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## TAKE 5: PENTATHLON IN 2026



### 1) From cradle to course

The first year of a new Olympic cycle can often be a period of flux. Veterans of the previous quad take a breather to rest, recover and reassess. As elite Pentathlon jumped into its dynamic new era in 2025, it was understandable that so many stars from the most recent cycle took a step back before jumping right in.

However, 2026 looks set to be a fascinating season of returns for so many leading lights of the Paris 2024 Olympic run. Whether returning from a career break, injury recovery or wonderful life changes like childbirth, there is a host of big names primed to swing into things all over again this year.

**Elodie Clouvel** of **France** hopes to emulate her partner **Valentin Belaud** and reiterate that Obstacle can be mastered by the veterans as well as the new generation. Paris 2024 saw Clouvel win a second Olympic medal with the sweetest silver. In 2025 she gave birth to a daughter, Sasha. Now she has set her sights on a remarkable fifth Olympic Games appearance in 2028.

“I know the road ahead will be difficult. Coming back, rebuilding, performing in a sport that has changed... It takes work, patience, and desire. I still have it,” Clouvel wrote on Instagram.

“My energy is different, new, stronger, more powerful. Because now, I'm not just doing it for myself... I'm doing it for her too. I'm passionate, motivated, determined. And I want to see how far I can go.”

Fellow new Pentathlon mom **Elena Micheli** of **Italy** has also posted updates from the pool and trackside, hinting that the two-time world champion may be on the way back too. Knowing that she has three compatriots in the same post-natal comeback situation – **Alessandra Frezza**, **Francesca Tognetti** and **Irene Prampolini** – means the first battle will be to make the Italian team.



It's natural for Olympians to take a break in the first year after their all-consuming Games experience – and one of the Paris 2024 competitors returning to the circuit is former world No.1 and European champion **Kerenza Bryson** of **Great Britain**.

Others will inevitably follow, and watching the doyennes of the Paris era adapt to the new challenges of the road to Los Angeles promises to be essential viewing. Not that the newest members of their families will understand the intricacies of a five-discipline sport.

## 2) Comeback kings

The hot stove debate around comebacks isn't just happening on the women's side of the sport. For the men too, this season is likely to provide some captivating returns, and it will be intriguing to see who adapts best to the new 100m Swimming distance and the addition of a fifth shoot in Laser Run.

Reigning Olympic gold medallist **Ahmed Elgendy** of **Egypt** underwent another shoulder surgery in

Germany in late November 2025, which he hopes will help him on the “long run to the Los Angeles Olympics”. How his recovery progresses will dictate when we see the champion reappear. His brother, former world silver medallist **Mohamed Elgendy** (EGY), is another star expected to return to the sport in the coming months.



Meanwhile the news from Asia signals that one of the men who shared the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games podium with Elgendy (EGY), Woongtae Jun of Korea, is another to have returned to training. A ferocious competitor and prolific medallist, the return of Jun (KOR) would serve to add even more intrigue to the season to come.?

Indeed, the last time we saw the great Jun (KOR) on the podium was the 2024 Pentathlon World Championships in Zhengzhou (CHN), alongside Hungary 1-2 Csaba Bohm and Balazs Szep, both of whom will have their own podium targets in the second season of Obstacle at elite level.

### 3) Prepare for a world of welcomes

The first month of the year is as good a time as any to go the drawer and double-check that one's passport is up to date and has enough room for the stamps to come in the season ahead.

The UIPM calendar is jam-packed for some globe-trotting with gatherings of the best and brightest in the sport peppered throughout 2026.

The UIPM Pentathlon World Cup season will kick off in April amid the historic surrounds of the Egyptian capital of Cairo, before stops in Pazardzhik (BUL) and beautiful Budapest (HUN).

The undoubted highlight of the 2025 campaign was the spectacular production that took place in the Lithuanian city of Kaunas, where the UIPM Pentathlon World Championships went indoors to spectacular effect, the Zalgiris Arena a cauldron of noise, colour and sporting excellence.

We won't have to wait long to return to Kaunas (LTU), which will host the combined UIPM Pentathlon Junior World Championships and UIPM Pentathlon U17 World Championships from July 23-29.

The following month, the spectacular Spanish capital of Madrid will welcome the coming stars of the sport as the UIPM Pentathlon U19 World Championships and UIPM Tetrathlon U15 World Championships are held from August 22-28.

In neighbouring Portugal, the excitement will hit fever pitch later in the year when the combined UIPM 2026 Biathle-Triathle and Laser Run World Championships descend on the picturesque island of Madeira, where the city of Funchal plays host to one of the most fun-filled and family-focused events on the calendar from October 26-29.

Just a few weeks in advance of that, the ocean views will be just as awe-inspiring when the UIPM Masters World Championships are held in Cape Town (RSA) from September 28 to October 3.

A typically warm Irish welcome, meanwhile, can be expected during FISO's OCR World Championships, which will be held in Limerick from August 6-9.

#### **4) Khalil's second act**

Having made herself the face of Pentathlon in 2025, it's remarkable to recall that this time last year **Farida Khalil** (EGY) had not yet won a senior competition.

Now she enters 2026 with a laundry list of titles to defend. Throughout her season for the ages, when she completed her 'Farida Slam' of simultaneous world championships at U17, U19, Junior and Senior level, Khalil maintained that her ultimate focus was an Olympic gold in California in 2028.



After she turns 15 in February, Khalil's season will soon get up and running and she is likely to face a higher calibre of challenge throughout her sophomore campaign at senior level.

In team sports they talk about breakout players facing 'second season syndrome', in music they always reference the 'difficult second album'. So far in her career, Khalil (EGY) has found almost no hurdle to be a hindrance. However, the couple of occasions she jostled with Olympic champion **Michelle Gulyas** of **Hungary** provided huge tests. And should Gulyas, not to mention compatriot **Blanka Guzi** (HUN) return to full fitness in 2026, Khalil will have plenty to chew on in her second act.

##### 5) Asia prepares for hectic, historic year

China has developed a knack of providing the most fitting stage for historic global gatherings in the world of Pentathlon.

In 2024, the city of Zhengzhou hosted a gripping Olympic-year Pentathlon World Championships in sweltering heat. A year and a half later, a far cooler National Olympic Sports Centre in Beijing was the venue for the inaugural UIPM Obstacle World Championships.

After this week's official announcement of the Race Across China, these two events will come together across a duo of Chinese cities, Guiyang and Beijing, creating a two-week festival of sport that will shine a spotlight on the leading lights of Pentathlon, OCR and Ninja.



Continuing a busy year for major gatherings in the continent, the 2026 Asian Games also looms on the calendar with Aichi-Nagoya (JPN) hosting the continental multi-sport carnival from September 19 to October 4.

**By Joe Callaghan**