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UIPM 2026 PENTATHLON WORLD CUP PAZARDZHİK: STELLAR SEO (KOR) RETURNS TO WINNING WAYS IN GRIPPING MEN'S FINAL



Changwan Seo of **Korea** held off a rocketing finish from **Matej Lukes** of **Czechia** as the Men's Final at UIPM 2026 Pentathlon World Cup Pazardzhik provided a fittingly frenetic end to an eventful week in Bulgaria.

With plenty of attention on his prolific compatriot **Woongtae Jun** (KOR) returning to elite action this week, it was Seo (KOR) who showed all of his own experience and fight as he took his first individual gold medal at World Cup level for over two years.

Lukes (CZE) made light of a heavy fall in Obstacle to reel in a near-50sec gap with a stunning Laser Run performance with **Mathis Rochat** of **France** taking bronze after a superb all-round performance in a final which lived up to its billing.

There was late heartbreak for **Mohamed El Asqar** of **Egypt** who had shattered the Obstacle world record for the third time in the space of a week and led proceedings for much of the Laser Run before taking a heavy fall on the final 600m lap.

Yuang Ma of **China** used some Fencing heroics as a springboard to a satisfying 4th place with El Ashqar (EGY) in fifth and Paris 2024 Olympic bronze medalist **Giorgio Malan** of **Italy** cracking the top six thanks to a great Laser Run.

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Fencing

The action got off to a startling start when Ma (CHN) caused a sensation in Fencing, battling his way from the Round of 32 all the way to a most unlikely victory.

Obstacle specialist El Ashqar (EGY) had shown his prowess on the piste when he secured pole position with 24V in the seeding round, three more than 2nd seed **Jean-Baptiste Mourcia** (FRA).

But almost from the off, 15th seed Ma (CHN) flipped the script, seeing off **Denis Agavriloaie** (ITA) and then showing no nerves but unerring accuracy as he upset Mourcia (FRA) 5-2 in the Top 16. He then beat **Fernand Mitterand** of **Germany** to race into the Top 4.

He knew he would face a foe from Korea because we were served a compelling Top 8 clash between two men who know each other better than anyone else. Seo (KOR), with priority, went up against Jun (KOR) and made it count, winning an intriguing tactical battle 2-1.

Rochat (FRA) comprehensively saw off El Ashqar (EGY) then squeezed past compatriot **Valentin Belaud** (FRA) to book a Top 2 showdown with Ma (CHN) who was delighting his teammates in the stands as he saw off Seo (KOR).

Ma (CHN) saved his best for last as he made the decisive blow in a cat-and-mouse clash with Rochat (FRA) with just 4.9sec left to win 4-3.

Obstacle

After a week when records tumbled on the Obstacle course, there was anticipation that there could be one more burst of fireworks. It duly arrived when El Ashqar (EGY) shaved five-hundredths of a second off his own world record, blazing through in 18.33sec to move firmly back into contention after his early Fencing exit.

From younger talents to veteran campaigners, the standard was sky high across the 70m course with half of the field going sub-25. Italian trio Agavriloaie, **Matteo Bovenzi** and Malan were among the seven fastest with Seo (KOR) not far behind them.

Ma (CHN) took his momentum into the second discipline as a brilliant race against Rochat (FRA) saw both men finish neck and neck in sub-22.

In a shake-up for the remainder of the competition Lukes (CZE) suffered a heavy fall, while the returning Jun (KOR) saw his competition come to an end as he watched El Ashqar (EGY) disappear into the distance.

Swimming

With more at stake in the pool this year, Bovenzi (ITA) rocketed up the standings with a blistering performance in the second heat. His time of 52.18sec was almost three seconds faster than the field.

Hunting a precious first Pentathlon World Cup medal in his eighth appearance, El Ashqar (EGY) was third-fastest in 55.72 with Rochat a half second behind.

These exploits ensured a jam-packed start to proceedings in the Laser Run with just 4sec separating leader Rochat (FRA) from El Ashqar (EGY) and Ma (CHN) with a 14sec gap back to the rest. The spectre of serial podium performer Seo (KOR) loomed in 5th. Fully 49sec back, a challenge from Lukes (CZE) looked most unlikely.

Laser Run

Rochat (FRA) led the field out but as quickly as the first shoot the order had already flipped. El Ashqar (EGY) started in fine form at the range to take the lead but it was a 9.96sec shoot from Seo (KOR) which caught the eye.

The swirling winds and cooler temperatures which had been a factor in the Women's Final were still present in the afternoon but the leading contenders were knuckling down so impressively. El Ashqar (EGY) reeled off an 8.46sec shoot on his second visit with Seo (KOR) moving into second, now just 13sec back.

Rochat (FRA) was staying neck and neck with his more experienced rival in the medal battle. Ma (CHN) wasn't wilting in the limelight but behind him Lukes (CZE) had already begun his slice through the field, jumping three places into the extended podium positions by the halfway mark but clearly hunting more.

Having eaten a further 7sec into the lead of El Ashqar (EGY) on the third shoot Seo (KOR) looked to be keeping a little in reserve and made his decisive move on the final shoot as nerves finally got the better of the long-time leader.

Seo (KOR) flung his cap to one side and set off from the range in front with Rochat (FRA) in pursuit with El Ashqar (EGY), Ma (CHN) and Lukes (CZE) bunched behind them. On a tight track, Lukes (CZE) was about to launch an attack on El Ashqar (EGY) when the big Egyptian took a heavy fall.

Lukes (CZE) didn't look back as he powered past Rochat (FRA) and then stalked Seo (KOR) who could surely feel his younger rival breathing over his left shoulder. The finish line came just in time for the Korean who savoured a sweet victory by a mere half-second, Rochat (FRA) content with bronze.

Unsurprisingly, Lukes (CZE) clocked the quickest Laser Run time of the day, his 10:00 the fastest

by over 13sec on the rest of the field, **Kivanc Tasyaran** of **Türkiye** the only competitor to get within 25sec of Lukes' (CZE) mark.

- UIPM 2026 Pentathlon World Cup Pazardzhik: All you need to know

Watch and follow

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