

U23 Wrestling World Championships: Khateri, Yousefi grab golds as Iran sweeps historic double

Sports Desk

The U23 World Championships in Las Vegas proved one for the ages for Iranian wrestling after the country secured a first-ever double of freestyle and Greco-Roman team titles at the competition.

With Iran and Russia locked in a tight freestyle team title race ahead of the final day, Ahoura Khateri and Mahdi Yousefi claimed gold medals in their respective weight classes on Sunday to help the Iranian squad finish atop the standings with 180 points – nine clear of runner-up Russia, which was eligible to score team points for the first time since 2021.

The United States, competing on home soil as the defending champion, endured an underwhelming campaign to finish third with 104 points.

Ebrahim Elahi settled for silver in the 70kg class, while Mohammad-Mobin Azimi won a consolation bronze in the 97kg category on the final day as Iran collected nine medals, including four golds, across the 10 freestyle weight classes.

Remarkable fightback

If his comeback victory over Russia's Eldar Akhmadudinov in the semifinals was not epic enough, teenage prodigy Khateri pulled off another remarkable turnaround in the final against Japan's Kaiji Ogino to win the 65kg gold.

A silver medalist in 2024, Ogino held a 6-1 lead over Khateri with 40 seconds re-

maining before the Iranian used an arm drag to go behind the Japanese wrestler, then scored a takedown and a turn. The additional two points were awarded only after a challenge by Iran.

With 10 seconds remaining and trailing 6-5, Khateri snapped Ogino down and attempted to go behind. Ogino managed to break free of the grip, but Khateri pulled him down to the mat and eventually scored a decisive takedown to win 7-6. Khateri burst into celebration as he captured his first world title since winning the 45kg gold in the under-17 category in 2023. Sunday's triumph also provided relief after he settled for bronze at the U20 World Championships in August.

"I entered the tournament with a positive mindset," Khateri said. "I've changed weight classes, moving up from 60kg to 65kg. Even though I found myself trailing in every match, I managed to turn things around during the second period." Khateri began his campaign with a thrilling 15-14 win over Kazakhstan's Shattlyk Alaidar before cruising to an 8-1 victory against Uzbekistan's Sanjarbek Rustambekov in the quarterfinals. The semifinal clash against Akhmadudinov provided further evidence of Khateri's never-say-die attitude in Las Vegas, as he recovered from an 8-4 deficit with a minute remaining to win 9-8.

"Since I had just returned from the U20 World Cham-



Iranian freestyle wrestler Ahoura Khateri (red) celebrates his comeback victory over Japan's Kaiji Ogino in the 65kg final at the U23 Wrestling World Championships in Las Vegas, Nevada, United States, on October 18, 2026.
● UWW

pionships, I was able to wrestle well," he said. "Solely because my spirits were high. Physically, though, I was only at a six or seven, but mentally I

was at 10. I had the self-assurance that I would win. Through all the circumstances, whether difficult or favorable, and throughout every moment I was wrestling, I could truly see God. You might think I'm lying, but God really did help me. I'll fight until the end and I'll win."

In the final, Khateri opened the scoring with a stepout before Ogino took the criteria lead with a stepout of his own. The Japanese

wrestler then frustrated Khateri with some impressive defense near the edge of the mat and countered his attacks to score takedowns.

Khateri, however, said he was not worried by Ogino's lead and considered Russian opponent Akhmadudinov a tougher challenge.

"The Russian wrestler was tougher for me," Khateri said. "With the Japanese wrestler, it was easier to handle him from a dis-

tance. As for the Russian wrestler, he got tired, and I was able to take advantage of his fatigue."

Later in the day, Magomed Eltermirov gave Russia hope in the title race by defeating Elahi 5-3 in the 70kg final. Yousefi, however, had other ideas, producing a composed performance to beat Said Saidulov 3-1 in another final between Iranian and Russian wrestlers and ensure there would be no late slip in Iran's pursuit of the historic achievement.

Yousefi scored a takedown in the second period of the 79kg final to take a 3-1 lead. Saidulov got hold of Yousefi's leg in the final 20 seconds, but the Iranian defended the position until the end to improve on the bronze medal he won in Novi Sad, Serbia, last year.

Meanwhile, Azimi, the 92kg champion at last year's edition and the Senior Asian Championships in April, ended his 97kg campaign on a positive note. After suffering a 14-9 semifinal defeat to Russia's Mukhamed Takhir Khaniev, whom he had beaten in the 92kg final in 2025, Azimi overpowered Armenia's Guren Simonyan by technical superiority (10-0) in the bronze-medal bout.

Sunday's results followed Iran's two gold medals through Abolfazl Rahmani and Abolfazl Mohammadnejad, as well as three bronze medals, on the preceding day.

Mohammadnejad maintained Iran's traditional dominance in the super-heavyweight category by

defending his 125kg title in style, defeating Georgia's Aleksandre Abramishvili 10-0. He combined steepouts and takedowns to complete the victory and claim his third world age-group title without conceding a single point throughout his dominant campaign in Las Vegas, which included three wins by technical superiority.

The 19-year-old Iranian has remained unbeaten since losing the final at last year's U20 World Championships to Kazakhstan's Yedige Kassimbek.

Rahmani, who suffered a heartbreaking defeat in the final seconds of the U20 World Championships final in August, finally secured his first age-group title on his seventh attempt, defeating Russia's Arslan Bagayev 5-2 in the 92kg final.

Meanwhile, Khari (61kg), Ali Karampour (74kg) and Reza Afshar (86kg) added three bronzes to Iran's medal haul on Saturday, while Ali Yahyapour was the only Iranian to finish his freestyle campaign without a medal, exiting in the round of 16.

Iran's impressive freestyle campaign followed the success of head coach Hassan Rangraz's 10-man Greco-Roman squad earlier in Las Vegas. Erfan Jarkani (63kg), Abolfazl Mohmedi (82kg) and Yasin Yazdi (87kg) won three golds, while Mohammad Kamali (67kg) and Mohammad-Hadi Seydi (97kg) added two bronze medals to lead the country to a third successive Greco-Roman team title at the competition.

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Marzieh Jafari, head coach of the Iranian women's national team and domestic top-flight champions Bam Khatoon, has described her nomination for the 2026 AFC Women's Coach of the Year award as a collective achievement for women's football in the country.

A winner of the prestigious prize last year, Jafari will face stiff competition from Ma Xiaoxu, head coach of China's U17 women's team, and Park Youn-jeong, coach of South Korea's U20 side, when the annual AFC Awards ceremony takes place at Bangkok's Aksra Theatre King Power on November 19.

Jafari was in charge of the Iranian national team at January's Women's Asian Cup, where her team's politically charged campaign in Australia ended in a group-stage exit.

She then led Bam Khatoon to the group stage of the AFC Women's Champions

Jafari says AFC nomination reflects collective effort in Iranian women's football

League after finishing top of its preliminary group in August.

Jafari said the AFC recognition went beyond individual success, highlighting the role of Iranian players, her colleagues and the support she had received throughout her career.

"Many people deserve credit for this recognition, and it cannot be considered solely an individual achievement. Iran's football players, my colleagues and God's grace played an important role in this success," she said. "The girls who play football and everyone who has accompanied me on this journey have also contributed significantly. I therefore see this nomination as the result of the collective efforts of those who have worked to develop and ad-

vance women's football." The Iranian coach added that the nomination offered an opportunity to showcase the country's footballing potential across the continent.

"I am happy that this nomination provides an opportunity for Iranian football's level and capabilities to receive greater recognition in Asia," Jafari said. "Being among the continent's nominees not only has individual value but can also draw attention to the potential of Iranian women's football and the efforts being made in this field."

Jafari went on to welcome the increased participation of clubs in the women's top flight, expressing hope that their involvement would help the sport continue to grow.

"I hope we will see further

growth and progress as more clubs enter women's football," she said, adding that greater participation could make competitions more dynamic and strengthen the foundations of the game.

Jafari also stressed that the long-term development of women's football depended on sustained planning and greater investment in youth development.

"If we pay more attention to grassroots football and major clubs also become involved at academy level, we can build a valuable foundation for women's football in the country," she said. "The involvement of major clubs in youth categories, alongside efforts to identify and develop talent, can provide players with a clearer pathway to progress

and more opportunities to improve."

She added that stronger grassroots programs would ultimately help Iran build a more competitive national team.

"The development of these programs will contribute to the growth of football and ultimately pave the way for a stronger national team," Jafari said. "The more seriously we invest in youth football and the earlier players gain access to training and regular competition, the better equipped we will be to shape the future of women's football in Iran."

Jafari will be one of four Iranians nominated for awards at the upcoming ceremony. Iranian international goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand is among the three nominees for the Player of the

Year award, alongside Saudi duo Feras Al Brikan and Salem Al Dawsari.

Iran will also look to claim a fourth successive AFC Futsal Player of the Year award, with internationals Hossein Tayyebi and 2023 winner Saied Ahmaddabbasi among the nominees. The pair scored nine goals between them to help Iran secure a record-extending 14th Asian Cup title in January.

