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# UIPM 2021 PENTATHLON WORLD CUP SOFIA (II): CHOONG (GBR) MASTERS THE ELEMENTS



SOFIA, BULGARIA: April 18, 2021 – If the mark of a champion is the ability to recover from a fall, **Joseph Choong** of **Great Britain** demonstrated a masterclass on the way to gold at UIPM 2021 Pentathlon World Cup Sofia (II).

After nine days of competition in two weeks, the grass surface used for Riding and Laser Run in Sofia (BUL) had deteriorated beyond repair and organisers had to apply sand to make it safe for the final event of the fortnight: the Men's Final Laser Run.

In heavy rain, Choong (GBR) found himself on his knees many times as he tried to manoeuvre the tight corners of the course, but the world No.1 coped well enough to secure his first individual gold since the UIPM 2019 Pentathlon World Cup Final in Tokyo (JPN).

The champion was pushed all the way by **Ilya Palazkov** of **Belarus**, who in turn did just enough to restrain 35-year-old **Robert Kasza** of **Hungary** – and the duo switched positions on the podium as they celebrated with their respective silver and bronze medals, a reverse of their prizes from the

first leg of the double-header.

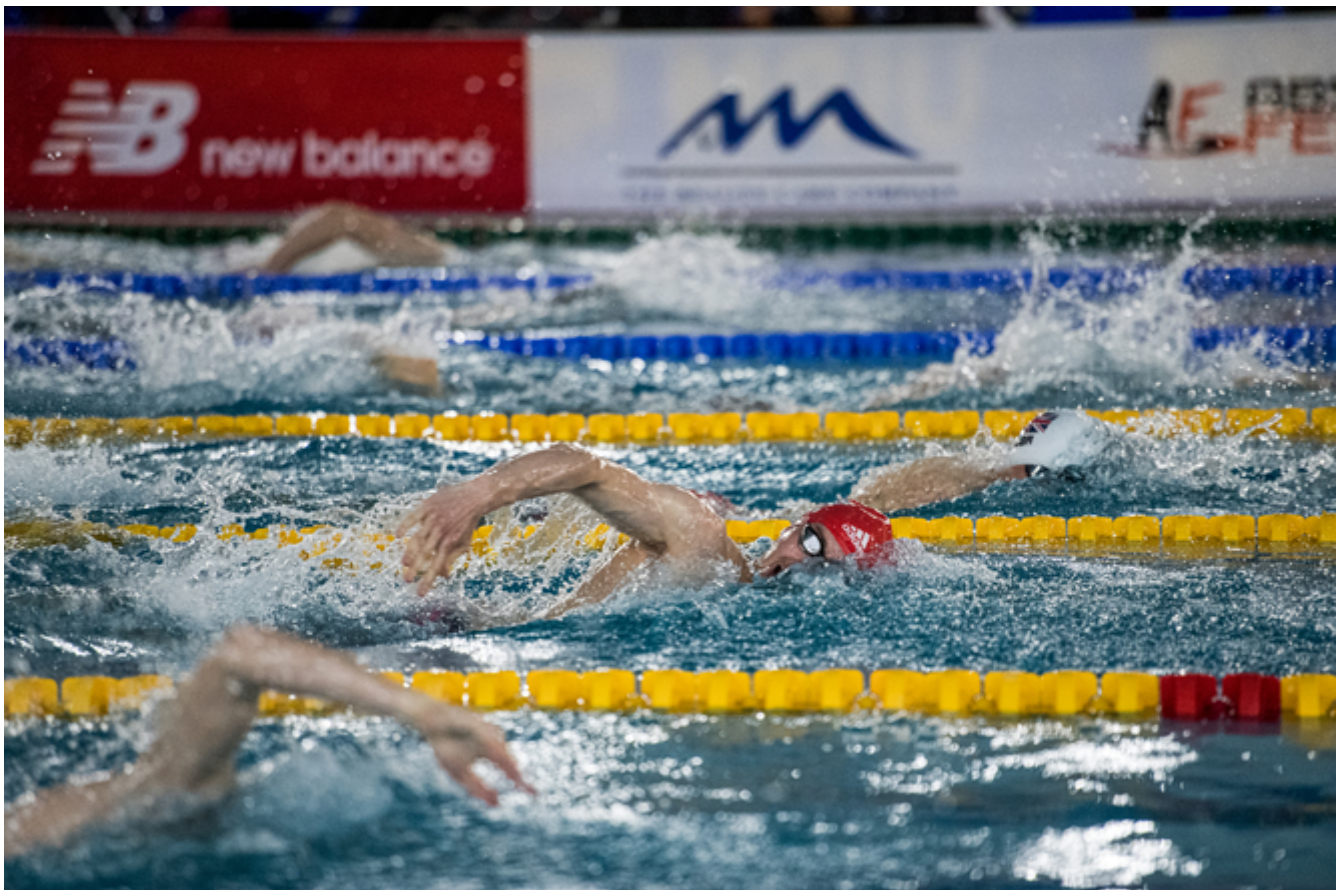
Behind them there was a fierce scramble for all positions as athletes ran their hearts out knowing this was their last chance to qualify for this season's 2021 Pentathlon World Cup Final, which will be the second-last opportunity to gain points in the UIPM Olympic World Ranking that will determine the remaining qualifiers for the rescheduled Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

The intensity of the qualification race was underlined by the fact Kasza (HUN) was joined by three team-mates in the top 10, as **Bence Kardos** (HUN) moved up from 13th to finish 4th with **Richard Berezcki** and **Bence Demeter** coming home 8th and 9th respectively.

**Ondrej Svehota** was the best of four finalists from the **Czech Republic** in 5th, one place ahead of last week's champion **Woongtae Jun** of **Korea**, with **Sebastian Stasiak** of **Poland** in 7th.

## Swimming

Another epic duel between two team-mates saw Choong (GBR) defeat **James Cooke** (GBR) by 0.04sec to set a fastest time of 2:01.05. Jun (KOR) was third-fastest in 2:02.12 ahead of Kardos (HUN, 2:02.42).



## Fencing

For the second Men's Final in succession, the top fencer was Palazkov (BLR) and this time he put more distance between himself and the rest of the field.

Palazkov (BLR) achieved a superb 27V/8D, two more victories than last week, in the Ranking Round and topped up score by two in the Bonus Round finale.

Once again, Kasza (HUN) was not far behind and he was joined on 24V/11D by Choong (GBR) and Svehota (CZE). Rio 2016 Olympic silver medallist **Pavlo Tymoshchenko** of **Ukraine** put together a run of five wins in the Bonus Round.



## Riding

Scoring was high in Sofia (BUL) across the fortnight and there were another nine clean rounds today with 272 the lowest score.

Maximum scorers included Choong (GBR) and Kasza (HUN), while Palazkov (BLR) only dropped seven points and narrowly retained the overall lead.

Svehota (CZE), Jun and **Jinhwa Jung** (KOR) also did as much as they could to put pressure on the leaders with scores of 300, as did Demeter and Kardos (HUN), **Duilio Carrillo** of **Mexico** and **Thomas Toolis** (GBR).



## Laser Run

Burdened by only the minimum 1sec handicap, Choong (GBR) looked like an odds-on favourite for gold and he paced his race cleverly, keeping in mind his renowned sprint finish and the deteriorating conditions.

Palazkov (BLR) did nothing to make life easy for his rival, shooting smoothly, and it was only on the third lap that the pair were separated as Choong (GBR) built a 6sec lead that he protected nervelessly at the final visit to the shooting range.

Palazkov (BLR) had no intention of letting Kasza (HUN) overtake him for the second week in a row, this time keeping enough distance between himself and his 35-year-old rival to earn a satisfying silver.

There was no sense of disappointment for 35-year-old Kasza (HUN), who had feared his Olympic dream was over at Pentathlon World Cup Budapest in March when he fell short of the Men's Final.

Now it is very much back on, although competition is fierce in the Hungarian team, and Kasza (HUN) ran a largely solitary race in protecting his bronze medal position.

Behind him, Jun (KOR) looked like the greatest threat having moved up from 9th to 4th in the early stages, but he stalled at the final shoot and was passed by Svehota (CZE) and the impressive Kardos (HUN), who climbed nine places to cross the finish line behind the medallists.

Given the underfoot and overhead conditions, times were inevitably slower than usual but Kardos (HUN) timed 11:18.80 and **Patrick Dogue** of **Germany** registered 11:20.90 as he cut through the back of the field, demonstrating the importance of every point in the ongoing process of qualifying for Tokyo 2020.



## Medallists' reaction

Choong (GBR) said: "That was definitely the worst running conditions I've ever experienced in a Modern Pentathlon competition.

"It was like being at home and doing cross-country, which I used to run at school. I've never fallen so many times in a Laser Run - unbelievable.

"We had a lot of competitions in quick succession so we had a good idea of everyone's fitness levels. The plan was to stick with [Ilya Palazkov] for the first two runs and then push him and apply some pressure on the third, and then hopefully I would be able to take the lead going into the final lap."

Palazkov (BLR) said: "I'm so happy. I came back last week with a bronze and now I moved up one position and it's so nice for me because I have points for the qualification for the Olympic Games. I don't have words.

"I think the running conditions were not bad, just dirty, but actually it was hard all day. And hard to have two World Cups in two weeks, so hard!"

Kasza (HUN) said: "Last week a silver and now a bronze, both podiums, and in the last month there was so much emotion and stress and it just ran through me, I couldn't hold it back somehow.

"It was a horrible day and I'm so glad to finish. It was really hard because all the corners were slippery and I couldn't find my frequency in running, no rhythm and there was no chance to catch up. In shooting I made a couple of mistakes and that meant I could not move up to Ilya."

## UIPM President's reaction

UIPM President Dr Klaus Schormann said: "The second Pentathlon World Cup in Sofia is now over and with so much rainfall it was difficult for the athletes with very heavy ground for the Riding, where we saw the importance of first-class horses, and the Laser Run.

"Again, thanks to the excellent organisation, in between disciplines they prepared the ground again and again and conditions became better and better. I must thank Andrey Kuzmanov, President of the Bulgarian Modern Pentathlon Federation, and his team for finding ways to cope with the bad weather conditions.

"Most importantly, the athletes have given everything to qualify for the UIPM 2021 Pentathlon World Cup Final and to raise points for the Olympic Games where we still have two more qualification competitions.

"Thanks to all the athletes – the ladies yesterday and today the men – for the way they performed, which made us very proud and you could see how strong our sport is developing and how much they are motivated to be well prepared for the Olympic Games in Tokyo.

"Finally I would like to thank all the volunteers and the media people who have supported us and given us the best possibility to promote our sport through the athletes and the whole surroundings. Thanks a lot and good luck for the coming competitions."

## Watch and follow

The regular season of the UIPM 2021 Pentathlon World Cup has now concluded and the 72 athletes who have qualified for the Pentathlon World Cup Final will be announced as soon as possible.

The Pentathlon World Cup Final takes place in Szekesfehervar (HUN) from May 13-16 with the UIPM 2021 Pentathlon and Laser Run World Championships following in Cairo (EGY) from June 8-14.

Live streaming of all finals will be available on UIPM TV, while all competition results are available at the UIPM website and the 'UIPM Central' app.

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Rank	Name	Nation	MP Points
1	CHOONG Joseph	GBR	1435
2	PALAZKOV Ilya	BLR	1427
3	KASZA Robert	HUN	1419
4	KARDOS Bence	HUN	1416
5	SVECHOTA Ondrej	CZE	1414
6	JUN Woongtae	KOR	1412
7	STASIAK Sebastian	POL	1410
8	BERECZKI Richard	HUN	1409
9	DEMETER Bence	HUN	1404
10	SEO Changwan	KOR	1401
11	DOGUE Marvin Faly	GER	1395
12	CURRY Samuel	GBR	1392
13	LI Shuhuan	CHN	1391
14	PATTE Christopher	FRA	1391

15	TYMOSHCHENKO Pavlo	UKR	1391
16	DOGUE Patrick	GER	1387
17	GUTKOWSKI Lukasz	POL	1384
18	GRYCZ Marek	CZE	1379
19	KUF Jan	CZE	1375
20	TOOLIS Thomas	GBR	1372
21	KINDERIS Justinas	LTU	1370
22	PADILLA Manuel	MEX	1368
23	DALLENBACH Alexandre	SUI	1367
24	SANDOVAL Alvaro	MEX	1358
25	COOKE James	GBR	1352
26	LIEBIG Fabian	GER	1347
27	CARRILLO Duilio	MEX	1344
28	JUNG Jinhwa	KOR	1342
29	HAN Jiahao	CHN	1337
30	ONISHI Sho	JPN	1334
31	BEREZNIAKOV Hordii	UKR	1330
32	LUO Shuai	CHN	1326
33	BUSTOS Esteban	CHI	1324
34	ZVEDENIUK Pavlo	UKR	1319
35	RADZIUK Yaroslau	BLR	1307
36	HAMED Ahmed	EGY	747