

Iranian Freestyle Wrestler Takes Over 1st Place in World Ranking



Iranian freestyle wrestler Hassan Yazdani Charati (file photo)

TEHRAN (Dispatches) — Iranian wrestler Hassan Yazdani Charati has taken over top ranking in the 2018 world freestyle wrestling, the website of United World Wrestling (UWW) announced.

“Olympic champion Hassan Yazdani Charati (IRI), fresh off winning a gold medal at the Asian Championships in Bishkek, takes over the No.1 ranking at 86kg in freestyle,” the UWW reported on Thursday.

Other top-ranking wrestlers in

freestyle include “Abbos Abbos Rakhmonov (UZB) at 61kg, Daulet Niyazbekov (KAZ) at 65kg, Ogbonna John (NGR) at 70kg, Rashid Kurbanov (UZB) at 79kg and Magomed Ibragimov (UZB),” it added.

The same report went on to say “Mongolia has four No.1-ranked wrestlers in freestyle, which is more than any other nation.”

The 2018 Asian Freestyle Wrestling Championships started on February 27, and finished on March 4, 2018.

At Paralympics Opening Ceremony

North, South Korea March Under Separate Flags

SEOUL, South Korea (USA Today) — The rival Koreas continued their period of detente as the Winter Paralympics Games officially kicked off in Pyeongchang on Friday, but without a key symbol of that thaw: They marched under their own flags during the opening ceremony.

The decision to forego marching under the same blue-and-white Korean peninsula flag, as they did last month at the Olympic Games opening ceremony, came on the day that President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un agreed to hold direct talks.

North and South Korea chose not to march together following a complaint by Japan during the

Olympic Games. The united Korean flag portrays disputed islands — known as Dokdo in Korea and Takeshima in Japan — that both countries claim. The islands are located in the Sea of Japan. North and South Korea couldn’t agree on a version of the flag to use, as the North insisted on keeping the islands.

But International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said the decision to march under separate flags doesn’t diminish the symbolism of the two Koreas coming together once again for an international sporting event. And during welcoming remarks at a reception before Friday’s opening

ceremony, South Korean President Moon Jae-in stressed the importance that the Olympics and Paralympics have played in opening the door for the peace process on the Korean peninsula.

“A small step to peace that started out a joint inter-Korean women’s ice hockey team has been growing rapidly like a snowball,” he said.

Moon said the Pyeongchang Games were a precursor for the upcoming inter-Korean summit in April as well as the meeting between Trump and Kim that will be held before the end of May. “I believe the Pyeongchang Olympics and Paralympics as well as our endeavors for peace will help create

a new global peace,” Moon said.

The ceremony kicked off at the 35,000 seat stadium in Pyeongchang with a spectacular pyrotechnic display and light show before the parade of 49 competing nations.

North Korea has again sent a delegation to participate in the Games, which run until March 18. The 24-person delegation includes two athletes, Para Nordic cross-country skiers Kim Jong-hyon and Ma Yu-chol, who received a wildcard entry.

Four observer athletes and 18 officials from North Korea are also attending. Pyongyang’s headline-grabbing cheerleading squad did not make the trip.

Tiger Tames Gusty Winds for Opening 70 at Valspar

FLORIDA (Reuters) — Tiger Woods gave himself a high grade after taming strong and gusty winds to trail first round Canadian leader Corey Connors by three strokes at the Valspar Championship in Florida on Thursday.

Showing glimpses of the verve and creativity that brought him 14 major championships before a serious back injury, Woods carded a one-under-par 70 to end the day equal eighth at Innisbrook Resort in Palm Harbor, Florida.

It was not such smooth sailing for some of the other big names, with Rory McIlroy battling to a 74 in his first round at the Copperhead course, while Jordan Spieth had five bogeys in a seven-hole stretch en route to a 76.

Woods, on the other hand, could hardly contain his smile, oozing satisfaction as he reflected on his performance.

“I’m pleased with every aspect of my game,” he told reporters.

“I drove it well, hit a lot of good iron

shots and had some good speed on the putts. Overall I thought I really did well today.

“This is the hardest of all the tests because the wind was all over the place.

“I don’t know if people understand how hard it was out there. Into the wind it felt we hit walls out there. The whole group got fooled a lot today.”

Woods, who underwent a spinal fusion last April, is making what is expected to be his penultimate appearance before the Masters, the first major of the year in four weeks.

His short game was particularly impressive, almost holing a flop shot from the rough at the par-five first, which led to a tap-in birdie and set a positive tone for the round.

A huge gallery, rugged up on an unusually cool Florida afternoon, were treated to a vintage Tiger recovery shot at the par-four 16th.

After his drive bounced on a cart path and clattered deep into the trees, coming



Tiger Woods watches his tee shot on the third hole during the final round at the Hero World Challenge golf tournament in Nassau, Bahamas.

to rest on leaves and pine straw, Woods was concerned his club would snap against a nearby pine on his follow-through.

He warned spectators to stand back,

and sure enough he subsequently wrapped his iron around the trunk, the club bending but not breaking, before flying out of his hand as his left arm also hit the tree.

‘Iran Knows How to Play in World Cup’



The Iran men’s national football team (file photo)

TEHRAN (Dispatches) — Iran national football team’s winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh says they know how to play in the 2018 World Cup.

In an exclusive interview with FIFA.com, AZ Alkmaar player says they have been drawn in the toughest group in the FIFA World Cup along with Portugal, Spain and Morocco but they are determined to make Iranian people happy.

“Obviously this is the toughest group in the World Cup, there’s no doubt about it, but it’s show time and we have nothing to lose. All three teams have a lot of quality and are top class, though I don’t think we are an easy opponent,” Jahanbakhsh explained.

“We know how to play and our coach will have us ready. The World Cup is a tournament where you can just be positive about it; we will do our best to make our people happy,” he added.

During the official 2018 FIFA World Cup draw ceremony at Kremlin State Palace in the Russian capital city of Moscow on December 1, Iran’s Team Melli joined the Portugal national

football team, nicknamed A Seleção, Spain’s La Furia Roja and Atlas Lions of Morocco in the preliminary round of the tournament.

The host nation, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Uruguay form Group A in the upcoming quadrennial international sports event.

France is drawn in Group C, and is pitted against Australia, Peru and Denmark.

Argentina, Iceland, Croatia and Nigeria are drawn in Group D.

Group E consists of Brazil, Switzerland, Costa Rica and Serbia.

While the 2014 FIFA World Cup champion Germany, Mexico, Sweden and South Korea shape Group F, Belgium, Panama, Tunisia and England are in Group G.

Group H has Poland, Senegal, Colombia and Japan.

The 2018 FIFA World Cup will take place from June 14 to July 15. Russia will open the event against Saudi Arabia in a Group A fixture at Moscow’s Luzhniki Stadium.

A total of 64 matches will be played in 12 venues located in 11 cities.

Persepolis Coach Dismisses Speculation

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Former Iran national football team and Persepolis current coach Branko Ivankovic says he has received an offer from Uzbekistan but he concentrates on his team’s success in the AFC Champions League.

Uzbekistan Football Federation (UFF) holds negotiations with potential candidates for the post, the Uzbek media reported.

Among candidates for the post

of coach of the national team of Uzbekistan are Iran coach Carlos Queiroz and Branko Ivankovic.

“I know that Uzbekistan football team is without a coach and it’s normal the federation is looking for a coach but I am Persepolis coach at the moment,” Ivankovic said.

Persepolis will play Al Wasl of the UAE on Tuesday in Group C of the AFC Champions League.

Delbonis Wins in Indian Wells, Earns Showdown With Federer

CALIFORNIA (Reuters) — Argentine Federico Delbonis saved two match points and earned a second-round clash with Roger Federer when he outlasted Ryan Harrison 6-2 4-6 7-5 at the BNP Paribas Open.

The crowd which had gathered to watch Serena Williams’ comeback in the evening session instead were entertained by a high-quality men’s contest that stretched from afternoon into the night in Indian Wells, California.

Delbonis used his powerful forehand to good effect, eventually dispatching the American in a match that featured numerous long rallies.

The Argentine put away a smash with aplomb to save a second match point, after previously in the same game allowing the ball to go as he rushed the net, only to watch in dismay as it landed on the baseline and brought up the first match point against him.

Suitably buoyed by staving off defeat, 67th-ranked Delbonis broke in the next game and then held serve for the victory, converting his first match point to a perfunctory reception from the pro-Harrison crowd.

Delbonis’ reward will be another trip to center court to face top seed and defending champion on the weekend.

As Federer and the other top seeds cooled their heels, Russian Daniil

Medvedev maintained his perfect career record against Steve Johnson when he beat the American 7-6(0) 6-4.

American Johnson saved two match points, the second in a 21-shot rally.

Canadian teenager Denis Shapovalov, meanwhile, was too good for qualifier Ricardas Berankis of Lithuania, winning 6-3 6-4.

In another match, Taylor Fritz saved a match point before edging good friend Reilly Opelka 4-6 7-6(6) 6-4 in an all-American contest.

Opelka was best man in 2016 when Fritz married fellow pro Raquel Pedraza.

“Obviously it is always uncomfortable playing someone you are such good friends with,” Fritz said.

“We both do know each other’s tricks and tendencies so that comes into play.”

In the day’s biggest upset, American qualifier Mitchell

Krueger outlasted 46th-ranked Benoit Paire of France 6-4 1-6 6-4.

It was the first top-level victory for 234th-ranked Krueger.

Canadian qualifier Peter Polansky won the day’s closest match but only after squandering seven match points, and saving two, before finally dispatching Romanian Marius Copil 7-6(3) 6-7(5) 7-6(12) in a three-hour thriller.

Vettel Smashes Track Record on Penultimate Day of Testing

BARCELONA (Dispatches) — Ferrari’s Sebastian Vettel signed off from Formula One’s pre-season testing with the fastest lap yet around Barcelona’s Circuit de Catalunya.

The next time the four-time world champion will get behind the wheel will be for first Friday practice at Melbourne’s Albert Park on March 23.

“The times on these test days don’t mean much,” said the German, playing down his time of one minute 17.182 seconds, set on the new hypersoft tires.

“The important thing is that the SF71H (car) has proved to be very strong, allowing us to run all day without any significant problems.

“We are still working on some things for the first race and it’s not really possible to make any predictions based

on the performance of the other teams, because everyone is running a different program,” he added.

That said, his time was more than a second quicker than anyone else and eclipsed the previous best, since the Barcelona circuit was reconfigured in 2007, of 1:18.047 set on Wednesday by Red Bull’s Australian Daniel Ricciardo.

Neither Red Bull nor champions Mercedes were focusing on lap times, concentrating instead on race simulations, and Mercedes have felt no need to try out the hypersofts.

General expectations are for a tighter battle at the front this season, with Mercedes seen as being still ahead but not by much.

All the teams did more than 100 laps, with Vettel also completing a

race simulation and doing 188 — the most of any driver and one more than Red Bull’s Dutch youngster Max Verstappen.

The German, runner-up last season to Britain’s Lewis Hamilton, now hands over to team mate Kimi Raikkonen for the final day.

Danish driver Kevin Magnussen was second fastest on supersoft tires with a time of 1:18.360 while France’s Pierre Gasly was third on the timesheets in the Honda-powered Toro Rosso and completed an impressive 169 laps.

McLaren put two days of troubled running behind them with a solid 151 laps for Belgian Stoffel Vandoorne, who was sixth on the timesheets. Team mate Fernando Alonso takes over for the final day.