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UIPM 2018 JUNIOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS: ITALY PREPARE TO FIGHT FOR THEIR TITLES



Italy were the standout nation 12 months ago and their best under-23 pentathletes will be aiming to match or improve on their medal haul this week at the UIPM 2018 Junior World Championships.

The 'Azzurri' won a stunning six medals, including three golds, at the 2017 championships in Székesfehérvár (HUN) and three of last year's medallists – **Aurora Tognetti**, **Elena Micheli** and **Matteo Cicinelli** (ITA) – return this year hoping for more of the same.

With more than 170 athletes representing 29 nations, it promises to be another thrilling exhibition of high-class pentathlon with medals distributed between countries and continents.

In the Women's Individual event, two-time champion Kim Sunwoo of Korea is no longer eligible so 2017 silver medallist Tognetti (ITA) and bronze medallist **Adelina Ibatullina** of **Russia** will be among the women to beat.

However, perhaps the favourite for gold will be **Ilke Ozyuksel** of **Turkey**, the No.1 junior athlete and a woman who is currently ranked 12 on the senior list.

Rio 2016 Olympian **Ozyuksel** (TUR), European junior champion and a Pentathlon World Cup medallist in 2018, has a stunning Laser-Run and will be a threat to anyone who holds a slender lead over her at that stage of the competition.

Ibatullina (RUS) is ranked No.2 in the junior list, with compatriot **Kseniia Fraltsova** (RUS) at No.3 and **Tognetti** and **Micheli** (ITA) ranked No.5 and No.6 respectively.

There will be huge local interest in the Men's Individual category, with No.2-ranked **Marek Grycz** of the **Czech Republic** aiming to go one better than his silver medal from 2017.

Reigning champion Daniele Colasanti (ITA) is not here to defend his title but last year's bronze medallist **Cicinelli** (ITA) may be among the contenders.

He is currently ranked No.10 in the junior standings, with No.1-ranked **Jean-Baptiste Mourcia** of **France** aiming to add to the Mixed Relay bronze he won in 2017 with **Lisa Riff**, who also returns. Another male athlete to watch out for is **Balasz Szep** of **Hungary**, who won a stunning bronze medal at Pentathlon World Cup Los Angeles in April.

Among the other 2017 medallists on the entry list for 2018 are **Sophia Hernandez** of **Guatemala**, **Ivan Khamtsou** of **Belarus**, the Spain duo of **Joan Gispert** and **Luis Shivel** and **Korea** athletes **So Hyunseok** and **Seo Changwan**.

Hungary have sent 13 athletes and there are also likely to be strong challenges from **Egypt**, **China**, **Japan**, **Germany** and **Great Britain**, while **Argentina** will be represented by talented teenagers **Martina Armanazqui** and **Franco Serrano**, who recently became the first athletes formally selected for the 2018 Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires.

UIPM President Dr Klaus Schormann said: "I hope everyone will enjoy an exciting competition in this beautiful Bohemian city. There is a long tradition in the Czech Republic of UIPM competitions being organized professionally and always with wonderful hospitality.

"I ask all of the competing athletes to remember their responsibility to showcase our historic core Olympic sport with a spirit of fair play. I know they will perform at a high level and I wish all them a successful competition and hope they will take away great memories of Kladno.

"Let us enjoy these exciting days together in a spirit of peace, friendship and harmony and support the legacy of our founder, Pierre de Coubertin."

The championships begin on July 31 with the Women's Relay, followed by the Men's Relay on August 1. Individual qualifying then takes place ahead of the Women's Individual Final on August 4 and Men's Individual Final on August 5, with the Mixed Relay closing the event on August 6.

All results will be available at the [UIPM website](#) and updates will be published on the UIPM's [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) pages.