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# TAKE FIVE: UIPM 2026 PENTATHLON WORLD CUP PAZARDZHIK



It's the second event of the second season of an Olympic cycle, and several of the world's top pentathletes are rejoining the action as they set their sights on LA28. UIPM 2026 Pentathlon World Cup Pazardzhik sees two Korean Olympic heroes coming back to tackle the new-look Pentathlon with Obstacle racing, while new athletes are emerging from different multisport origins all the time.

## 1) Jun (KOR) begins his quest for LA28

While the Olympic Games is the crest of a wave for pentathletes, it can also be the moment when dreams come crashing down. 'Crestfallen' is the only word to describe the way **Woongtae Jun** looked in the aftermath of the Men's Final at Paris 2024.

A bronze medallist at Tokyo 2020, held three years earlier, and bronze medallist at the UIPM 2024 Pentathlon World Championships in Zhengzhou (CHN), the Korean was in the prime of his career and one of the firm favourites for podium glory in front of the Palace of Versailles.

Indeed, even at the beginning of the Laser Run there was nothing to suggest Jun would miss out

on that coveted second Olympic medal. But somehow his aim and his legs let him down, and more decisive athletes pushed past and left him in 6th.

For the better part of a decade, Jun had been part of the furniture of Men's Finals during the Pentathlon World Cup season. And now he is back.

Twelve years have passed since his World Cup debut in Chengdu (CHN) in 2014. Fittingly, he was a contender from the get-go, finishing 9th. Remarkably, Jun (KOR) would win six World Cup gold medals across six seasons in the years to come – in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2021, 2022 and 2023.

He was also a prolific relay medallist alongside fellow Korean titans, most recently **Changwan Seo** and **Seungmin Seong**, who are also on the entry list as part of a formidable Korean team for UIPM 2026 Pentathlon World Cup Pazardzhik from May 13-17.

Jun, who participated in UIPM's first official Obstacle Test Event in Ankara (TUR) in 2022, is back in the mix, aiming to prove he can match up against a bold new generation aiming to own the road to Los Angeles 2028, where he could make a fourth Olympic appearance aged 32. It would be foolish to doubt him.

## 2) Bryson back in the swing of things

In the days before this season's curtain-raiser in the Egyptian capital, UIPM News had speculated that 2026 could be the season of comebacks. Well, things are about to kick up on a notch on that front as the action moves to Europe.

Many in the women's field will be keeping a close eye on one familiar name returning to the start line. A star of 2023 and 2024, **Kerenza Bryson** is making her return to the elite end of the sport for the first time since the Paris Olympics.



Typically, Bryson hasn't spent much time standing still in the interim. A qualified doctor and

reserve officer in the British Army, Bryson is a do-it-all and it's worth remembering just how prolific the 27-year-old was during the last Pentathlon cycle.

Between February 2023 and the Paris 2024 Olympics, Bryson entered 12 events and finished top 10 in every single one, finishing on the podium in seven of those. She also won the first Pentathlon World Cup gold medal of her career on Bulgarian soil in Sofia in 2023.

Like so many of those from the previous cycle feeling their way into this new era, getting a look at how Bryson has got to grips with Obstacle will be fascinating, but her track record tells us to expect her to be more than competitive.

### 3) Comebacks add to the well of talent

It's a sign of the depth of talent in women's Pentathlon that with the world No.1 and Olympic champion absent - Farida Khalil is nursing an injury, while Michelle Gulyas is saving herself for the next event at home in Budapest - the World Cup start line is still brimming with talent.

**Blanka Guzi** took the season's first gold medal in Cairo but will be well aware of the threat of Seong, the Paris 2024 Olympic bronze medalist who was a contender for much of last season, Seong, making her first appearance of the 2026 campaign.

Let's throw one more serial threat into the mix: **Gintare Venckauskaite**. The Lithuanian veteran also hasn't been seen since the epic Olympic Final in Versailles nearly two years ago. A three-time Olympian and World Cup Final gold medallist two seasons ago, the 33-year-old Laser Run specialist finished 7th in Paris and is now back for more. She'll find herself in the thick of a hugely talented field.



### 4) Mohamed (EGY) looks to extend rampant run

The reigning men's Olympic champion, Ahmed Elgendy, was onsite in Cairo last month to see his



compatriot **Moutaz Mohamed** begin 2026 exactly as he had left off last year – scorching away from the rest of the field.

Mohamed is on a blistering gold rush, having won all five individual elite events he has entered since April 2025.

Elgendy gave signal that he hopes to be back later this year, and in the newer, more dynamic format debuted in Cairo, Mohamed didn't exactly have it all his own way, pushed hard to the line by **Mathis Rochat** and **Mihaly Koleszar**.

With 30+ nations and every continent represented in Pazardzhik, Mohamed will face a literal world of rivals ready to bring his rampant run to an end. Their task may be daunting, but the challenge of catching the world No.1 is enticing.

## 5) From HYROX and Ironman they come

With five disciplines rolling into one unique sport, we know that the pathways leading athletes into Pentathlon are wide and wonderful. The second World Cup of the 2026 season will provide plenty of fresh evidence of that.

From a three-strong **Australia** delegation, **Calypso Sheridan** is the sole female competitor but is no stranger to holding her own in high-stakes sporting environments. The 27-year-old was recently crowned Asia-Pacific champion in HYROX, the gruelling fitness racing phenomenon. Sheridan was formerly an elite swimmer at US collegiate level and at junior international level for Australia.

As host nation of the next Olympic Games, the **United States** continues to grow its talent pool with nine competitors in Pazardzhik. Among them is **Michael Arishita**, who has previously been a professional Triathlete and Ironman competitor, racing internationally dozens of times in the World Triathlon circuit, Super League Triathlon, and Ironman races.

His compatriot **Yu Hannah Kim** will get her first taste of elite UIPM competition, having only taken up the sport two years ago. The 40-year-old mother of three has said on social media that she "used to joke: if there were a sport that combined parkour and swimming, I'd do it in a heartbeat". Just 15 months after joining the US national team programme, Kim will make her World Cup debut.

***By Joe Callaghan***