

19 DEC 2023

2023 IN REVIEW: FIVE THINGS WE LEARNED FROM AN ACTION-PACKED SEASON



As 2023 gets ever nearer to its close, elite pentathletes across the world have already put it behind them and begun the hard work towards 2024.

Such are the multisport demands that those at the centre of it all have little time to take a breath and reflect. With an Olympic Games on the schedule for next year, the stakes are higher than ever and timelines are now crunched tighter than before.

But that doesn't mean the rest of us cannot take a look back at what was an action-packed, drama-filled and truly consequential year for UIPM sports. The most fitting approach might be for us to take five...so here we go, with five highlights from 2023.

1. It's Forza Azzurri as Micheli leads Italian renaissance

The season began with expectations of Michelle Gulyas of Hungary and close friend Elena Micheli of Italy continuing a rivalry that lit up much of 2022, but in fact Micheli (ITA) emphatically established herself as the dominant individual in Women's Modern Pentathlon.

The 24-year-old claimed the first quota qualification place for Paris when she triumphed in the UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Cup Final and then backed it in stunning style at the UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Championships in Bath (GBR).

It's been 36 years since Italy, once a prolific presence on the Olympic podium, last won a Pentathlon medal at the Games but next summer Micheli won't carry Azzurri hopes alone. Her experienced compatriot Alice Sotero (ITA) enjoyed a storming season of her own, winning European Games gold and Olympic qualification and ensuring the year ends with an Italian 1-2 in the World Rankings.

Gulyas (HUN) wasn't at her scintillating best consistently but still claimed Pentathlon World Cup gold in Cairo (EGY) and silver at home in Budapest (HUN). Discounting her would be foolish in the extreme. Great Britain's depth of talent was clear as Kerenza Bryson (GBR) burst into Olympic contention on the back of a stellar year.

Europeans occupy the first nine places in the rankings, with the increasingly consistent Mariana Arceo of Mexico in 10th, but there's no doubt that the Italians are the ones to catch.



2. Olympic favourites headline the form book

The season before an Olympic Games year can provide something of a crystal ball for how things are shaping up. Yet 2023 mostly saw those at the business end of men's competitions crystallise

their reputations as big-game hunters.

The year ends with Mohanad Shaban of Egypt and Joseph Choong of Great Britain together dominating the World Rankings and Emiliano Hernandez of Mexico in third. Those positions pass the eye test: for a start at both the UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Cup Final and the UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Championships, the trans-continental triumvirate locked down the medal positions.

Shaban (EGY) and Choong (GBR), particularly, enjoyed a gripping rivalry and the reigning Olympic gold medallist would have ended the year atop the rankings if not for a dramatic fall on a slippery sprint finish in Ankara which enabled Shaban to win gold and take the first Paris 2024 quota place.

But behind these three there are plenty of others who will be targeting prizes in Paris, not least the other medalists from Tokyo 2020. Woongtae Jun of Korea was seemingly in constant contention during his competition season while Ahmed Elgendy (EGY) showed his injury woes are firmly behind him, even if his younger brother Mohamed is keeping him on his toes!

Hungary's Csaba Bohm finished inside the top 10 all year while French hopes of a home winner remain strong with Valentin Prades' UIPM 2023 Pentathlon World Cup Sofia triumph a timely reminder of his class. The Olympic clock is ticking and the big guns look primed to deliver.



3. History clears a significant Obstacle

The Egyptian city of Alexandria has a monumental history and it saw a little more in July when Obstacle was integrated into Modern Pentathlon for the first time at global level.

At the UIPM 2023 U17 World Championships, the best emerging global talent got to grips with the Fencing/Obstacle/Swimming/Laser Run format that will be adopted at all levels of the sport after

the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. It proved an instant and emphatic hit with competitors as well as the watching public.

Further integrations at the UIPM U19 World Championships in Istanbul (TUR) later in July and the UIPM 2023 Junior World Championships in Druskininkai (LTU) in September confirmed that the Obstacle integration has ushered in a new, dynamic era.



4. Los Angeles added to the roll of honour

In mid-October it was made official: Modern Pentathlon's unbroken run of featuring at every Summer Olympic Games since its introduction by Baron Pierre de Coubertin in 1912 will continue through to Los Angeles in 2028.

At the 141st Session of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Mumbai (IND), IOC Members backed the Executive Board's proposal and voted to confirm Modern Pentathlon on the LA28 programme.

Having worked tirelessly to meet the challenge of the IOC President to carry out 'critical reform' and find a replacement for Riding as one of Modern Pentathlon's five disciplines, UIPM's successful integration of Obstacle proved to be a key factor in the decision.

"Today, we can say with absolute confidence that Coubertin's legacy is safe thanks to the faith in our movement communicated by the 141st IOC Session here in Mumbai," said UIPM President Dr Klaus Schormann.

5. Asia rising at an ever-faster speed



That

the final major event of the 2023 calendar took place in gorgeous sunshine in Asia at the UIPM 2023 Biathlon-Triathlon World Championships felt fitting. The continent has been a region of consistent growth for UIPM Sports for some time but this was a year of acceleration.

From the continent's Southeast to its Middle East and Far East, both interest and investment have been booming. The Southeast Asian Championships in Pattaya (THA), much like the Biathlon-Triathlon World Championships held in Bali (INA), proved to be hugely successful events attracting young athletes from across the region. As many as 12 Asian countries hosted Global Laser Run City Tour events this year.

Meanwhile construction began on the stunning UIPM Asia-Pacific Development Centre in Kunming (CHN). The state-of-the-art and sustainable facility for training and competition was visited by UIPM leadership in March with phase one of the project planned for completion by 2025. And it won't be long before the eyes of the Pentathlon world turn to Asia again, with the inaugural UIPM Open Middle East Asia Championships coming soon in Kuwait City (KUW) followed by the flagship UIPM 2024 Pentathlon and Laser Run World Championships in Zhengzhou (CHN) in June.