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VOYAGE TO PARIS: PART XIII



Leading off: Young guns shine but number crunching points to more mature champions

As one of the world's most timeless cities, Paris is unlikely to judge anyone by their age. A place that magically mixes centuries of history with cutting-edge modernity, all are welcome. And this summer that's likely to be particularly true as the city welcomes the world for its Summer Olympic Games.

But when it comes to generation games, these are interesting times in Modern Pentathlon. The third instalment of the UIPM 2024 Pentathlon World Cup season served up an exciting flash forward to the future when Mariya Gnedtchik (AIN) and Mohamed Elgendy of Egypt stormed to the top of the podium.

Just a couple of weeks after UIPM News had sat down with the great Laura Asadauskaite to discuss her hopes of winning a third Olympic medal at 40, here were two winners with a combined age of 41. Gnedtchik is 20 and Elgendy (EGY) is just a year older.

In any year their victories on the same Super Saturday would be noteworthy but in Olympic year, ever more so, and it begs a question: could the Palace of Versailles see the coronation of young pentathlon royalty in August when Olympic medals are decided?

A place such as Paris would suggest that it's worth referring to the history books for guidance. Since the turn of the century at the Sydney Olympics there have been 12 gold medalists in Modern Pentathlon and the ages of those winners follow some pretty telling patterns.

There are two outliers: reigning women's gold medalist Kate French of Great Britain is the only one to win in her thirties, aged 30 when she triumphed in Tokyo; Lena Schoeneborn of Germany, meanwhile, is by a distance the youngest having claimed gold at Athens 2004 as a 22-year-old. Otherwise the winners are all aged in their mid-to-late 20s with half of the medalists aged either 27 or 28 at their moment of glory. The sweet spot, the data suggests, is 26.8.

As fate may have it, some of the Paris contenders fall right into that category: men's world No.2 Emiliano Hernandez of Mexico turned 26 in January while, on the women's side, Rebecca Langrehr (GER) celebrated reaching 26 last month and world No.3 Kerenza Bryson will hit that magic number just a couple of weeks after the Games.

As Paris has proved time and again, it is a city for all ages and this summer it will crunch some new numbers of its own.



Paris Pointer: IOC President remains confident the Seine can shine

April marked another small but significant step on the countdown to Paris 2024: the clock ticked into the single digits. With just over 80 days to go, the final preparations have ramped up further

still

The flowing heart of the city, the River Seine is due to play a starring role in getting the Games going with organisers having planned a spectacular Opening Ceremony along its waters. In spite of some debate over whether security concerns could prompt a change of plan, IOC President Dr Thomas Bach has assured athletes and fans that he is confident the Seine can safely shine.

"The very meticulous, very professional approach (from French authorities) gives us all the confidence that we can have this opening ceremony on the River Seine and that this opening ceremony will be iconic, will be unforgettable for the athletes, and everybody will be safe and secure," President Bach told AFP.

After the Tokyo Games were first postponed to 2021 and then played out to empty stadiums due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the IOC President is excited to restore the glory of the Games after refusing to cancel Tokyo 2020.

"The Olympic Games and the Olympic values would have disappeared from the world's attention for eight years. Eight years is too long a time and so then it would have been very difficult to revive the Olympic spirit," Bach said.

Numbers game

1,000: The number of vessels that will sail into the port of Marseille on May 8 to welcome the Olympic Torch to French soil ahead of the Games, where French swimmer Florent Manaudou will be the first torch-bearer.

Qualification latest

With the first three legs of the UIPM 2024 World Cup season already in the books, the jostling for the final 28 qualification spots for Paris 2024 is beginning to approach its crunch time.

While we still know that 44 of the 72 quota places at this summer's Games have been claimed, the plot is thickening.

Here's a reminder of who has qualified for the Games already: **Women:** Italy (2), Great Britain (2), China, Japan, Korea, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Spain, Lithuania, France, Hungary, Germany, Egypt, Australia, Czech Republic, Mexico, USA, Brazil, Ecuador and the International Athletes Team (EAI). **Men:** Egypt (2), Mexico (2), Italy, China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Kazakhstan, Great Britain, Hungary, France, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Switzerland, Australia, Ecuador, Cuba, Argentina and EAI.

Six places are on offer at the UIPM 2024 Pentathlon World Championships in June but there are 12 more through the UIPM rankings which makes the World Cup season so key for those targeting rankings points.

Full details of the Paris 2024 qualification process can be found at uipmworld.org/olympic-games.