

Iranian Athletes Call On I.O.C. to Ban Iranian Athletes

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The Islamic Republic recently executed the 27-year-old champion wrestler Navid Afkari. He had been tortured by the regime until he “confessed” to the murder of an Iranian intelligence officer. The real reason for eliminating Afkari was that in 2018 he had attended an anti-regime demonstration, protesting against the country’s economic degrading. Because of his fame as a wrestler, Afkari could have been an enormously popular figure around which to rally opponents of the regime, a danger that the mullahs did not want to risk. His execution has led prominent Iranian athletes, and human rights activists, to ask both the I.O.C. (International Olympic Committee) and FIFA (the International Soccer Association) to keep Iran from participating in sports competitions. The report is [here](#):

"Olympics refuses to discuss Iranian regime's murder of wrestler," Benjamin Weinthal, [Jerusalem Post](#), October 7, 2020:

A new organization comprised of decorated Iranian athletes and human rights activists on Friday urged the International Olympics Committee and the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) to suspend Iran from all sports competitions because of its reported murder of the champion wrestler Navid Afkari.

Women's rights campaigner Masih Alinejad tweeted: "We've launched a new campaign: #United4Navid. Gold-medal athletes from Iran's national teams join human rights activists. We're calling on international sporting federations & Olympic Committee to suspend Islamic Republic of Iran from sporting events for killing #NavidAfkari."

United4Navid posted videos on its website from Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi, former Iranian kick-boxing champion Majid Fallah and former Iranian Greco-Roman national coach Sardar Pashaei, who all called for the Islamic Republic to be suspended. They also cited Iran's "discrimination against women, including female athletes who have faced numerous restrictions."

Sardar Pashaei, the renowned Greco-Roman Iranian wrestler, said in a short video on the United4Navid website that "In Iran, Kurdish, Baloutch, Arab, Sunni, Bahai and even female athletes face systematic discrimination.

"I personally witnessed Iranian authorities forcing athletes to refuse to compete with Israeli athletes... Athletes who take part in civil disobedience protests in the streets are arrested, tortured and even executed, especially the innocent young athlete, Navid Afkari," he added...

"He called on international sport bodies to suspend the Iranian regime, "as long as Iran does not respect human rights and treat its citizens in a fair way."...

What is so impressive about this effort is that all the Iranians involved in creating United4Afkari, in order to undermine the Islamic Republic's prestige by having it banned from taking part in international competitions, including the Olympics and the World Soccer Championship, are directly challenging the rule of the mullahs. They are accusing the regime of torture and judicial murder. And they are doing this, incredibly, from inside Iran. They know, too, that they are not too prominent to be punished, for Navid Afkari himself was a world champion Greco-Roman wrestler, and he was executed despite all the worldwide pleas on his behalf. The Supreme Leader, the implacable Ayatollah Khamenei, might decide that the regime will now have to make examples of those behind United4Afkari in an attempt to frighten into silence these entirely too intrepid opponents. He can choose punishments ranging from expulsion to imprisonment to execution, of those involved in this unflinching and direct challenge to the regime's authority. But will the infliction of such punishments dampen their zeal or, isn't it more likely, inflame it?

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