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PENTATHLON PERSONALITIES: EMILIANO HERNANDEZ (MEX) FINDS THE FAST LANE TO SUCCESS



Emiliano Hernandez is a man in a hurry. Years and years of waiting will do that to you.

The 25-year-old Mexican is off to Paris. But unlike the other 43 pentathletes who have already booked precious quota places at the 2024 Olympic Games, Hernandez is not waiting until next summer to take his talents to the French capital. Instead he will kick off Christmas week on the banks of the Seine competing in the French National Championships.

Finding room for one more trans-Atlantic trek in this hectic year is typical of Hernandez. Leaving absolutely no stone unturned in the quest for Olympic glory. For almost eight years now the determination to make it to the greatest show on Earth has burned inside Hernandez. He's determined that his Olympic debut will be one to remember.



“The main goal of going to Paris now is to feel the adrenaline and the city, to feel the people who are getting ready to have the Games,” Hernandez tells UIPM News from Mexico City before his departure to France. “But it’s also a good chance to see how pre-season and training is going in a real competition.”

Hearing Hernandez use the words ‘pre-season’ doesn’t sound quite right. Don’t you have to have some down time, a post-season perhaps, before you start a whole new one? From early March through to late October this year Hernandez gave everything in nine different elite competitions.

It was a breakthrough year by all measures. He won bronze at the UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Cup Final in Ankara (TUR) in July, followed by Central American & Caribbean (CAC) Games gold. Then he claimed a spectacular UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Championships silver medal in Bath (GBR) in August before rounding it off with a pair of golds at the 19th Pan American Games in Santiago (CHI).



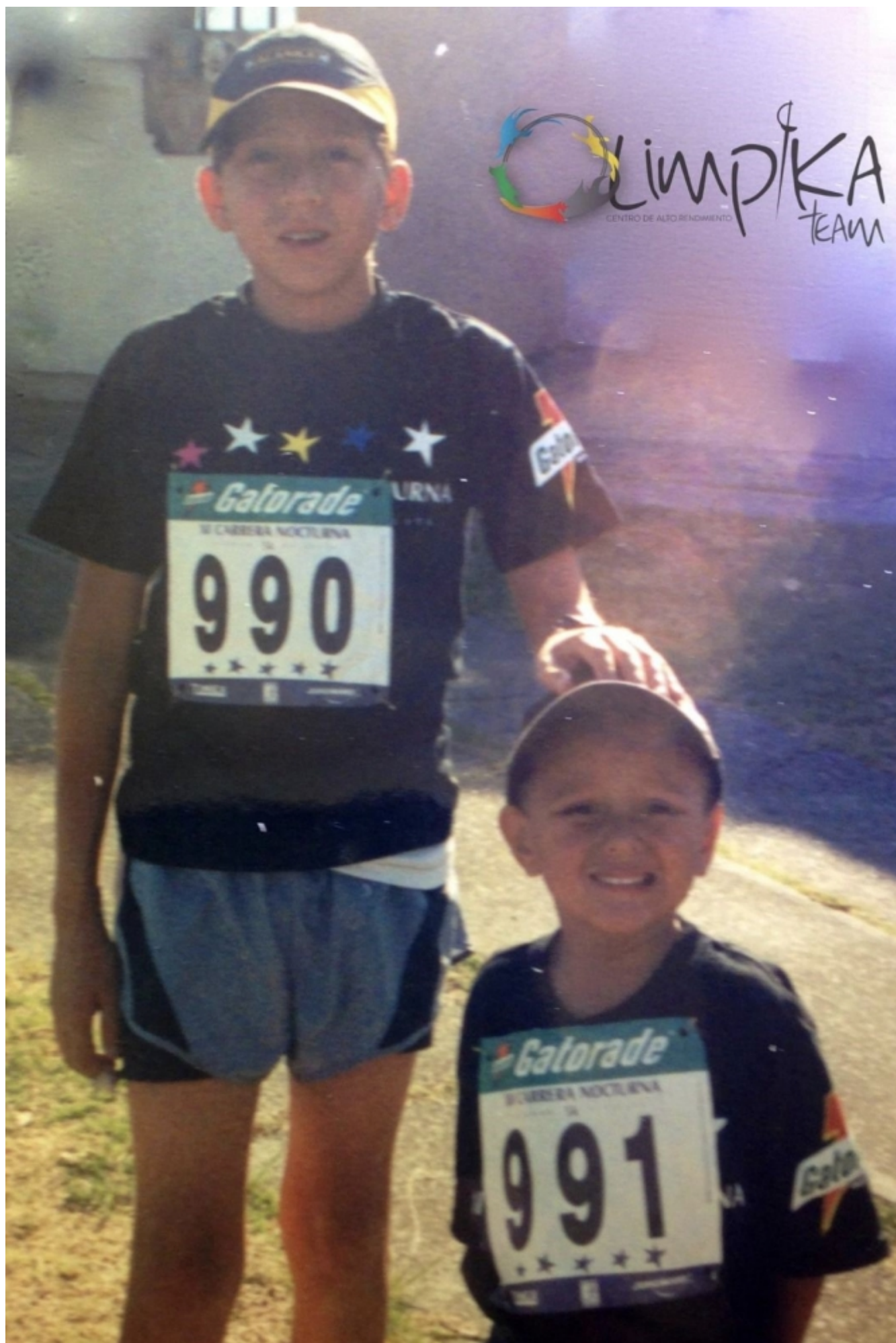
In early November Hernandez did find just a little time to rest. Where he decided to go after the best season of his career made all of the sense in the world: he travelled to the United States to see his brother, Ismael. Eight years his senior, the elder Hernandez made history at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games when he claimed bronze, the first Modern Pentathlon Olympic medal won by a Mexican. Ask the younger brother if he remembers it and you don't even get to finish the question...

"I was in Rio that day, the 20th of August 2016," smiles Emiliano. "I was near the shooting range and when I saw my brother finish his last shoot, I turned and ran the whole 400m to see Ismael get to the finish line because I knew he was going to be in the medals.



“My family has always been a very competitive family. We like challenges and a little competition. But what we respect is the family. My dad is always trying to set this line: we are a family and we are not better than each other, we are just better together.

“When I got my silver medal at the World Championships this year my brother was the same way as I was in Rio. Very happy, so supportive. But also astonished and grateful that the little brother carried the pressure forward for almost eight years, the pressure of [his] bronze medal. Everyone in the sports world knew me as the brother of Ismael. Finally now this year I am still the brother of Ismael but everyone also knows who Emiliano Hernandez is.”



They do — and they're likely to get to know him even better in 2024. That's only a good thing because Hernandez is the kind of athlete it's worth knowing and listening to. He speaks openly and honestly about his goals as well as his doubts, about those who inspire him and motivate him, his passions away from Pentathlon too. He does so just as fluently in English as Spanish. Family comes up in conversation early and often — and not just Ismael. His long-term girlfriend Karol Gonzalez, also a pentathlete, is a constant companion, whether physically by his side or on FaceTime, whether in good times or bad.

"My relationship with Karol is really a change in my life," Hernandez says. "She showed me a lot of things that I didn't see previously. I didn't enjoy life as I enjoy it now with her. At the end I believe we are the best teammates.



"She understands what it is to be training all day and only speak for 30 or 40 minutes. But when I think about her sacrifices, that's what I mean: sometimes those 30 or 40 minutes are just about me. That's a good teammate and someone I can share my life with."

His parents made sacrifices too. Father Marcelo and mother Celeste Uscanga had their sons while they were still studying, still forging a life to support the boys. Their solution to a time crunch would end up changing all of their lives.

"They needed time to finish their studies and to work and to begin building everything for our

family,” Emiliano, the baby of the family, explains. “It was difficult to look after two little ones at the same time. So they found this Pentathlon club where they left us just after school at 3pm and they would come for us at 8pm when their working day was finished. I think they found in this club, in this sport, a way they could achieve their goals of having the family they dreamed of while having their loved ones grow and develop.”

While Celeste is a doctor, Marcelo is both a salesman and a semi-professional but highly successful coach — with both Ismael and Emiliano his students. “My brother was the rabbit, the lab rabbit, the prototype,” Emiliano laughs. “Now with me, we have a more precise project!”

There’s a wider family too — Team Hernandez. The coaches, physios and nutritionists who have helped him reach this moment of delivering great performance after great performance. He speaks glowingly about all of them. “I know they support me and are really happy when the medals arrive,” he says. “They are the main reason that I run so fast in the last 600. I love to see the happiness and the joy in the eyes of everyone. It’s what keeps me pushing forward.”

Away from Pentathlon, Hernandez is an avid movie watcher. He’s kept busy studying and pursuing a Masters in Business too but there’s always room for sport. Football is an enduring passion and one which brought him to a crucial piece of the puzzle, a key addition to Team Hernandez.



“Because I love football so much, I said to myself ‘I want to be as good and as professional as the football players are’. I got in that train of thought and I found Dr Claudia [Rivas]. She is the best psychologist in sports. She has worked with the national football team, with the best club in Mexico.”

Asked what concerns or mindset changes Dr Rivas has worked on, Hernandez pointed to one which may be abundantly clear when you see him line up alongside rivals like Joseph Choong or Valentin Prades.

“The biggest doubt I always have in myself...I mean you can see it in the pictures...it’s that everyone is two metres tall in Pentathlon!” he smiles. “And I’m just one seventy with all these

people who are two heads or three heads taller than me. The doubts that I work with Dr Claudia is that Pentathlon is a sport where if you are gifted physically, it really helps. But more important is the head. That's what I have been enjoying now — the moments of pressure where you feel the real work is coming good.

"I have seen that the heart can't be measured by how tall you are. The heart is measured in every day, in every second of the training, in every day spent with your loved ones. In the end, if your loved ones love you so much, your heart is bigger and that's my main secret."

Part of that secret is out but that's the way Hernandez is, completely unafraid to speak about his strengths and his goals. Almost two years ago on his Instagram account he posted a photo of himself staring at the Eiffel Tower with the caption 'El faro de los sueños' — 'The lighthouse of dreams'.

Ask him to imagine what it will be like to float by the Parisian landmark at next summer's Opening Ceremony and he reveals he's aiming bigger than that.

"My dream is to be holding the national flag that day. I know I need to work hard in 2024 to be healthy, improving and to reach Paris in a good shape so that I can be the one holding the national flag in that river towards the Eiffel Tower for the Opening Ceremony. I'm counting down the days for that moment."

A man in a hurry.

By Joe Callaghan