

U23 Wrestling World Championships:

Iran dominates Day 2
in freestyle, closes in
on historic double

Iranian freestyle wrestler Abolfazl Mohammadnejad (L), pictured after his semifinal victory over Azerbaijan's Khetag Karsanov, won the freestyle 125kg gold medal at the U23 World Championships in Las Vegas, NV, United States.
● IAWFIR

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestlers stole the show in the freestyle competition at the U23 World Championships in Las Vegas on Saturday, claiming two gold and three bronze medals across five weight classes.

The impressive haul lifted Iran to the top of the team standings with 95 points, 11 ahead of Russia and 29 clear of the United States, at the end of the penultimate day of competition.

With three more Iranians advancing to their respective finals earlier in the day, Iran moved within touching distance of a second freestyle team title in three years, as well as a first overall team title double in the tournament's nine editions, having secured a third successive Greco-Roman crown in Las Vegas last week.

An 86kg bronze medalist at last year's tournament, Abolfazl Rahmani, who settled for silver at the U20 World Championships in August, opened Iran's gold account on Saturday by claiming the 92kg title with an impressive 5-2 victory over Russia's Arslan Bagaev, the 2024 champion, who had not conceded a single point in four technical superiority wins on his way to the final.

Defending champion Abolfazl Mohammadnejad, meanwhile, was once again in a league of his own in the 125kg event, maintaining Iran's traditional dominance in the superheavyweight category. Having reached the final without conceding a point in three bouts, including a semifinal victory over Azerbaijan's Khetag Karsanov in a rematch of last year's final, Mohammadnejad made quick work of Georgia's Aleksandre Abramishvili in the showdown, winning 10-0 to add the U23 world title to his U20 crown won in Bratislava.

Elsewhere, Ebrahim Khari, who had suffered a 7-1 defeat to American Benjamin Davino in his opening 61kg bout, bounced back to beat Japan's Akito Mukaida 15-4 in repechage before crushing Romania's Gabriel Whisenhunt 12-0 to cap his campaign with a bronze medal.

Davino, meanwhile, went on to

claim gold with a 4-1 victory over Kyrgyzstan's Iukhan Dokturbek Uulu in the final, while Armenia's Sargis Begoyan won the other bronze medal in the category.

Iranian Ali Karampour also claimed a bronze medal in the 74kg division, recovering from a semifinal defeat to American Jayden James to beat Moldova's Ion Marcu 10-0 in the third-place bout.

James had to settle for silver after losing 5-3 to Russia's Magomed Baitukaev in the final, while Japan's Toki Ogawa shared bronze with Karampour.

In the 86kg class, Reza Afshar added a third bronze medal to Iran's tally.

Afshar, a world U17 champion in 2024, made a losing start in Las Vegas, falling 7-1 to Turkey's Ahmet Yagan. He began his bid for bronze with a technical superiority victory over Mexico's Kevin De Leon and defeated Armenia's Razmik Yepremyan 5-2 in his second repechage bout before beating Moldova's Eugeniu Mihalcean 6-0 in the bronze-medal match.

Arsen Balaian defeated Yagan 5-0 in the final to secure a second gold medal for Russia, which has been eligible to earn team points for the first time since 2021. Mongolia's Batbilguun Naadambat also finished with bronze.

Three golds up for grabs

Earlier in the day, Iranian Ahoura Khateri mounted an action-packed campaign to reach the 65kg final, where he will face Japan's Kaiji Ogino, who will be looking to improve on his silver medal from 2024.

Khateri opened his campaign with a thrilling 15-14 victory over Kazakhstan's Shattyk Alaidar, an Asian U23 bronze medalist, before beating Uzbekistan's Sanjarbek Rustambekov 10-2 to set up a semifinal clash with Russia's Eldar Akhmadudinov. Khateri edged the Russian 9-8 to book his place in the final. Ebrahim Elahi was the second Iranian to advance to a final on Saturday.

The former world U17 champion opened his 70kg campaign with a 6-1 victory over Turkey's Abdullah Toprak, followed by wins over Kazakhstan's Maisi Aliyev (9-6) and

Japan's Taiga Ogino (4-0).

Russia's Magomed Eltemirov will stand between Elahi and the gold medal in the final.

Mahdi Yousefi, meanwhile, will look to improve on last year's bronze after reaching the final in the 79kg class. Also a world U20 champion in 2025, Yousefi opened with a 6-4 victory over Turkey's Ibrahim Metehan Yaprak before outclassing Ireland's Declan Bligh 10-0 to advance to the quarterfinals, where he dismantled Armenia's Hayk Papikyan 12-1.

A 4-3 win over India's Chandermohan sent Yousefi into the final against Russia's Said Saidulov, whom the Iranian defeated 15-7 when they met at last year's U20 Worlds in Samokov, Bulgaria.

In the 97kg category, Mohammad-Mobin Azimi, the 92kg champion at last year's edition and the Senior Asian Championships in April, made a winning start in his new weight class by defeating Azerbaijan's Zafar Aliyev 8-0 in the opening round. He then beat Uzbekistan's Sherzod Poyonov (9-5) and Turkey's Rifat Eren Gidak (6-1) before suffering a 14-9 semifinal defeat to Russia's Mukhamed Takhir Khaniev in a thrilling clash. Khaniev had lost to Azimi in the 92kg final last year.

Azimi will look to salvage a medal when he competes in the bronze-medal bout on Sunday. Ali Yahyapour, meanwhile, had a campaign to forget in the 57kg category, crashing out in the round of 16. After receiving a first-round bye, Yahyapour lost 10-8 to Armenia's Arman Harutyunyan in his opening bout and missed out on a second chance in repechage after his opponent failed to reach the final.

Iran's impressive freestyle campaign in Las Vegas follows the success of head coach Hassan Rangraz's 10-man Greco-Roman squad, which secured three gold medals through Erfan Jarkani (63kg), Abolfazl Mohmedi (82kg) and Yasin Yazdi (87kg), while Mohammad Kamali (67kg) and Mohammad-Hadi Seydi (97kg) added two bronze medals. The haul lifted Iran to the Greco-Roman team title with 119 points, five ahead of runners-up Kazakhstan.

Iranians to continue taekwondo
Olympic bid at Qatar Open Ch'ship

Sports Desk

Five Iranians will continue their bid for a taekwondo berth at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics when they take part in the upcoming Qatar Open Championship in Doha.

The senior competition of the sixth edition of the tournament will kick off at the Ladies' Sports Hall in the Qatari capital on Wednesday.

The event is a World Taekwondo (WT) G1 tournament, with gold medalists in each weight class earning 10 Olympic ranking points.

Saghar Moradi, who made history by winning Iran's first women's taekwondo gold medal at the Asian Games in Nagoya, Japan, earlier this month, headlines the roster

in Doha, competing in the -67kg class.

Also a winner of a historic gold medal for the country at the WT Women's Open Championships in July, Moradi is currently ninth in the Olympic kyorugi rankings in her weight class.

Joining Moradi in the women's competition is Nastaran Valizadeh, who will take part in the -62kg class.

Valizadeh, who won gold at the WT President's Cup – Asia in August, is 18th in the Olympic -57kg rankings.

In the men's competition, Iran will be represented by Danial Bozorgi, also a President's Cup champion, in the -68kg class.

Bozorgi faces a daunting task in his bid to secure an Olympic berth, as he is currently

ranked 31st in the kyorugi rankings.

Radin Zeinali, 24th in the Olympic -80kg rankings, will compete in the men's -74kg class, which features 23 athletes from around the globe.

Amir-Sina Bakhtiari, meanwhile, will headline the -80kg competition. The reigning Asian champion in the -74kg class will look to improve his 22nd-place ranking after winning bronze at the Chuncheon Korea Open in July.

The Iranian men's trio will be coached by Sajjad Mardani, with Shima Khalil-Arjmandi in charge of the women's pair. The Qatar Open Championship features 1,574 contestants across different age groups, with 363 athletes set to compete in the senior event.



Iran's Saghar Moradi (blue), pictured in July's WT Women's Open Championships, will compete in the -67kg event at the Qatar Open Championship.
● WORLD TAEKWONDO

Asian Team Squash Championships 2026:

Iran unveils four-man
squad for Islamabad event

Sports Desk

Iran will field a four-man squad at the 2026 Asian Team Squash Championships in Islamabad, Pakistan.

The tournament will take place from November 3 to 7, with Iran set to compete in the men's event with four players.

Sepehr Etemadpour, Sami-

ollah Qasedabadi, Mojtaba Kafiri and Mohammad Changaniyan will represent Iran at the continental competition, with Mohsen Gholamnejad serving as head coach.

The Iranian players are scheduled to travel to Pakistan about a week before the tournament, possibly on October 27, to familiarize themselves with the

host country's conditions and prepare for the event.

India will be among the notable absentees from this year's championships.

The previous edition of the Asian Team Squash Championships was held in Malaysia, but Iran did not participate because of the 12-day war and the circumstances surrounding it in the country.

