basketball World Cup qualifiers. The 35-year-old forward, along with the other two senior players, Arslan Kazemi and Arman Zangeneh, is expected to add a touch of experience to the young squad for the

two major events. The following is Iran's full 14-man squad: Arslan Kazemi, Mohammad Jamshidi, Arman Zangeneh, Salar Monji, Mobin Sheikhi, Matin Aqajani, Hassan Aliakbari, Peter Grigorian, Mohammad-Mahdi Heidari, Seyed Mahdi Jafari, Navid Rezaeifar, Alireza Sharifi, Salar Taheri and Mohammad-Mahdi Jalali.

Iranian players participate in training session in Tehran, Iran, on Aug. 6, 2026.

MARYAM SATTARI/IRIBF

