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PENTATHLON STORIES COMPETITION WINNER: EMILIANO HERNANDEZ (MEX) – ‘WALKING WITH GIANTS’



Walking with giants a story of Emiliano Hernández

My whole life in this sport has been a roller-coaster of emotions. As all my fellow pentathletes can certify, success is not always a straight line in our sport. Losing your temper in fencing or having a wrong turn while riding can have catastrophic consequences. But this beautiful sport also brings us joy, helps us grow, and fuels our wildest dreams of glory.

It's in the magical world of pentathlon where my story takes place. The date, July 12th, 2019. The competition, the Junior World Championships Drzonkow 2019. The objective, glory. It was my "last dance" in the junior category.

The Pentathlon "Family"

Modern Pentathlon is all about teamwork between clubs, colleagues, and coaches. Traveling and having your coaches in a competition is an advantage that you need to use. Unfortunately, in that competition, my coaches were unable to go. It was just me, with no one on my corner against multiple hungry lions looking for victory. An enormous Lukas Gutkowski, who qualified to the Olympics a couple of weeks before, an incredible Ahmed El Gendy, ranked 1st on the senior world ranking at that time, and other athletes looking to make history for their country. All of us were there on the battlefield, carrying on the legend of Napoleon's officer.

I started my last junior competition with an excellent fencing. I remember every touch, every bout, but overall, enjoying and living every match as if it would be the last one. The desire to get a good position in this event was high. Still, my mind and my body understood that living the moment was the only thing that mattered. I was satisfied with the result since it allowed me to fight for the world title.

I have surveyed a couple of athletes about this, and the pool in Dronkow offers mixed reviews. For me, this pool adds a degree of complexity to the swimming event. Imagine swimming on a river against the current and now add 3 days of competition. That is how rough it is to swim in that particular pool. Still, I was determined to make a great event. A good time could take me a step closer to my goal. They called us to the calling room. At that moment, you could feel everybody's nervousness. Nobody spoke; the athletes prepared, stretched, and circled their arms. Me, I tried to breathe in, deeply and slowly. When they called us to the starting block, I knew what I needed to do. I jumped out of the block swimming as if my life was depending on it. I made every stroke, every kick as fast and as accurately as possible. After stretching my whole body to touch the wall after that last stroke, I knew that I've done it. My effort and energy had been fruitful. I was in 8th place after two events, and my favorite sports were ahead.

My 8th place allowed me to compete in the second round. I could see how my horse behaved and acted with the rider before me. Fortunately, Rashad Sherif, a good friend from Egypt, had the privilege to ride the horse before me. He rode 273 points. That was not a terrible ride in this competition but not good enough to keep in the fight. I paid attention to every detail while he was riding. I tried to examine every detail, every inch of his parkour, and see where I might be able to fix some turns or jumps to get a higher score. I decided to pace down the horse and go in a slower rhythm so the horse could jump higher and avoid knocking down the obstacles. We did an excellent job. The score, 286. Only two knockdowns. The result took me all the way up into 4th place. I had the opportunity to start the laser-run in a place unknown by any other Mexican since that day.

I knew what needed to be done. I was about to start the last event of the day—my last laser run as a junior. I was starting the competition in 4th place, just 16 seconds behind 1st place. It was a dream scenario, with plenty of action yet to come. My fencing coach, Vahag Agorashvili, an expert athlete, and an Olympic medalist, called me. He told me that the thunderstorm was coming but that we were ready to bring the fight on. At the starting line, I looked at all of them. They were

my friends, my colleagues, but all of us were also a pack of hungry lions at that moment. All of us looking for a place on the podium.

I enjoyed the laser-run as never before. From the 1st shooting round until the last, I was between 2nd and 3rd. I wondered if that's the same feeling Aleksander Lesun, Patrick Douge, or Valentin Belaud feel in every competition. Being able to compete for the medals, being followed by the TV and commentators. In the end, my last shooting round was 17 seconds. It was a bit high when you consider that the other 3 athletes next to me shot in 8 seconds; nevertheless, I did what every pentathlete would have done. I run with my heart and with my legs. I knew that I needed to finish strong. Every stride got me closer to the finish line. After I crossed it, I had mixed feelings. I was sad about not being able to earn a place on the podium. Still, I was grateful because this competition allowed me to learn more about myself.

The story's moral is as follows:

- 1) With or without coaches, as pentathletes, we are bound to give our best from the first bout until the last stride.
- 2) A call can make a difference, even if you are 10,000 miles away.
- 3) Always celebrate your colleagues' success. At the end of the day, life is about learning, growing, and laughing with your friends. PS. That was the "last dance" as a Junior for what will come will be the first of many dances as a Senior. Onwards and upwards, see you in 2021.

