Sports Desk

Wrestling World Championships

Nokhodi settles for silver as Iran finishes third in freestyle

The final day of the freestyle competition at the Wrestling World Championships in Astana, Kazakhstan, saw Iran's Mohammad Nokhodi settle for a silver medal, while Amir-Mohammad Yazdani secured a bronze.

Sunday's medals took Iran's tally to six, including two golds, across the 10 weight categories. The Iranian freestyle team, which entered the competition as the defending champion, finished third in the team standings with 133 points.

Team USA dominated the freestyle competition, winning an impressive nine medals, including five golds, to top the team standings with 194 points. Russia, which was eligible to earn team points for the first time since 2021, finished runner-up with 185 points, courtesy of three golds, two silvers, and four bronze medals.

Arriving in Astana on the back of five consecutive medals at the World Championships, Nokhodi maintained his streak but once again missed out on the top prize after suffering a final defeat to American Levi Haines in the 79kg category.

Haines scored the decisive takedown in the second period to secure a 4-3 victory and improve on the silver medal he won in Zagreb last year.

"I thought I fought the game plan well, wish I would have got more attacks in there," Haines said. "Just a real grippy guy, kind of hard to break from and create action. Just got to get better in there."


IWF

Nokhodi, who had won gold in the 86kg category at the recent Asian Games, opened the match with a stepout. Haines responded with a takedown, but as he attempted a gut wrench, Nokhodi stepped over to score two points and take a 3-2 lead into the break.

In the second period, Haines scored a single-leg takedown before stopping an arm-drag attempt and holding on for the victory, leaving Nokhodi with the third world silver medal of his career.

Meanwhile, Yazdani wrapped up Iran's campaign with a bronze medal in the 74kg category.

A two-time silver medalist at the 2021 and 2023 editions, Yazdani denied Slovakia's Tajmuraz Salkazanov a second consecutive bronze medal and fifth world medal overall, surviving a late rally to secure a 5-4 victory.

Yazdani scored a stepout and a takedown in the first period, before the two wrestlers exchanged stepouts early in the second. Salkazanov then stepped up the pressure, scoring three consecutive stepouts in the final minute to tie the score, but remained behind on criteria.

The Slovak corner challenged the final stepout, which was awarded with just one second remaining, arguing that it should have been ruled a takedown. However, the challenge was unsuccessful, giving Yazdani his final point.

Having suffered a fall defeat to eventual gold medalist Inalbek Sheriev of Russia in the quarterfinals, Yazdani bounced back with an 8-2 victory over American James Green in the repechage before defeating Salkazanov to claim his third world medal in a third different weight category.

Amirhossein Firouzpour was the other Iranian wrestler chasing a bronze medal on the final day but finished empty-handed after suffering a 6-0 defeat to Azerbaijan's Ali Tcokaev in the 92kg third-place bout.

A European champion in April, Tcokaev scored a takedown in each period and added a lace-lock roll after the second to deny the Iranian a second consecutive world bronze medal.

The highlight of Iran's freestyle campaign came on the penultimate day of the competition, when Ahmad Mohammadnejad Javan and Amirhossein Zare' won gold medals in their respective categories.

A silver medalist last year, Javan stunned Zavur Uguev, a three-time world champion and Tokyo Olympic gold medalist, in the 61kg final, securing a 9-2 victory to avenge his defeat to the Russian star in last year's final in Zagreb.

Zare', meanwhile, claimed his fourth superheavyweight title in emphatic fashion, defeating Russia's Abdulla Kurbanov 11-0 with 56 seconds remaining in the second period of the 125kg final. It was the Iranian's fourth consecutive victory by technical superiority in Astana, during which he did not concede a single point.

The triumph extended Zare's unbeaten run since his defeat to Georgian Geno Petriashvili in the final of the Paris Olympics. The Iranian, who also won the world bronze medal in 2022, added the title to his Asian Championships and Asian Games gold medals earlier this year.

Yazdani eager for more

Hassan Yazdani and Rahman Amouzad had opened Iran's freestyle campaign by winning two bronze medals.

Yazdani bounced back from a last-gasp quarterfinal defeat to Japan's Arash Yoshida to beat reigning Olympic champion Akhmed Tazhudinov of Bahrain 5-0 in the 97kg bronze-medal bout, taking his personal tally to 11 world and Olympic medals.

"This medal is not the end of the road for me," Yazdani wrote on social media. "I still have the dream of [winning] the championship on my mind, and I will try with all my might to make the flag of Iran fly high in the world once again."

The 31-year-old underwent two surgeries following the 2024 Paris Olympics but made his return at the Zagreb Ranking Series this year, where he won silver on his international debut in the 97kg category. He then claimed his eighth world medal in his first appearance at the World Championships in three years.

"In this comeback I was able to bag another medal for Iran," he wrote. "I know this position [third] is not what I have strived for and my fans deserve a greater honor."

"Returning after two years off the mat was not easy for me," Yazdani wrote. "I went through hard days to have the opportunity to wear the Iran's singlet and wrestle for Iran and its people. All this time, your encouragement has been one of my biggest motivations to keep going."

Amouzad, meanwhile, missed out on defending his 65kg title but still managed to beat familiar rival Shamil Mamedov 5-4 in the bronze-medal bout to claim his third world medal.

AFC Women's Champions League:

Khatoon hammered by Kobe in group opener

Sports Desk

Iranian club Bam Khatoon got off to losing start in its AFC Women's Champions League Group A opener, suffering a 4-1 defeat against Japan's INAC Kobe Leonessa in Yangon, Vietnam, on Sunday.

Yui Narumiya's first half strike set the tone for Kobe, who extended their lead through Mao Kubota, only for Zahra Sarbali to pull one back from the spot, with Maya Yamamoto and Ai Tsujisawa adding further goals to seal the win.

Maryam Dini tested Kobe goalkeeper Momoko Tanaka in the ninth minute from distance before the Japanese side took control, with Ayaka Michigami and Fukina Mizuno both threatening Raha Yazdani at the other end.

Kobe continued to press, with Tamaki Okuma heading wide from Ai Kuwahara's corner in the 14th minute, Mizuno and Okuma then seeing efforts blocked moments later, before Yui Narumiya's close range effort was foiled by Yazdani.

Khatoon thought they had taken the lead in the 29th minute when Mona Hamoudi sent Dini through on goal, with the forward looping her effort over Tanaka with the ball bouncing off the underside of the bar and over the line, only for the goal to be ruled offside.

The Japanese side finally made their pressure count in the 35th minute when Mizuno and Narumiya combined nicely at the edge of the area before the latter converted Mizuno's cut-back with a composed finish.


AFC

Kobe came out strongly after the break, with Yazdani saving Maya Yamamoto's long-range effort in the 46th minute before denying Okuma four minutes later but the Iranian shot-stopper could do nothing to stop the Japanese side in the 50th minute.

Fukina Mizuno guided her headed pass off Yazdani's goal kick, to Michigami, who set up Kubota to split through the Khatoon defence and slot home.

Khatoon, however, clawed their way back in the 53rd minute after Yamamoto conceded a penalty for handling the ball, with Sarbali converting from the spot.

Unfortunately, Khatoon were reduced to 10 players in the 66th minute after Sara Didar's overhead clearance inside the box resulted in a foul on Okuma, with the referee awarding a penalty.

Yazdani, however, went the right way to deny Okuma from the spot, before foiling Natsume Kingetsu on the follow-up.

Play was interrupted by bad weather in the 74th minute but upon resumption, Kobe added the third in the 87th minute after Yamamoto received Kubota's pass inside the box before beating her marker and slotting past Yazdani.

Tsujisawa furthered Kobe's advantage in the first minute of stoppage time after capitalsiing on a poor clearance from Melika Motevalli to slot home from close range.

New Iran U23 coach Golmohammadi eager to end Olympic drought

Sports Desk

Iran's new U23 head coach Yahya Golmohammadi says he is determined to end the country's decades-long absence from the Olympic Games, but insists his top priority is to "develop a new generation of young talents for Iranian football."

Golmohammadi, 56, left his position at Iraqi top-flight side Duhok SC to succeed Hossein Abdi, who stepped down after his team suffered a group-stage exit at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan in October.

The former Iranian international centre-back, who took charge of Duhok in June, guided the club to two wins and six draws in 10 matches in the new Iraq Stars League season.

Speaking at a press conference after signing a three-year contract on Sunday, Golmohammadi said accepting the Iranian Football Federation's offer had been an easy decision for him.

"My biggest motivation is to be able to help the young footballers in my country. I embraced this offer wholeheartedly, without the slightest hesitation.

"I am thrilled to be here, but I also fully understand the significance of this position and the responsibility that comes with it. That is why I am proud to have taken on this responsibility," said Golmohammadi, who will be tasked with securing Iran's first Olympic qualification in football since 1976.

His team will compete at the 2028 AFC U23 Asian Cup in Japan, where the two finalists will secure qualification for the Los Angeles Olympics later that year.


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"Our primary goal is to qualify for the Olympics, but I believe the bigger objective is to develop a new generation of young talents for Iranian football. Achieving this requires effective cooperation and coordination between clubs, coaches, the U23 team, the senior national team, the National Olympic Committee, and the Ministry of Sports and Youth.

"Everyone must work together to shape the future of our football. This is our foremost priority, and I am confident that with hard work and the implementation of sound structural plans, we can achieve it.

"Our country is blessed with an abundance of exceptional talent. Many of these young and promising players have yet to be discovered or given the opportunity to showcase their abilities. This is a great opportunity for us to provide them with a platform to make themselves known.

"I hope that we, as football coaches, along with everyone who has a say in decision-making in this field, can contribute to identifying and discovering talent and work together to build the future of Iranian football," Golmohammadi added.

Golmohammadi enjoyed the most successful spell of his coaching career at Persepolis, guiding the Tehran Reds to three Persian Gulf Pro League titles and a domestic cup trophy, as well as the AFC Champions League final, during his four-year tenure.

He parted ways with the capital club midway through the 2023-24 season following a falling-out with the club hierarchy.

He subsequently took charge of Foolad Khuzestan ahead of the 2024-25 campaign and guided the southern Iranian side to an impressive fourth-place finish. However, a poor run of results led to his departure by mutual consent midway through the following season.