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UIPM 2025 PENTATHLON WORLD CUP PAZARDZHNIK: TAKE FIVE



Like waiting for a bus, it took almost two months for the next instalment of the UIPM 2025 Pentathlon World Cup season to come, and now two arrive almost colliding together.

Hot on the heels of an action-packed and storyline-filled week in Budapest at the second stop of the first World Cup of a new Olympic cycle, we now move on to Bulgaria for the third.

Around 120km southeast of the capital Sofia, the riverside city of Pazardzhik will host a huge gathering of some of the best and brightest the sport has to offer. Here are five great reasons to tune in and watch the action (free on UIPM TV):



1. Khalil (EGY) guns for gold again

When teenage phenomenon **Farida Khalil** of **Egypt** conquered all before her on a historic senior debut on home soil in February, there was an immediate question to be asked: who can stop her?

The all-conquering 14-year-old and the rest of us found the answer last week in Budapest (HUN) when Olympic champion **Michelle Gulyas** of **Hungary** roared to a deeply satisfying victory on home turf.

Khalil (EGY) wasn't far behind, however, claiming silver and going two-for-two on podium places in her sophomore World Cup season. Afterwards, she insisted: "Every time I come to a competition I like to win the gold."

With Gulyas (HUN) resting up and missing the trip to Bulgaria, it will fall to other rivals to try to match Khalil (EGY). For good measure, the current world No.4 in the women's world rankings, **Ilke Ozyuksel** of **Türkiye**, also returns for a highly anticipated first appearance since Paris 2024.



2. Cicinelli back to duel with Moutaz and Co.

Moutaz Mohamed (EGY) toasted the first senior gold medal of his career last week and did it in style, storming through the field to top the podium.

The third leg of the season will now pit the two champions from the opening instalments against one another as **Matteo Cicinelli** of **Italy**, who was triumphant in Cairo (EGY) in February, returns to the start line.

Mohamed's Laser Run performance was a devastating marker to lay down as the season really begins to gain momentum, but behind him were plenty of other rising talents such as first-time medallist **Ugo Fleurot** of **France** and **Roman Popov** of **Ukraine**. In terms of identifying the athletes likely to dominate the coming seasons en route to LA28, there is more fluidity right now on the men's side than on the women's. Perhaps in Pazardzhik (BUL) we will find more clues.



3. China on the rise

Korea and **Japan** have ruled the roost in the Asian confederation in recent years. Korea has toasted medallists at both of the two most recent Olympic Games with **Woongtae Jun** (KOR) claiming bronze in 2021 and **Seungmin Seong** (KOR) repeating the trick at Paris 2024, where **Taishu Sato** (JPN) grabbed men's silver and a first medal for his country.

However, that recent duopoly over many of the big prizes may be under threaten on the evidence of **China** providing a new generation of talent that caught the eye in Budapest (HUN).

Taking to Obstacle with particular skill, a huge team from China impressed, securing two places in both the Women's Final (**Jing Fu** and **Yizhuo Liu**) and Men's Final (**Yan Chen** and **Shifan Ge**). All four were born post-2000 and have youth on their side. With another 16 entrants in Pazardzhik (BUL), China's rise may only be beginning.

4. Obstacle = excitement

Three years ago this week, the UIPM Executive Board moved forward with a recommendation from its New 5th Discipline Working Group which would help transform the sport, as Obstacle was given the green light.

We may have had just two senior competitions under the new format of the sport, but it's already clear that what happens over the obstacle courses is not just transforming Pentathlon but transfixing audiences too.

There has been excitement and drama aplenty as so many of the elite senior athletes literally get to grips with the discipline. Like any new challenge, it's proving the case that practice is required

before perfection can be chased.

It was impossible to turn your eyes away from the Obstacle course in Budapest last week as we watched in real time as participants grew into the new challenge.

Across two wildly entertaining day of women's and men's qualification, 45 of the 166 combined entrants were eliminated in Obstacle. Yet by the time Super Saturday rolled around, athletes had found their groove with only one of the 36 finalists suffering elimination. Let's see what trends emerge in Bulgaria.

5. Hosts with the most?

With each competition the diversity of participants continues to grow, with athletes from Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Singapore among those poised to gain crucial experience this week. Closer to home, though, there is always a laser focus on how well the host nation can compete with the best in the sport.

Bulgaria has flirted with a breakthrough at elite level for a few years now, led by **Todor Mihalev** - who earned a top-10 finish at Pentathlon World Cup Ankara on the way to a debut Olympics in Paris (FRA) last year. Will the Bulgarians be up to speed on Obstacle? Only time will tell, but the fact that Mihalev (BUL) is the only member of an eight-strong team born before 2005 hints at a new generation entering the fray.

By Joe Callaghan