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VOYAGE TO PARIS: PART XIV



Leading off... Koreans make the short hop knowing that Olympic places are at a premium

True, 1236km is hardly a walk in the park or a leisurely stroll. It's still a vast distance between any two points on the map. But for Korea's current crop of elite pentathletes, the distance between their capital of Seoul and the eastern Chinese city of Zhengzhou will likely feel short — and sweet.

As the UIPM 2024 Pentathlon and Laser Run World Championships visit China, much of the focus has been on how China's new generation of pentathletes can cope with the pageantry and pressure of performing on home soil.

But for the four Koreans who currently sit comfortably inside the top 20 in the world — two men and two women — this year's World Championships is as close as they have come to competing on home turf for some time.

In the last elite-level competition before the Olympic Games in Paris and with plenty of qualification places up for grabs in Zhengzhou from June 9-16, the potential performances of Korea's finest — and the knock-on effects — could be very significant indeed.

Let's recap, shall we? Korea currently has two men inside the World Top 20: Woongtae Jun (4th)

and Changwan Seo (9th). On the women's side Seungmin Seong (4th) and Sunwoo Kim (16th) sit inside the upper echelon too. But the wrinkle lies in the fact that Korea has thus far only secured one quota qualification place for each sex.

So if the powers-that-be in the Korean federation want to avoid some very challenging selection calls or qualification showdowns between teammates, they would certainly like to see Korean athletes make the most of the short travel time to Zhengzhou.

Jun, of course, is defending an Olympic medal, his Tokyo bronze, and his enduring class suggests he could even upgrade to silver or gold. Seo, meanwhile, has a World Cup gold medal to his name in 2024. One look at Seong's results this year will tell you she has a wonderful habit of finding her way inside the top three or four, a great skill to have. Yet it was Kim who secured the quota spot in 2023, picking it up at the Asian Games in Hangzhou (CHN) when Seong was eliminated in the Riding.

There is plenty of work to be done before Paris places are decided for Korea. And their short hop across to China next week could go a long way to making things clearer.



Paris Pointer

Making it to the podium will give an athlete a view from the top of the world — and a Parisian view too.

An Olympic medal can be the highlight of a lifetime and the culmination of work that goes back to the earliest years of an athlete's life.

But to get the medal place over your head and hung around your neck you have to first make it to

somewhere just as special: the Olympic podium.

The unique podiums for Paris 2024 were unveiled in recent weeks and like so many aspects of this summer's Games in the French capital, thought has been put into every aspect.

The podiums will be coloured grey in homage to the rooftops of Paris and inspired by the design of the Eiffel Tower and will be used for all 329 medal ceremonies at the Olympic Games, including the two for Modern Pentathlon competitions at the Palace of Versailles. The podium's modular, built-in design enables it to adapt to different configurations (individual or team Olympic/Paralympic events).

"When you win a medal at the Games, you'll feel a bit like you're climbing on top of the world, so at least the athletes will be on the top of Paris with this grey, which recalls the strong colour of the roofs of Paris," said Paris 2024 President Tony Estanguet.

"With these podiums made in France from French wood and 100% recycled plastic, we offer athletes a real stage where they will be proud to stand and wear the colours of their country, watched by the whole world."

Numbers game

10,000: The number of Paris 2024 tickets that will go on sale every Thursday between now and the start of the Games, less than two months from now. Tickets for some events start as low as €24 and can be accessed at tickets.paris2024.org.

Qualification latest

With the UIPM 2024 Pentathlon World Cup season already in the books, the jostling for the final 28 qualification spots for Paris 2024 has reached crunch time. Within the next month the final slots will be decided. While we still know that 44 of the 72 quota places at this summer's Games have been claimed, the plot is thickening.

Here's a reminder of who has qualified for the Games already: Women – Italy (2), Great Britain (2), China, Japan, Korea, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Spain, Lithuania, France, Hungary, Germany, Egypt, Australia, Czechia, Mexico, USA, Brazil, Ecuador and the International Athletes Team (EAI). Men – Egypt (2), Mexico (2), Italy, China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Kazakhstan, Great Britain, Hungary, France, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Switzerland, Australia, Ecuador, Cuba, Argentina and EAI.

Up to six places are on offer at the UIPM 2024 Pentathlon World Championships, but 22-28 will come through the UIPM Olympic World Rankings, which makes the last qualification competition so key for so many.

Full details of the Paris 2024 qualification process can be found at uipmworld.org/olympic-games.