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Or Sasson of Israel kisses his medal at the 2016 Rio Olympics. (Photo by: REUTERS)

Fifth medal for flagless Israel at Abu Dhabi judo Grand Slam

By ALLON SINAI
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The event has been overshadowed by a ban on Israeli judokas sporting their national flag.

Israel's judo delegation to Abu Dhabi may have been denied the right to compete under its flag, but it will return home on Sunday with five medals from the year's final Grand Slam event after Ori Sasson and Peter Paltchik claimed bronze medals in the final day of action on Saturday.

Gili Cohen and Tohar Butbul also picked up bronze medals in the capital of the United Arab Emirates, with Tal Flicker taking a gold medal in the opening day of competition on Thursday.

With Israel and the UAE not having diplomatic relations, the blue-and-white team was forced to compete under the flag of the International Judo Federation.

The organizers claimed that due to security reasons the Israelis can't have their flag on their judo uniform and instead of having ISR (Israel) by their names on the scoreboard and on their backs, they will have to take part as representatives of the IJF. For the same reason, they explained that should an Israeli win a gold medal, the national anthem would not be played.

The delegation of 12 athletes, also experienced a far from ideal preparation for the event, only arriving in Abu Dhabi via Amman, Jordan, on Tuesday, a day later than scheduled.

The judokas waited for seven hours at Ben-Gurion Airport on Monday, but returned home frustrated after being told that they can't pick up their visas in Istanbul as they were initially told.

After Flicker (men's under- 66kg competition) and Cohen (women's under-52kg) notched top-three finishes on Thursday, Butbul took bronze in the men's under-73kg event on Friday.

Coming off winning the gold medal at the Grand Prix event in Uzbekistan in his first competition since the Rio Games, Olympic bronze medalist Sasson (men's over-100kg) took another bronze on Saturday, beating Belgium's Benjamin Harmegnies in the decisive bout.

Paltchik (men's under-100kg) defeated Miklos Cirjenics of Hungary in his fight for the bronze.



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