Qassempour remains at crossroads over Olympic ambitions

Sports Desk

With the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics potentially offering his last opportunity to achieve the one elusive medal missing from his career, Iran's Kamran Qassempour faces a defining decision about his wrestling future.

The freestyle wrestler endured yet another disappointing campaign at 86kg at the World Championships in October. He got off to a flying start in Astana, Kazakhstan, defeating reigning Olympic champion Magomed Ramazanov before crashing out in the second round following a shock fall defeat to Kyrgyzstan's Malik Shavaev.

This marked the latest setback in a roller-coaster two years for Qassempour, whose career has been shaped by weight-class switches, injuries and fierce competition against high-profile wrestlers.



Iranian freestyle wrestler Kamran Qassempour looks dejected after a last-16 defeat to Kyrgyzstan's Malik Shavaev at the UWW World Championships in Astana, Kazakhstan, on October 30, 2026.
IAWF

Different paths, same disappointment

After falling short against Hassan Yazdani in the race for a place on Iran's team for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, Qassempour opted for a different route, moving up to 92kg. The decision quickly paid dividends. He captured back-to-back world titles in 2021 and 2022, producing technically impressive and entertaining performances that made him one of Iran's most popular wrestlers.

However, 92kg was not an Olympic weight class, meaning he would eventually have to compete elsewhere to pursue his Olympic ambitions.

His bid for a third consecutive world title in 2023 was derailed by injury, while preparations for the Paris 2024 Olympics presented him with another difficult choice between 86kg and 97kg.

He initially tested himself at 97kg but failed to secure Iran's national team place, with Amirali Azarpira eventually earning the berth.

The alternative was a return to 86kg and another showdown with Yazdani, who was attempting to regain his place following shoulder surgery. Yazdani strengthened his Olympic credentials by winning a Ranking Series tournament in Budapest, leaving Qassempour without an Olympic berth for a second consecutive edition.

Following the disappointment, Qassempour returned to 92kg for the 2024 World Championships in the non-Olympic weight classes in Tirana, Albania.

He came close to defeating Russian great Abdulrashid Sadulaev in the semifinals but surrendered his advantage in the closing seconds before subsequently losing to American star David Taylor in the bronze-medal bout.

Inconsistency at 86kg

Yazdani's decision to move up to 97kg following a second shoulder surgery eventually prompted Iran's coaching staff to give Qassempour another shot at 86kg.

At the 2025 World Championships, Qassempour reached the semifinals but was undone by American Zahid Valencia. He still managed to finish with a consolation bronze, but the 7-0 defeat to Valencia underlined the challenge of overcoming the division's leading contenders.

A more disappointing outcome in Astana, however, has left his long-term Olympic plans hanging by a thread.

The situation is further complicated by the number of Iranian wrestlers competing for a place at 86kg.

Mohammad Nokhodi emerged as a potential candidate this year after claiming gold at June's Ranking Series event in Ulaanbaatar, followed by an impressive Asian Games title in September.

However, he returned to his established 79kg division in Astana, settling for his fourth world silver medal.

Nokhodi's ability to challenge the world's leading 86kg wrestlers remains to be fully assessed, as success at continental competitions and Ranking Series events does not necessarily translate into similar performances at the World Championships or Olympics.

Other domestic contenders will also have an opportunity to establish themselves during Iran's 2027 selection cycle, meaning Qassempour cannot rely solely on his previous achievements to secure a national team place.

Iran Wrestling Federation president Alireza Dabir recently stressed that the two-time world champion must make a clear decision about his future, insisting that "even 10 world gold medals do not match a single Olympic bronze."

He added that Qassempour had looked physically sharper this year but also suggested that the wrestler needed to be mentally stronger, insisting that he could not afford to keep changing weight classes and repeatedly endure the demanding preparation and weight-cutting process.

Defining choice before LA28

With Iran's 2027 selection cycle approaching, Qassempour is entering a decisive period of his career. Next year's World Championships will be the final edition before the Los Angeles Olympics, making his decision in the coming months particularly important. Remaining at 86kg would preserve his Olympic ambitions, but he would have to overcome fierce domestic competition and prove that he can consistently challenge the division's international heavyweights.

Qassempour has repeatedly demonstrated his technical ability and remains capable of returning to the top level. But continuing without a clear plan could cost him some of the few opportunities left in his career.

For a wrestler who has already conquered the world twice, the choice is clear: pursue further success at 92kg or make one final effort to fulfil his Olympic dream at 86kg. The world titles are already in his collection. The Olympic medal remains the missing piece.

FIP Junior Asia Padel Cup 2026:

Iranian girls beat Australia to claim bronze

Sports Desk

Iranian girls defeated Australia to claim an impressive bronze medal at the FIP Junior Asia Padel Cup 2026 in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Saturday.

Competing in the under-14 age group, Yasamin Hassani and Armita Ezzatnejad gave the Iranian team an early advantage by thrashing the Australian pair of Evelyn Daisy Ferguson and Frankie Avalon Smith 2-0 (6-0, 6-1).

Iran coach Sahabeh Fard then fielded Romina Rafei and Bahar Haj-Mollaheydar for the second doubles contest of the day, with the duo also emerging victorious in straight sets (6-2, 6-1) against Ava Garner and Hope Johns to secure the bronze medal following Iran's semifinal defeat to Indonesia.

Also featuring Jana Safi, Delan Bitarafan, Helia Aqili, Nila Rahimi and Arghavan Amirkhanlou, the Iranian team opened its campaign with a victory over Australia before defeating the Philippines 3-0 to reach the semifinals.

Iran will seek further glory at the competition when its boys take on Kuwait in the final later on Saturday.



IRITF

2026 World Taekwondo Grand Prix Final:

Iran confirms squad for season finale in Astana

Sports Desk

Iran will be represented by nine practitioners at the 2026 World Taekwondo Grand Prix Final in Astana, Kazakhstan, after Radin Zeinali secured a late berth in the season-ending event.

The two-day showpiece, which forms part of the Olympic qualification pathway, will kick off on November 28, with competitors from around the world looking to strengthen their bids for a place at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics.

Eight Iranian athletes had previously secured their places based on the Olympic rankings, but the release of the final list of invited competitors by World Taekwondo confirmed Zeinali's inclusion in the men's -80kg category, taking Iran's delegation to nine.

The star-studded Iranian squad will feature six representatives in the men's divisions and three in the women's events.

Reigning Olympic champion Arian Salimi (+80kg) will be joined by world champion Abolfazl Zandi (-58kg), Asian champion Mahdi Haji-Mousaei (-68kg), Amir Sina Bakhtiari and Zeinali (-80kg), as well as Mohammad Hossein Yazdani (+80kg) in the men's competition.

In the women's divisions, Olympic silver medalist Nahid Kiani (-57kg), Saghar Moradi (-67kg), who won gold at September's Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games, and two-time world junior champion Hana Zarrinkamar (+67kg) will represent the country.

South Korea will have the largest delegation with 11 athletes, followed by Spain with 10 and Iran with nine. Brazil and China will each field seven competitors, while Jordan and Uzbekistan will have six apiece. The United States, Croatia and Greece will each be represented by five athletes.



Asian Games gold medalist Saghar Moradi (L) will represent Iran in the women's -67kg weight class at the 2026 World Taekwondo Grand Prix Final in Astana, Kazakhstan.
ISNA

Asian Women's Handball Championship:

Iran calls up 19 players for Almaty showpiece

Sports Desk

Iran's women's team began its final training camp on Saturday in Tehran for the upcoming Asian Handball Championship, with 19 players called up as part of preparations for the continental showpiece in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

The 21st edition of the flagship continental event will kick off on November 23, with Iran drawn in Group A alongside Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Bangladesh.

Fatemeh Khalili, Elnaz Yarmohammadi, Zahra Afshari, Bahar Izadgashb, Hadiseh Norouzi, Aseman Badvi, Arezoo Kianiara, Fatemeh Merikh, Mehrban Badvi, Shahrzad Nasouhi, Mobina Hassannejad, Negar Zandeboodi, Saeideh Ghazanfari, Hanieh Karimi, Samin Karimi, Leila Hosseini, Elaheh Nikan, Elnaz Ghasemi and Maedeh Oshaghi have been named in the squad.

The Iranian team will open its campaign against Hong Kong on November 23 before facing 10-time silver medalist China the following day. It will then take on Bangladesh on November 25 and conclude its group-stage campaign against defending champion Japan on November 28.

The championship will also serve as the qualification event for the 28th IHF Women's Handball World Championship, with the top four teams securing direct qualification for the global tournament, scheduled to be held in Hungary from November 30 to December 19 next year.