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A FANTASTIC BATTLE DURING THE WOMEN'S QUALIFICATION IN BATH



BATH, ENGLAND - Germany's Lena Schoneborn and Lithuania's Laura Asadauskaite, the reigning World and Olympic champions respectively, are among the 36 qualifiers for Sunday's Modern Pentathlon European Championships women's final at the University of Bath. All four British athletes also safely negotiated Friday's qualifiers, including London 2012 Olympic silver-medallist Samantha Murray and Francesca Summers, the newly-crowned World Junior Champion. Schoneborn – who has already won gold this week in the women's team relay – crossed the line first in Group A alongside Hungary's Tamara Alekszejev, with 2015 World Cup Final winner Asadauskaite just a second back in third. A blanket finish to Group B saw all 12 automatic qualifiers cross the line within a couple of seconds of each other, with the top three places going to Hungary's Zsolia Foldhazi, Anastasiya Prokopenko of Belarus and Poland's Oktawia Nowacka. Schoneborn may have recorded the joint highest score of 1032 points on the day but she was far from pleased. "I am glad I have qualified but it was not a very good performance today," said Schoneborn. "My fencing was not good and my swim was very poor, so I am looking forward to Sunday to improve it." Alekszejev was happier with her performance, saying: "It was very good overall – I hope the final is like today. "The fencing was very good, the swimming not so good but the run and shoot went very well and I'm happy." Anna Burkak of Russia and Poland's Anna

Maliszewska completed the top five, with the latter saying: "I am very happy with my shooting because I have had problems before. "Today everything was great, which meant my run did not have to be so fast. The final should be good." Eighth-placed Iryna Prasiantsova of Belarus said: "I'm happy to qualify but hope that all of the events then will be better than in the semi-final. "I want to concentrate better during the fencing and want to have a better performance in the swimming and running." Home favourite Murray is also confident she will be able to step on in Sunday's final. "Semi-finals are strange events," she said. "Sometimes you struggle to tap into what you are trying to do but the goal for today was getting qualification, that was it." Hungary's Foldhazi was one of three athletes to record a winning score of 1030 points in Group B after a near-faultless shooting display in the combined event. "It was one of the best performances of my life, I can't believe it!" she beamed. "I hope in the final it will be the same results, but it's a new day." Prokopenko, who crossed the line alongside Foldhazi and Poland's Nowacka, said: "I am happy and looking forward to Sunday. The competition went well, especially the swimming which is my best event." Nowacka added: "After fencing I was 11th which is not good for me but I am a strong distance runner. "I think I'm feeling positive about Sunday, it's always better for me to try and be positive. I hope it will be great." Like Schoneborn, Asadauskaite and Murray, Russia's Donata Rimsaite has already set the Olympic qualification standard through a fourth-placed finish at last month's World Championships and she looked impressive again in qualification. "I'm just looking for another good individual result on Sunday and if I can get on the podium that would be perfect," she said after placing fifth in Group B. "I had a little trouble with my shooting in the second and third rounds but that was my own fault and I can sort that out before the final." Annika Schleu, who partnered Schoneborn to women's team relay gold on Wednesday, will also contest Sunday's final where eight Olympic qualification places are up for grabs. "After disappointment at the World Championships in my hometown of Berlin, I am looking forward to making it better here," she said. "I am not too worried about where I finished today. The most important bit is that I qualified for the final." Britain's Kate French and Freyja Prentice also progressed through Group B, giving the home nation a full complement of women's finalists. They are back in action on Sunday but it is the turn of the men to go for glory on Saturday. Tickets have sold out for both finals over the weekend, meaning there will be plenty of support for the athletes as they seek not only medals but also a Rio 2016 Olympic qualification place. *How the day unfolded* Laura Asadauskaite, Lena Schoneborn and Samantha Murray all competed in a very strong Group A, whose day started with the fencing. Despite the number of highly regarded athletes fighting in the group, it was Latvia's Elena Rublevska who topped the table after 13 rounds with an impressive 20 victories under her belt. Hungary's Tamara Alekszejev also demonstrated her strong fencing ability by finishing second above Asadauskaite. Olympic Champion Asadauskaite dominated her swimming heat, setting a decent time of 2:22:94 to finish just ahead of Poland's Anne Maliszewska and Britain's Francesca Summers. Schoneborn struggled in her heat but Samantha Murray set the fastest time in the group, clocking 2:10:19 to mitigate for her weaker fencing earlier in the day. Lithuania's Ieva Serapinaite held a seven-second lead going into the combined event but by the second shoot, it was Alekszejev who held a narrow advantage over Asadauskaite and Schoneborn. The three stayed well ahead of the pack for the duration of the run/shoot, with Alekszejev producing a brilliant final shoot which allowed her to reclaim first place. She went on to cross the line alongside Schoneborn. Action was definitely in full supply at the London 2012 Legacy Pool where qualification Group B began their day with the 200m swim. The home crowd were happy to see Freyja Prentice win her heat with a good time of 2:22:79 but Elodie Clouvel of France became the overall leader by claiming a clear-water victory in her heat in a fantastic time of 2:09:48. Clouvel continued her fine form in the fencing, recording 20 wins from 26 bouts to finish joint top of the rankings with Belarus's Katsiaryna Arol. Those stellar performances gave Clouvel a 33-second lead going into the combined event. However, she timed out on her first visit to the shooting range and was reeled in by the rest of the field. Hungarian competitors have been in fine form in the combined event at this year's European Championships, so it was no surprise to see Zsolt

Foldhazi shoot rapidly and accurately to open up a strong lead. This meticulous and controlled performance was enhanced by her faultless shooting in the next two shoots and Foldhazi was able to ease off in the closing stages. Determination for a place in the final sparked the remaining women as they all sped up to reach the finish line in a pack. *Source: Pentathlon GB Picture credits: Phil Searle*