

Iranian Defector Dedicates Olympic Medal to Israel

Shortly after winning a silver medal in Judo at the Tokyo Olympics on Tuesday, Iranian defector Saeid Mollaei dedicated the award to Israel.

Mollaei represented Mongolia in the men's -81Kg division, losing the gold to Japan's Takanori Nagase.

Mollaei told the Israeli Sports Channel he is grateful for the support he's received from Israel after defecting from Iran.

"Thank you to Israel for the good energy. This medal is dedicated also to Israel," he said. "I hope the Israelis are happy with this win."

Mollaei won his first Olympic medal two years after fleeing Iran after his country's judo team tried to pressure him into deliberately losing in the semifinals of the 2019 World Championships in Tokyo to avoid competing against Israel's Sagi Muki in the final. Mollaei subsequently went to Germany and then gained Mongolian citizenship.

CNN reported that Mollaei said he had feared for his safety and that of his family after ignoring Iranian officials two years ago, who he says told him to lose his semifinal bout on purpose.

Iranian athletes have long been prohibited from competing in any sport against Israeli opponents because Iran refuses to acknowledge Israel's right to exist as a state.

Muki congratulated Mollaei after his win.

"I'm super happy for Saeid," the Israeli judoka told reporters. "I know what he's gone through, and how much he wanted it. He's a very close friend of mine, and I'm so happy

that he succeeded in achieving his dream. He deserves it. His journey is incredibly inspiring.”

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