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ROAD TO TOKYO: MARTIN VLACH (CZE) STAYS STRONG AND FOCUSED ON HIS GOALS



One of the breakthrough pentathletes of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic cycle, Martin Vlach of Czech Republic has a physical and mental strength that promises to take him far.

After a top-10 finish at the 2014 Youth Olympic Games in Nanjing (CHN), the teenager continued to progress well at youth level and became UIPM Biathlon Under 19 world champion in Lisbon (POR) in 2016, just a few weeks after watching the Rio 2016 Olympic Games on TV.

Graduating to the five disciplines, he won European junior bronze in Barcelona (ESP) the following year and finished 5th alongside Marek Grycz (CZE) in the Men's Relay at the UIPM 2017 Pentathlon World Championships in Cairo (EGY). He kept working hard and returned a year later to claim a stellar silver in Mexico City (MEX) alongside the experienced Jan Kuf (CZE).

On the back of some excellent individual performances on the UIPM 2019 Pentathlon World Cup circuit, Vlach (CZE) performed superbly in a highly competitive field to win bronze at the European Championships in Bath (GBR) to comfortably secure the coveted prize of a qualification place at

the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games for his country.

In the latest Road to Tokyo interview, the 23-year-old reflects on the unwanted interruption to his career in the past 12 months but makes it clear he has refused to let it alter his goals.



Q: How did it feel when you won bronze at the 2019 European Championships to secure a qualification place for the Tokyo Olympics?

A: It was my first big individual success in the senior category and in conjunction with Olympic qualification it was an amazing feeling.

Q: Did you watch the Modern Pentathlon at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games? What were you thinking?

A: I did. It was interesting to watch some athletes I know personally from competitions or trainings camps. I felt sorry for some of them for what happened in Riding because I knew they were experienced riders and they did not deserve that.

Q: What would it mean to you to be selected to compete for Czech Republic at Tokyo 2020 in 2021?

A: I would be proud to represent my country. Not so many athletes get a chance to do that.



Q: What do you think about the Olympics being postponed until 2021?

A: In my opinion, it was the best decision that could be made at that time.

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

A: It was not such a big deal for me. Training conditions were not optimal but there were still ways to keep in good physical shape. In some aspects it was a disruption of stereotype. I could also focus on my other hobbies and spend more time with my family.

Q: What has been the most challenging part?

A: Probably the beginning of the pandemic when nothing was certain and we as athletes did not know anything about the upcoming season or anything else actually.



Q: And what positive things have you seen?

A: I do not see many positive things but if I have to name one, it would probably be re-evaluating possibilities and rights I considered to be certain and unalienable a year ago, but now I see that we should appreciate them more.

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

A: I started when I was 13 years old. At that time my coach was looking for athletes in swimming clubs to join Modern Pentathlon. It seemed interesting so I gave it a chance.

Q: What motivates you in training?

A: I still enjoy doing it, so I do not need any other motivation at all.



Q: Describe yourself as an athlete in three words.

A: It is hard to say...calm, determined, hard-working

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

A: In sport it is, for example, Libor Capalini [bronze medallist at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games]. In my life I enjoy doing things 'my way' so having a role model would be counter-productive.

Q: What is your ultimate ambition in Modern Pentathlon?

A: I want to be better at every competition. Who knows where it is going to lead?

