Iran seeks to broaden Olympic medal base for LA28

Sports Desk



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Iranian Sports Minister Ahmad Donyamali has urged the country to expand its medal prospects beyond the traditional strongholds of wrestling, taekwondo, and weightlifting at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics.

The issue was among the key points raised during seven expert sessions held by the National Olympic Committee to assess the performance of Iranian federations, as it reviewed the country's campaign at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games, where the delegation collected 52 medals, including 19 golds, to finish sixth in the medal table.

The discussions focused primarily on the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, while also emphasizing the need for a comprehensive development plan for non-Olympic sports to improve Iran's performance at the 2030 Asian Games.

With less than 20 months remaining until the sporting extravaganza, Donyamali has called for an end to Iran's traditional reliance on wrestling, taekwondo, and weightlifting for Olympic medals, stressing the importance of broadening the country's medal-winning base.

"Iran's Olympic medal tally should no longer be limited to just weightlifting, wrestling, and taekwondo, although we must also make the most of our medal-winning potential in these three sports," the sports minister said at the concluding session this week.

"Athletics, shooting, and gymnastics are sports in which we can win medals in Los Angeles if we invest the necessary effort.

"What matters most at this stage is securing Olympic quotas. Given the limited number of athletes we can send, obtaining these quotas must be our top priority. Planning should focus more on the weight categories and events in which we have realistic chances of qualifying and winning medals."

Of the 88 medals won by Iranian athletes in Olympic history, dating back to weightlifter Jafar Salmasi's bronze in London 1948, wrestling, weightlifting, and taekwondo account for 85.

Wrestling leads the way with 27 golds, including the first two Olympic titles won by Iran, courtesy of legendary duo Gholamreza Takhti and Emam-Ali Habibi in their respective categories at Melbourne 1956.

Weightlifting and taekwondo, meanwhile, have contributed nine and three golds, respectively.

Hossein Rezazadeh and Hadi Saei are the only Iranians to have won two Olympic gold medals, with the latter remaining the country's most decorated Olympic athlete, having also claimed a bronze in Sydney 2000.

Iran's success in other sports, however, has been few and far between.

At London 2012, Ehsan Haddadi won silver in the men's discus throw, before Javad Foroughi and Sajjad Ganjzadeh claimed historic golds in shooting and karate, respectively, at Tokyo 2020.

Iran collected three golds, six silvers, and three bronze medals at the latest edition of the multi-sport showpiece in Paris 2024, all of them coming in the familiar three disciplines.

The key question, however, is how this ambition to diversify the medal tally can be translated from a stated objective into an effective, results-driven strategy.

While maximizing their medal potential should remain a priority, continued reliance on these three disciplines not only limits the country's opportunities to win medals but also leaves its Olympic campaign more vulnerable to setbacks should results fall short in any of them.

Meanwhile, unlocking the potential of disciplines such as athletics, shooting, and gymnastics requires far more than occasional participation in international competitions. Identifying promising athletes, developing a strong talent pool at junior level, recruiting top-class coaches, ensuring regular participation in high-level international events, and providing standard training facilities are among the essential steps that must be incorporated into the respective federations' plans.

The minister's emphasis on securing Olympic quotas is also significant. Talent and encouraging performances at Asian competitions alone cannot guarantee a successful campaign on the world's biggest sporting stage.

Federations must identify the weight categories, events, and disciplines in which they have realistic chances of securing Olympic berths and subsequently challenging for medals, and allocate their resources accordingly.

Women's sport is another important part of the equation. Donyamali has underlined Iran's ambition to win the country's first-ever Olympic gold medal in women's competition, a target that requires greater attention to female athletes and disciplines, equal opportunities for preparation and international competition, and sustained support for medal prospects.

Iran has won only three women's medals in Olympic history, all in taekwondo.

Kimia Alizadeh opened Iran's women's medal account with a bronze in Rio 2016, before Nahid Kiani won a historic silver and Mobina Nematzadeh claimed a bronze in Paris 2024.

In this regard, the National Olympic Committee's expert sessions and plans by its National Teams Monitoring Center to hold meetings with federations could provide a valuable opportunity to assess the situation in individual disciplines, hear the concerns of coaching staff, and establish preparation priorities.

However, the effectiveness of such meetings will ultimately depend on whether they produce concrete, time-bound, and measurable action plans.

The Los Angeles Olympics, therefore, will be more than just another sporting destination for Iran. They will also serve as a test of the country's ability to develop medal-winning potential across a wider range of disciplines.

If Iran is to move beyond its traditional reliance on three sports, significant changes must begin now in the way federations are supported, resources allocated, and their performances monitored. Otherwise, the ambition of adding new medal-winning disciplines in 2028 could remain little more than a declared goal.

Mehr News Agency contributed to this report.

ITTF World Youth Championships:

Faraji wins historic bronze in U19 doubles

Sports Desk

The ITTF World Youth Championships in Istanbul delivered yet another milestone for Iranian table tennis player Benyamin Faraji.

Two years after winning a historic bronze in the U15 boys' singles event at the competition in Helsingborg, Sweden – the country's first-ever international medal in the sport – the teenage prodigy, ranked No. 11 in the latest ITTF boys' U19 rankings, teamed up with world No. 7 Alan Kurmangaliyev of Kazakhstan to replicate the feat in the U19 doubles event on Thursday.

Having opened their campaign with a 3-2 victory over Poland's Samuel Michna and Patryk Zyworonek in the round of 16, the pair, coached by Iranian Miad Mokayef, had already secured a podium finish with a 3-2 quarterfinal win against India's Abhinandh Pradhivadhi and Priyanuj Bhattacharyya.

The duo, however, saw its run come to an end after suffering a straight-game loss (11-6, 11-6, 11-5) to South Korea's Kim Daehwan and Lee Hyeondo in less than 19 minutes at the Ata Sporları Merkezi venue. Faraji and Kurmangaliyev shared the bronze medal with the French duo of Nathan Pilard and Antoine Noirault, who lost 3-0 to China's Wen Ruibo and Li Hechen in the other semifinal.

The singles competition, meanwhile, was one to forget for Faraji, who fell in four games (13-11, 11-9, 12-10, 11-5) to the host nation's Kenan Kahraman in the round of 16. Kahraman was part of the Turkish duo that won silver in the U15 doubles event last year.

Faraji's compatriot Faraz Shakiba also suffered a first-round exit in the U15 boys' singles category against world No. 21 Ukyo Kobayashi of Japan, who came from behind twice to edge the Iranian 4-3 (13-15, 11-5, 9-11, 5-11, 11-4, 11-7, 13-11) in a thrilling contest lasting just over 52 minutes.

Faraji was also part of the Iranian trio that missed out on a semifinal spot in the U19 boys' team event after falling 3-0 to China on Sunday.

Mohammad Habibi suffered a straight-game loss (11-8, 11-2, 15-13) to Wen Ruibo, before Faraji was beaten by Li Hechen, who rallied from behind to win 3-2 (9-11, 12-10, 5-11, 11-6, 11-4).



Iran's Benyamin Faraji (L) and Kazakhstan's Alan Kurmangaliyev won the bronze medal in the U19 boys' doubles category at the ITTF World Youth Championships in Istanbul.
ITTF

Arshia Lorestani completed Iran's disappointing quarterfinal outing with a 3-0 defeat (11-9, 11-3, 11-6) against Zhou Guanhong.


IRIHF

Asian Women's Handball Championship:

Iran eyeing fitting finale to group stage against holders Japan

Sports Desk

Iran will look to round off its group-stage campaign on a high note at the Asian Women's Handball Championship when it takes on defending champion Japan today in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

The Iranian women claimed a comprehensive 23-15 victory over Thailand on Wednesday to secure a top-four finish in Group A and book a quarterfinal berth with one game to spare.

Maedeh Oshaqqi delivered a player-of-the-match performance with six goals as Iran bounced back from a 34-32 defeat to 10-time silver medalist China on the previous day at the Dostyk Universal Sports Complex.

Bahar Izadgashb also contributed six goals, while Haniyeh Karimi and Elaheh Nikan chipped in with five and three, respectively, for an Iranian side that fielded a reshuffled lineup.

Iran had opened its campaign with a commanding 33-16 victory over Hong Kong on Monday. Iran and Japan also met in the group stage of the 2024 edition, with Japan claiming a 34-14 victory, having previously cruised to an emphatic 43-19 win in the 2022 semifinals.

As if the prospect of securing a maiden podium finish at the competition – after falling short in the third-place playoff in each of the previous three editions – were not enough motivation, the Almaty tournament also serves as a qualification pathway for the 28th IHF Women's Handball World Championship.

The four semifinalists will secure direct qualification for the global showpiece, which is scheduled to be held in Hungary from November 30 to December 19 next year.