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ROAD TO TOKYO: TEAM ENERGY FUELS OLYMPIC DREAM FOR WOONGTAE JUN (KOR)



Team Korea have yet to win the coveted prize of an Olympic medal in Modern Pentathlon. A generation of athletes who have become dominant in Asia and prolific at world level suggests that it will only be a matter of time before this is rectified.

Woongtae Jun, 24, has all the hallmarks of a great champion. A big-match performer, he is one of those all-round athletes who, on the days when it all falls into place, makes winning look easy.

In 2015 he enjoyed a breakthrough year, finishing top-eight in a series of Pentathlon World Cups and qualifying for the Rio 2016 Olympic Games with a silver medal at the Asian Championships. He finished 19th in Rio, where experience counted for everything, but the taste of gold at senior level had already become familiar to him.

Since 2016 Jun has won three individual World Cup golds among numerous other accolades. And when the COVID-19 Coronavirus struck, he was coming into his best form.

A bronze medal at the UIPM 2019 Pentathlon World Championships in Budapest (HUN) secured Korea's first Olympic quota place for Tokyo 2020, and Jun returned this season to win silver at the only UIPM competition that took place – UIPM 2020 Pentathlon World Cup Cairo.

Jun will undoubtedly be one to watch in Tokyo in 2021 – assuming he is selected. Competition between the men in Team Korea could not be fiercer, with 2018 world champion Jinhwa Jung and 2019 Asian champion Jihun Lee also battling for the right to compete for the ultimate honour.



Q: How did it feel in 2019 when you won the World Championships bronze medal and secured a qualification place for the Tokyo Olympics?

A: Getting the qualification place for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games was my first-priority goal in 2019, so it was very fulfilling and exciting.

Q: How would you describe your first Olympic experience in Rio in 2016?

A: I prepared very hard, as did the other athletes who competed in Rio 2016. However, I was young and not experienced enough, so it was not a surprise that I could not get the medal. But the experience was so precious in itself, and it made me concentrate to become better and better.

Q: If selected to represent Korea at Tokyo 2020, will you do anything differently this time?

A: Unlike in Rio 2016, I think I'm ready. The most important thing is to prepare perfectly until the very day of the Olympics. And on the day, I will enjoy the competition as the Olympics is the world's best festival.

Q: What are your thoughts on the Olympics being postponed until 2021?

A: I heard some news that the Olympics might be cancelled or postponed, and I hoped if we could not help, it would be better postponing the Olympics rather than cancelling it. So when I heard that the Olympics was postponed until 2021, I was relieved and now I think in a positive way that I can prepare for one more year. But most of all, I really hope everything will be well as soon as possible.

Q: How have you been keeping up your physical and mental health during the Coronavirus crisis?

A: I didn't go anywhere and I work out at home. I kept working to maintain my body as far as I can. And I gave myself more time to clear my mind and motivate. Also I rested enough, which I had never done before.



Q: What has been the most challenging part?

A: Pentathlon athletes need to do five disciplines, so it was not easy to take care of all of them during this time. Swimming and Fencing especially need training partners and if I do not keep training, I am afraid of losing my touch.

Q: And what positive things have you seen?

A: For me, this time can provide opportunities to overcome my weaknesses. And for the world, people are fighting back against the virus all together, and I saw the hope we can do it.

Q: When, and why, did you take up the Modern Pentathlon?

A: I started Swimming first and got suggestion from my middle-school coach. That was the first time I had known the Modern Pentathlon but it was so attractive to me, so I changed into Modern Pentathlon easily.

Q: What motivates you in training?

A: My teammates who train with me make every moment so unforgettable and make training more interesting. Also they stimulate me, which makes me more focused on the training. They are my important energy.



Q: Describe yourself as an athlete in three words.

A: Positive, humble, Team Korea

Q: Who are your role models in sport, and in life?

A: Russian athlete Andrey Moiseyev, who won the gold in Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008. It is very difficult to win two consecutive gold in Olympics, I respect his achievement and want to know how he prepared and what he thought at that great time.

Q: What is your ultimate ambition in Modern Pentathlon?

A: To leave my name in Modern Pentathlon history.

