2nd judoka pulls out of Olympics in apparent move to avoid facing Israeli

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/2nd-judoka-pulls-out-of-olympics-in-apparent-move-to-avoid-facing-israeli/>

A second judoka has pulled out of the Olympics judo competition seemingly to avoid facing Israeli Tohar Butbul, days after his scheduled opponent in a previous round was [suspended](https://www.timesofisrael.com/algerian-suspended-from-world-judo-for-refusal-to-face-israeli-at-olympics/) for doing the same.

Butbul was listed as having “No competitor” in what should have been a bout with Sudan’s Mohamed Abdalrasool in the men’s 73-kg division.

Olympic officials say Abdalrasool didn’t show up to face Butbul in their round, despite weighing in for the bout earlier.

The International Judo Federation didn’t immediately announce a reason why Abdalrasool didn’t compete, and the governing body didn’t respond to requests for comment.

Sudanese Olympic officials also didn’t immediately comment.

In January, Sudan signed onto the Abraham Accords with the United States, paving the way for the African country to normalize ties with Israel, but a report earlier this month said that [Sudan was disappointed](https://www.timesofisrael.com/sudan-said-disappointed-with-results-of-normalization-with-israel/) with the outcome of the normalization agreement. The agreement was widely protested in Sudan.

Abdalrasool is the world’s 469th-ranked judoka in his weight class, while the accomplished Butbul is seventh.

“These are things that sometimes occur in judo, so it wasn’t that odd for me,” Butbul said. “I just had to wait, stay focused and wait for my first chance.”

Butbul later defeated Victor Stepru of the Republic of Moldova in an elimination bout, but then lost to Changrim An of South Korea in the quarterfinal and again to Canada’s Arthur Margelidon in the repechage, ending his medal hopes.

Butbul refused to talk about politics after his eventful day, instead lamenting his athletic shortcomings.

“I came with a pure aim to win a medal, and it’s very hard for me to bear that I didn’t fulfill my own expectations,” Butbul said. “That was the goal I put into the whole of my career. It’s still too early for me to understand what happened. I wasn’t precise in executing my plan, but in judo sometimes there is a gap between how you plan and what is in reality.”

Last week, Abdalrasool had been slated to face Fethi Nourine of Algeria. The winner of the clash was to face Butbul, but Nourine pulled out of the contest before their bout in order to avoid the possibility of meeting the Israeli on the mat.

Nourine and his coach Amar Benikhlef had their Olympic accreditation withdrawn on Saturday and were sent home.

The International Judo Federation’s (IJF) executive committee announced they had temporarily suspended Nourine and Benikhlef. In response, the Algerian Olympic Committee withdrew their accreditation, and further sanctions are expected.

The IJF said Nourine’s stance was “in total opposition to the philosophy of the International Judo Federation.”

“The IJF has a strict non-discrimination policy, promoting solidarity as a key principle, reinforced by the values of judo,” it added.

“Judo sport is based on a strong moral code, including respect and friendship, to foster solidarity and we will not tolerate any discrimination, as it goes against the core values and principles of our sport.”

Speaking to an Algerian television station late Thursday, Nourine said his political support for the Palestinian cause made it impossible for him to compete against an Israeli.

“We worked a lot to reach the Olympics… but the Palestinian cause is bigger than all of this,” he said, adding that his decision was “final.”

It is not the first time Nourine has pulled out to avoid facing an Israeli opponent, after pulling a similar move at the 2019 world championships, also in Tokyo.

At the 2016 games, Egyptian judoka Islam El Shahaby quit the sport, just hours after [refusing to shake the hand](https://www.timesofisrael.com/egyptian-judoka-loses-to-israeli-refuses-to-shake-hands/) of his victorious Israeli rival Or Sasson in the first round of the men’s over-100kg competition at the Rio Olympics.

Iranian judokas have also come under fire for refusing to compete against their Israeli counterparts.

In April, the International Judo Federation [issued a four-year ban against the Iranian Judo Federation](https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-hit-with-four-year-judo-ban-for-ordering-athletes-to-avoid-israelis/) over Tehran’s demands that its athletes refuse to face Israeli opponents.

The ban was backdated to begin in September 2019, when judoka Saeid Mollaei left the Iranian team during the World Championship in Tokyo, revealing he was ordered to lose matches and withdraw from competitions to avoid facing Israelis.

Another Israeli judo medal hope, Timna Nelson-Levy, similarly made it to the quarterfinal of the women’s 57-kg contest on Monday but was defeated by Tsukasa Yoshida, one of the favorites in the competition.

She also lost her repechage bout, missing out on the bronze medal match.