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UIPM 2021 PENTATHLON WORLD CUP SOFIA (I): OTEIZA (FRA) REPEATS THE TRICK IN BULGARIA



Marie Oteiza of **France** held off a seemingly unstoppable force to repeat her success from 2019 at UIPM 2021 Pentathlon World Cup Sofia (I).

Oteiza (FRA) had led the competition for much of the day but came under intense pressure from **Kate French** of **Great Britain**, chasing back-to-back golds after her success at UIPM 2021 Pentathlon World Cup Budapest.

French (GBR) even moved into the lead in the late stages of the Laser Run, but Oteiza (FRA) confirmed her status as a Tokyo 2020 Olympic contender by fighting back to win gold at the same venue where she claimed her first Pentathlon World Cup title two years ago.



Behind them, **Anna Maliszewska** of **Poland** showed excellent defiance to hang on to the bronze medal in the face of stern pressure applied by the in-form **Joanna Muir** (GBR), London 2012 Olympic champion **Laura Asadauskaite** of **Lithuania** and Beijing 2008 Olympic bronze medallist **Anastasiya Prokopenko** of **Belarus**.

Those three athletes completed the top six, with **Alice Sotero** of **Italy** and **Gulnaz Gubaydullina** of **Russia** following closely behind to strengthen their own Olympic qualification prospects.

SWIMMING

It was no surprise to see Gubaydullina (RUS - below) set the standard in the pool with a time of 2min 10.73sec, but there was an intriguing contest behind her between two athletes from Italy and two from France.

Sotero (ITA) won the race for second place in 2:12.46, with **Elodie Clouvel** (FRA) and **Elena Micheli** (ITA) also going under 2:13 and Oteiza (FRA) ending up 5th-fastest in 2:13.72.



FENCING

After her world record-breaking exploits last month in Budapest, French (GBR) was the athlete everybody wanted to beat but she performed strongly, with 22V/13D and two additional points collected in the Bonus Round to move her into 2nd place overall.

Oteiza (FRA) topped the overall standings after scoring 21V14D and adding five points as the star of the Bonus Round. There were also 22 victories for **Xiaonan Zhang** of **China** and **Francesca Summers** (GBR), while Rio 2016 Olympian Maliszewska (POL) topped the standings in the Ranking Round with 23V/12D.



RIDING

A perfect score of 300 for Clouvel (FRA) allowed her to move up into the overall top 10, and she wasn't the only high-profile athlete to strengthen her position from within the pack. Asadauskaite (LTU) and Prokopenko (BLR) also made advances with scores of 292 and 293 respectively.

At the upper end of the overall standings, some high-quality riding allowed most of the leaders to stay on course. There were clean rounds for Zhang (CHN), Sotero (ITA) and **Ieva Serapinaite** (LTU), putting pressure on the top three.

They didn't crack under the pressure, as Maliszewska (POL) scored a clean 300 and Oteiza (FRA) did the same to maintain her supremacy, but only after French (GBR) had suffered two obstacle penalties to lose 14 points that would prove costly in the final reckoning.



LASER RUN

With a classic duel for gold and a gutsy effort to secure bronze with a marauding pack behind, there were storylines galore in the Laser Run.

Oteiza (FRA) started 13sec ahead of Maliszewska (POL) but French (GBR) was back in 6th with a 20sec deficit to make up on the leader. She did exactly that with a display of true stealth.

Brimming with confidence from her success in Budapest, the British woman moved up to 4th at the first shoot, and quickly reined in Sotero (ITA) and Maliszewska (POL) to get within sight of the leader.

Edging closer and closer with each circuit, French (GBR) finally overtook Oteiza (FRA) on the third lap, but her rival was not to be daunted. Oteiza (FRA) responded with a 10sec shoot at the final visit to the range, and then summoned her stamina to run clear of French (GBR) with superb athleticism in the final 800m.

Behind them, Maliszewska (POL) knew that gold and silver were out of reach and protected her bronze with impressive conviction. If she had looked behind her, she would have seen Muir (GBR) giving everything in pursuit of a third consecutive Pentathlon World Cup medal – with two of the legends of the sport on her shoulder.

In that nerve-racking final lap, Muir (GBR) gained huge credit for holding off Asadauskaite (LTU) and Prokopenko (BLR), who are both renowned for their exceptional Laser Run speed and who produced the quickest times of the day – 12:00.50 and 12:08.50 respectively.



MEDALLISTS' REACTION

Oteiza (FRA) said: "I wasn't sure that I would finish first because Kate French was just behind me, and I was really stressed, but I couldn't be more happy than I am right now."

"Next week will be a holiday for me, free time, so I will be able to recover before the Pentathlon World Cup Final."

French (GBR) said: "I'm really pleased. It's been quite a tough day, not easy, but I'm really pleased with second place."

"Marie is a very good athlete and it's always tough competition with her."

Maliszewska (POL) said: "I'm so happy because this is the first World Cup medal of my career and I'm 28 this year."

"At the first World Cup of the season in Budapest, I didn't qualify for the final for the first time - I finished 37th. So it's like going from hell to heaven."

"I'm so happy to have my first World Cup medal."

UIPM SECRETARY GENERAL'S REACTION

UIPM Secretary General Shiny Fang said: "After the opening UIPM 2021 Pentathlon World Cup in Budapest, here in Sofia we have seen another escalation in competitive levels."

"Today in the Women's Final it was so close among the top athletes, starting in the Fencing and finally in the Laser Run, where there were around 20 athletes starting within one minute of each other."

other, so ranking changed fast and the result was surrounded in uncertainty.

“Exciting, competitive and entertaining are three words to describe this sport, a sport that deserves the highest respect and with its different combinations of the disciplines will suit more and more kids and young athletes in their future participation.

“I look forward to seeing the Men’s Final competition tomorrow, it will be no less fierce and competitive, also dynamic and diverse. But isn’t that what the Olympic sport values and spirit are all about?”



WATCH AND FOLLOW

UIPM 2021 Pentathlon World Cup Sofia (I) continues tomorrow (April 10) with the Men's Final and concludes with the Mixed Relay on Sunday April 11.

Live streaming is available on UIPM TV, while results of all competitions are available at the UIPM website and the 'UIPM Central' app.

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