



WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS PREVIEW FREESTYLE



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Zagreb
'25



01 FREESTYLE

97 KG

Abdulrashid Sadulaev (UWW)
defeats Kyle Frederick Snyder (USA)



**FOR NEARLY A DECADE,
THE 97KG FREESTYLE
WRESTLING DIVISION
WAS DEFINED BY
TWO NAMES:
ABDULRASHID SADULAEV
& KYLE SNYDER**





From 2015 to 2017, **SNYDER** (USA) ruled the mat, winning Olympic and World titles.

SADULAEV (UWW) then took over from 2018 to 2021, claiming every major gold.

When **SADULAEV** missed the 2022 Worlds, **SNYDER** reclaimed the top spot.



Abdulrashid Sadulaev



Akhmed Tazhudinov

But in 2023, a new force emerged – **Akhmed TAZHUDINOV** (BRN).

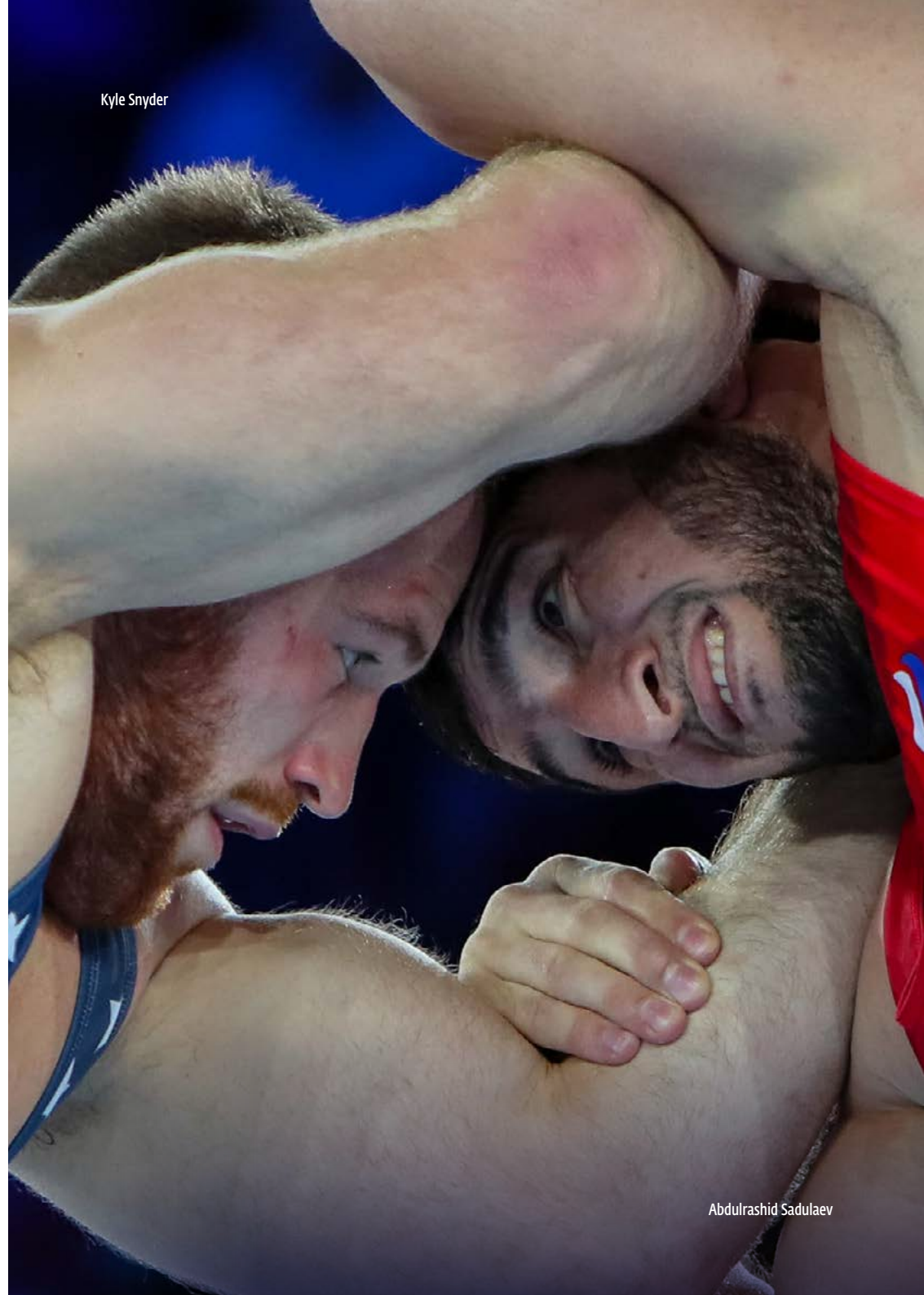
He stunned the wrestling world by beating both **SNYDER** and **SADULAEV** in Belgrade, claiming the world title. In 2024, he repeated his feat in Paris, solidifying his status as the man to beat at 97kg.



**NOW, TAZHUDINOV ENTERS ZAGREB
AS THE WRESTLER TO BEAT, BUT HE'LL
FACE STIFF COMPETITION FROM VETERANS
LOOKING FOR REDEMPTION AND RIVALS
WHO CAME CLOSE TO BEATING HIM.**

SNYDER, who missed the podium in Paris, remains dangerous. He once pushed **SADULAEV** to the limit before the Russian adjusted.

SNYDER also fell in Albania to **Arash YOSHIDA** (JPN), the current Asian champion. **YOSHIDA**, blends Iranian and Japanese techniques and has excellent underhook defense and is a serious medal contender.





Givi Matcharashvili

European champion **Givi MATCHARASHVILI** (GEO) is another name to watch. He won Olympic silver in Paris but was pinned quickly by **TAZHUDINOV**.

Still, as the number two seed, he avoids **TAZHUDINOV** until the final and must contend with **SNYDER**, **YOSHIDA**, and possibly **SADULAEV** on his side of the bracket.



Amirali AZARPIRA (IRI), seeded number five, came closest to beating **TAZHUDINOV** in Paris, leading 3-0 before surrendering two late takedowns to lose 4-3.

Back from injury, his fitness will be key if the two meet again in Zagreb.





Rizabek Aitmukhan

Akhmed Tazhudinov

Rizabek AITMUKHAN (KAZ), Kazakhstan's first freestyle world champion, also pushed **TAZHUDINOV** hard at the Asian Championships but couldn't close the match.

He's a strong bet for the podium.



Magomedkhan MAGOMEDOV (AZE) returns after a bronze in Paris and a silver at the 2023 World Championships, remains a serious threat in one of the deepest brackets in the championships.





OLYMPIC FINAL ON CARDS



Kotaro Kiyooka

Rahman Amouzad

Apart from **TAZHUDINOV**, **Kotaro KIYOOKA** (JPN) is the only other Freestyle Olympic champion in Zagreb.

At 65kg, all four returning medalists from Paris are entered, though **Islam DUDAEV** (ALB) will wrestle at 70kg.



A repeat of the 2024 Olympic final is expected at 65kg, with **KIYOOKA** and silver medalist **Rahman AMOUZAD** (IRI) on course to collide if seeding holds.

KIYOOKA has never wrestled at a World Championships and skipped the season after winning gold in Paris, but his resume includes wins over world-class opponents.

He beat Tokyo Olympic champion **Takuto OTOGURO** (JPN) to earn Japan's Paris spot, and then defeated Asian champion **Kaisei TANABE** (JPN) twice to make the team for Zagreb.



Rahman Amouzad





Rahman Amouzad

AMOUZAD will be his biggest threat, looking to avenge the Olympic final.

Barring that loss, the Iranian has been a consistent force, using his under-over technique to catch opponents off guard. If he can limit **KIYOOKA**'s relentless attacks and keep the match low-scoring, he may have a chance.



European champion **Ibragim IBRAGIMOV** (UWW), the world U23 champion, brings a full arsenal to challenge both **KIYOOKA** and **AMOUZAD**.

He could be the biggest disruptor in the bracket.





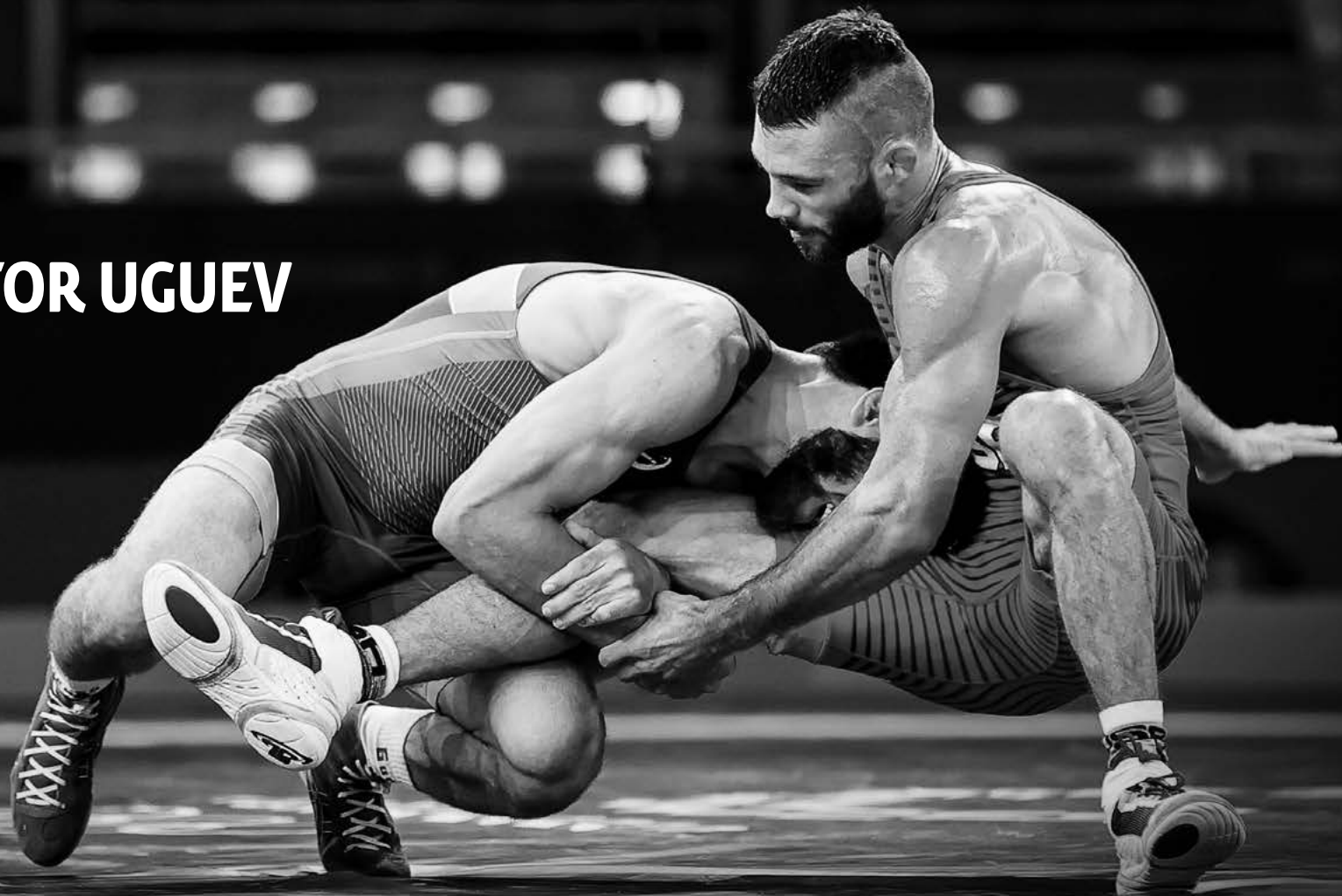
Sebastian Rivera

Sebastian RIVERA (PUR), an Olympic bronze and world silver medalist, could medal again despite not competing since Paris.

Vazgen TEVANYAN (ARM) and **SUJEET** (IND) are also aiming for podium finishes.



GOLD DROUGHT FOR UGUEV



Beyond **KIYOOKA** and **YOSHIDA**, other Japanese medal hopefuls include Asian champion **Takara SUDA** (JPN) at 61kg, world silver medalist **Yoshinosuke AOYAGI** (JPN) at 70kg, **Kota TAKAHASHI** (JPN) at 74kg, and the **ISHIGURO** brothers at 86kg and 92kg.



Takara Suda





Zavur Uguev

SUDA will have big shoes to fill as his Yamanashi Gakuin University teammate **Masanosuke ONO** (JPN) rose to become the world champ last year.

SUDA faces an equally tough field with **Zavur UGUEV** (UWW), **Zelimkhan ABAKAROV** (ALB), and **UDIT** (IND) among others.



UGUEV, Olympic and 2019 world champion, returned to form by winning the European title in April. He finished fifth last year after losses to **ONO** and **Vitali ARAJAU** (USA).

Can he now stop **SUDA**, the Ranking Series and Asian champion? **SUDA** has found ways to win but struggles with conditioning.





Zelimkhan Abakarov

ABAKAROV, a former world champion, will also be in the mix, having beaten **UGUEV** in 2023.

Other contenders include Asian silver medalist **UDIT**, **Taiyrbek ZHUMASHBEK UULU** (KGZ) – back at 61kg – and **Jaxen FORREST** (USA), who beat **ARAJAU** to claim the U.S. team spot.






**AIN
SIDAKOV**

SIDAKOV SET TO RETURN

At 74kg, 2023 world champion **Zaurbek SIDAKOV** (UWW) has managed to recover just in time for the World Championships.

He suffered an injury in his European Championships loss to **Chermen VALIEV** (ALB) and will likely go through the Albanian if he wants to defend his gold.





Zaurbek Sidakov

Chermen Valiev

VALIEV has had close encounters against **SIDAKOV** and the win at Europeans was his first over **SIDAKOV**.

His strategy to keep a close score or defend a lead may not always play out well. But his defensive skills are top notch, and he doesn't let anyone score easily.



Kota TAKAHASHI (JPN) and **David CARR** (USA) are two youngsters who can surprise a few. Both have lethal attacks and can move quickly.

TAKAHASHI won the clash in Budapest but **CARR** nearly pulled off a comeback against a tiring **TAKAHASHI**.





Tajmuraz Salkazanov

World silver medalist **Tajmuraz SALKAZANOV** (SVK) would like to return to the podium, while **Yones EMAMI** (IRI) and veteran **Soner DEMIRTAS** (TUR) remain strong contenders.



Top-seeded **Yoshinosuke AOYAGI** (JPN) and world champion **Nurkozha KAIPANOV** (KAZ) will go for the 70kg title.

KAIPANOV defeated **AOYAGI** in last year's final to win gold. **AOYAGI** seemed in form with a win at the Budapest Ranking Series but will be challenged in Zagreb.



Yoshinosuke Aoyagi

Nurkozha Kaipanov





Nurkozha Kaipanov

KAIPANOV won 74kg gold at the Asian Championships but is now back at 70kg to defend his world title.

While **AOYAGI** is a key challenger, others may break **KAIPANOV**'s defensive wall.



Former world silver medalist **Amirmohammad YAZDANI** (IRI) will be the biggest threat as he hunts for his first world title. His attacking style troubles many, though his conditioning is still a work in progress.

The field is deeper with Asian champion **Ernazar AKMATALIEV** (KGZ), who entertains with crafty moves, though that can be his undoing.



Amirmohammad Yazdani



Ernazar Akmataliyev



Viktor Rassadin

Viktor RASSADIN (TJK), a Paris Olympian and second to **AKMATALIEV** in Asia, is also a medal threat.



WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS PREVIEW **FREESTYLE**

Tulga TUMUR OCHIR (MGL) will be at 70kg.

Saiyn KAZYRYK (UWW) can make a run to the final but will be tested on the international level.



PJ Duke



PJ DUKE (USA), coming off a world U20 gold, and world medalist **Arman ANDREASYAN** (ARM), will look to add to their success.



WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS PREVIEW **FREESTYLE**



LEE CHASES WORLD GOLD

In other weight classes, **Spencer LEE** (USA) will be looking to win a world medal.

A United States wrestler winning the gold medal in the lowest weight category is a rare occurrence. **Thomas GILMAN** (USA) won gold in 2021 and silver in 2022; however, the country drew a blank in 2023.





Spencer Lee

Gulomjon Abdullaev

Now, Paris Olympic silver medalist **LEE** is primed to win gold at 57kg in Zagreb. This will be his first World Championships, but he is the favorite to claim the title.

It is unlikely he will face much trouble, but if he does, it will likely come from 2023 world bronze medalist **Arsen HARUTYUNYAN** (ARM) and Paris bronze medalists **AMAN** (IND) and **Gulomjon ABDULLAEV** (UZB).



The field is further intensified by Asian champion **Chong Song HAN** (PRK), European silver medalist **Azamat TUS-KAEV** (SRB), and Iran's **Ali MOMENI** (IRI).





Akhmed Usmanov

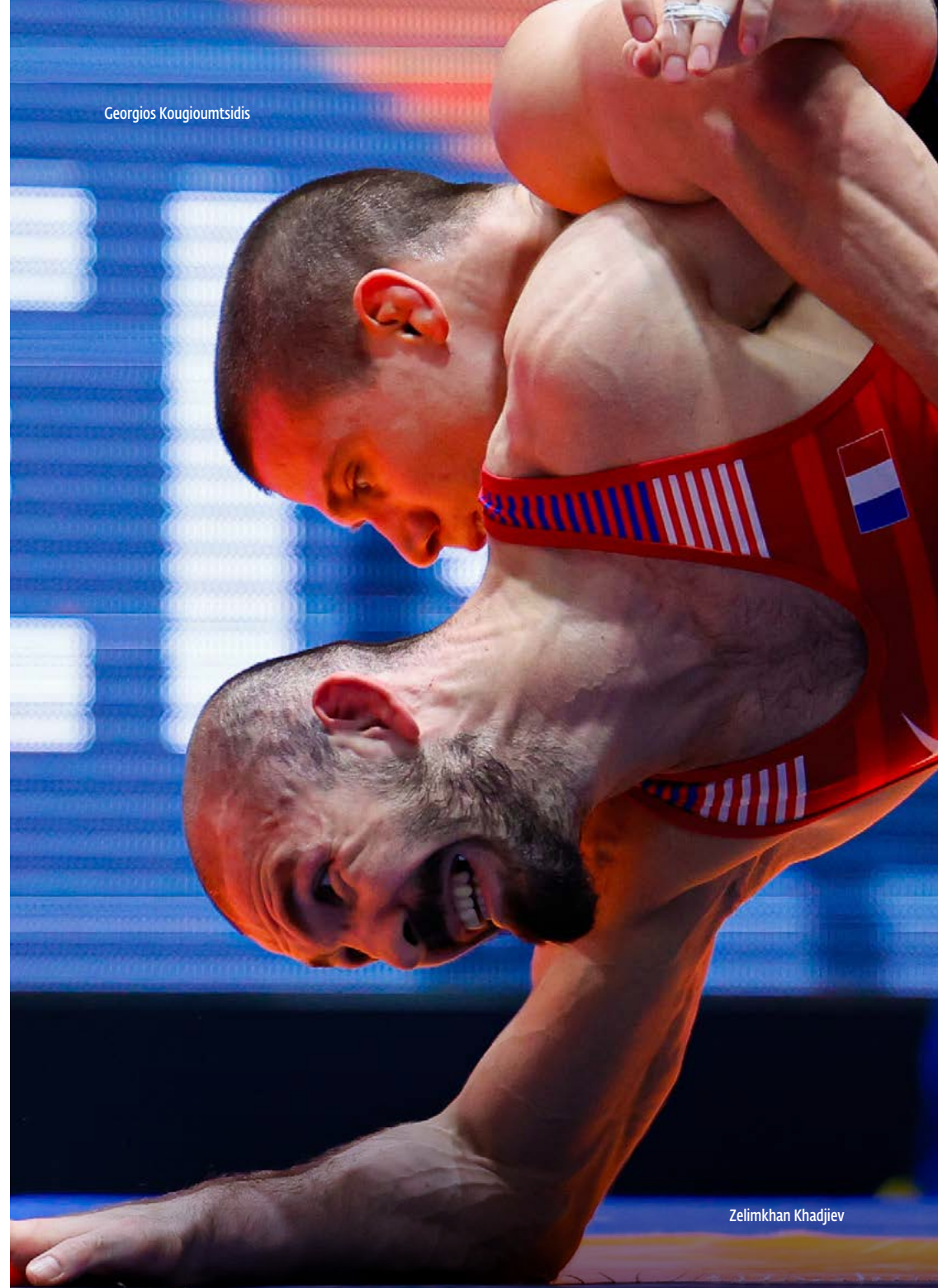
Vladimeri Gamkrelidze

At 79kg, **Akhmed USMANOV** (UWW), world champion in 2023, should have no trouble winning his second title despite familiar foes like **Vladimeri GAMKRELIDZE** (GEO) and **Mohammad NOKHODI** (IRI).

USMANOV defeated both en route to his 2023 gold and has since won the European Championships in 2024 and 2025. In the final in Slovakia, **USMANOV** overcame veteran **Zelimkhan KHADJIEV** (FRA).



KHADJIEV remains a podium contender but recently suffered a close loss to **Georgios KOUGIOUMTSIDIS** (GRE) in Budapest, making the Greek wrestler a real medal threat.



Georgios Kougioumtsidis

Zelimkhan Khadjiev



Vasyl Mykhailov

Also not to be counted out is **Vasyl MYKHAILOV** (UKR), who has consistently been competitive at the World Championships.



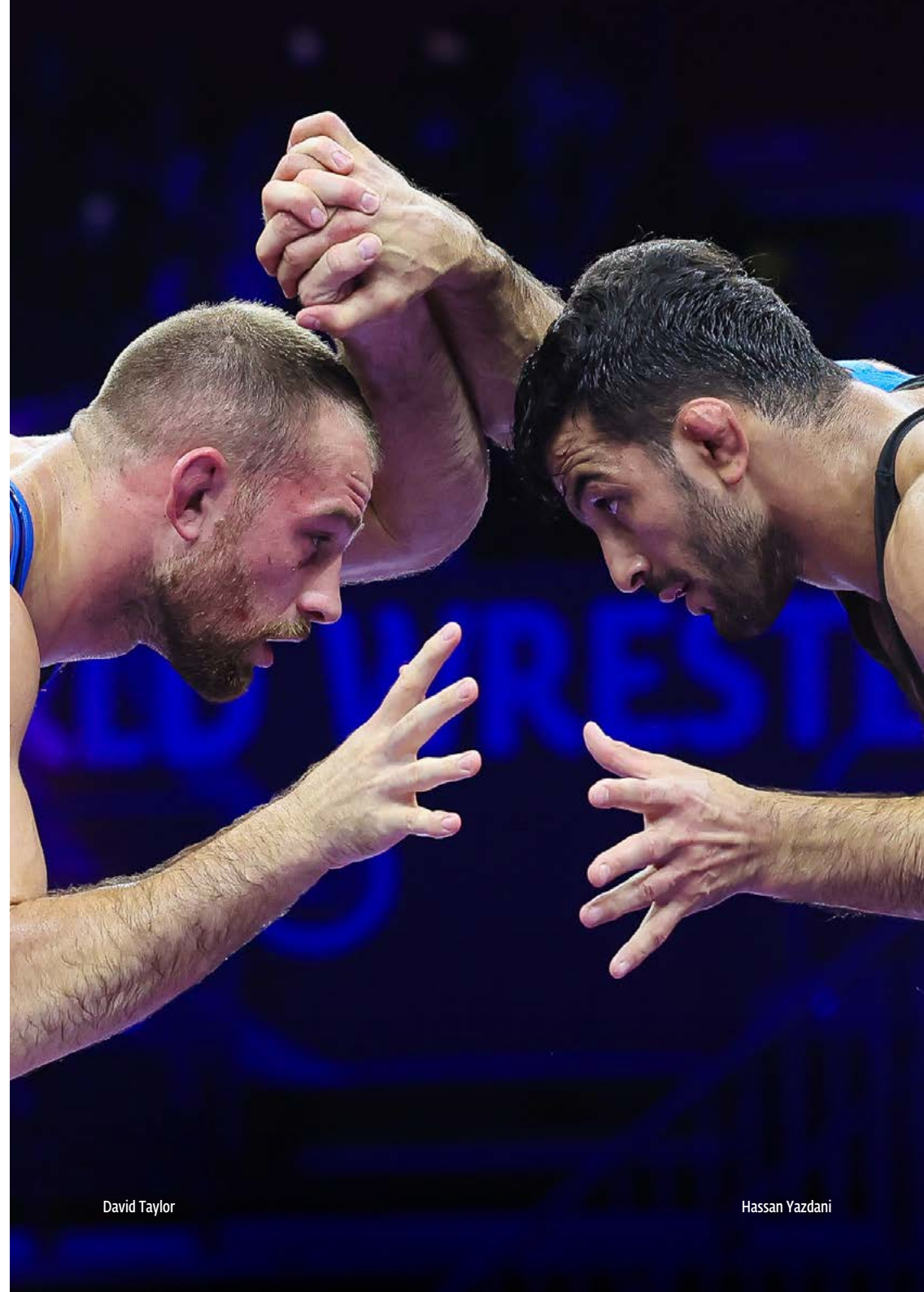
NEW DAWN AT 86KG



The 86kg category will see a big shift in Zagreb.

Since 2017, **Hassan YAZDANI** (IRI) and **David TAYLOR** (USA) have shared the gold medals at Worlds. However, that near-decade-long reign is ending.

TAYLOR has retired, and **YAZDANI** has moved up a weight class, skipping this year.





Kamran Ghasempour

So who will be champion in Zagreb?

Two-time world champion **Kamran GHASEMPOUR** (IRI), second to **YAZDANI** at 86kg, will be the favorite. He was competing at 92kg and was close to a third world title before losing heartbreakingly in the semifinals to **SADULAEV**.



Now back at the Olympic weight class, **GHASEMPOUR** aims to deliver his best performance in Zagreb.

He is unseeded, which means he can be drawn anywhere in the bracket.





Mahamedkhabib Kadzimahamedau

The weight class is packed with talent. European silver medalist **Mahamedkhabib KADZIMAHAMEDAU** (UWW) is thriving at 86kg and nearly won gold at the European Championships.

Former world U20 champion **Ibragim KADIEV** (UWW) is another strong contender despite limited top-level international experience.



Zahid VALENCIA (USA) has improved significantly over the past year and is a potential podium finisher with his attacking pace.

Arsenii DZHIOEV (AZE) and **Azamat DAULETBEKOV** (KAZ) are dark horses who could surprise in this competitive field.





Osman Nurmagedov

Two-time world silver medalists **Osman NURMAGOMEDOV** (AZE) and **Miriani MAISURADZE** (GEO), European champion **Dauren KURUGLIEV** (GRE), Asian champion **Amirhossein FIROUZPOUR** (IRI), and former world silver medalists **Batyrbek TSAKULOV** (SVK) and **Deepak PUNIA** (IND) make the 92kg category one of the toughest in Zagreb.



Though he lacks a World Championships medal, **Trent HIDLAY** (USA) is a top gold-medal contender after winning gold in Budapest.

He is currently one of the strongest wrestlers globally.





Amirhossein Firouzpour

FIROUZPOUR, moving into the spotlight after **GHASEMPOUR**'s shift down a weight class, enters Zagreb as a favorite.

Though new to Worlds, his Iranian style with underhook pushouts and takedowns makes him a serious threat.



NURMAGOMEDOV and **KURUGLIEV** battled at the European Championships and Budapest, with **KURUGLIEV** prevailing both times.

MAISURADZE remains a strong competitor despite a recent dip in form.





Amir Hossein Zare

At 125kg, **Amir Hossein ZARE** (IRI) stands head and shoulders above the rest, though European champion **Giorgi MESHVILDISHVILI** (AZE), **Solomon MANASHVILI** (GEO), **Lkhagvagerel MUNKHTUR** (MGL), and **Wyatt HENDRICKSON** (USA) aim to challenge him.



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