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STORY HEADLINE: Iraqi refugee wrestler Aker Al Obaidi makes the IOC Refugee Olympic Team for Tokyo 2020

DATE: 8 June 2021
LOCATION: Austria
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: Iraq
LANGUAGE: English
Broadcast quality footage available at the IOC Newsroom: http://iocnewsroom.com

STORY SCRIPT:
Austria-based wrestler Aker Al Obaidi has been given the chance to compete at his first Olympics, for the IOC Refugee Olympic Team in Tokyo 2020.

Aker had to leave his family and flee Mosul, having to take the hazardous journey through Europe to get to Austria: “You lived in fear of war, of death, of being injured. I lived through three wars as a child. You are always afraid.”

He arrived in Austria at the age of 14, and by 17 was competing in international events. His journey has taken him to the Austrian town of Inzing in Tyrol, and the Ringer Sports Club. The Head of the Club helped him with accommodation in Inzing where he trains seven times per week, and Aker now helps local children with their training too.

Aker won bronze at the European U20 Championships in Spain in 2019. As one of 56 athletes currently supported by the IOC through the Olympic Solidarity Refugee Athlete Scholarship programme, he can take on the best wrestlers in the world at Tokyo 2020.

“You can have goals and change your life with sport,” says Aker. “The journey to Europe and other countries is not easy and once you arrive you need to get rid of the bad things you have seen. Sport can help.”

The 29-member IOC Refugee Olympic team (EOR)* initiative at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 is a continuation of the IOC’s commitment to play its part in addressing the global refugee crisis, and another opportunity to continue to convey the message of solidarity and hope to millions of refugees and internally displaced athletes around the world.

*The IOC Refugee Olympic Team will compete in Tokyo under the French acronym EOR which stands for Équipe Olympique des Réfugiés.

SHOTLIST:
00:02 Aker Al Obaidi and his training partner jogging around the gym mat
00:08 Aker stretching his neck
00:14 Aker and training partner turning somersaults on the mat
00:22 SOUNDBYTE: Aker Al Obaidi, IOC Refugee Olympic Team (EOR), Tokyo 2020, Wrestling (Greco-Roman -67kg) (English Language).
Q. How does it feel to be a member of the Refugee Olympic Team?
"It's always been a big dream. It will be a big day, a big moment, and I'll give everything when I'm on the mat. I'm in Tokyo. It was a dream and now it's reality and it's such a great feeling."

00:47 Aker and training partner tap hands before starting to wrestle
00:51 Aker throws his training partner over his shoulder
00:57 Aker throws his training partner over his shoulder again

01:05 SOUNDBYTE: Aker Al Obaidi, IOC Refugee Olympic Team (EOR), Tokyo 2020, Wrestling (Greco-Roman -67kg) (English Language).
Q. How has sport improved your life?
"Refugees, myself included, have had tough lives. When I talk about refugees, they have had hard lives. The journey to Europe or other countries is not easy. You see things. And once you arrive here, you say, "I need to get rid of those bad things." And sport, for example, can help. It doesn't matter which sport you do, but it's important to clear those negative things with a sport."

01:51 Wide shot of the mat with Aker throwing his training partner over his head
00:56 Aker throws training partner again
02:02 Aker lifts his training partner and throws him to the side

02:08 SOUNDBYTE: Aker Al Obaidi, IOC Refugee Olympic Team (EOR), Tokyo 2020, Wrestling (Greco-Roman -67kg) (English Language).
Q. Why did you leave your home country?
"I arrived in Austria when I was 14. I'm 21 now. Before the age of 15, I saw three wars in my home country. There is no opportunity for you to do anything. You live in fear of war, of death, of being injured. Not a sports injury, an injury because of the war. And that is the biggest problem I had. You are always afraid. You don't have friends. It's dangerous. You are never safe. You have no freedom. That is a huge problem. Living through three wars as a child, I think that is a huge problem."

03:07 Aker lifting a dumb bell through his legs!
03:14 Aker squatting with a bar and weights

03:20 SOUNDBYTE: Aker Al Obaidi, IOC Refugee Olympic Team (EOR), Tokyo 2020, Wrestling (Greco-Roman -67kg) (English Language).
Q. Can sport help Refugees?
"Yes, my wish is for these people is that they do good things. There are many good things a person can do. It doesn't have to be sports. Do good things, not negative things. This word and these people often have a bad reputation. That's the way it is. That is normal. That is the world we live in. And I want to tell them being a refugee is not bad. It's not a pity. You don't have to be ashamed."

04:13 Aker's coach watches as he lifts weights
04:19 Close on Aker face with weights lifted
04:23 Aker lifting his bodyweight

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