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UIPM 2025 PENTATHLON WORLD CUP PAZARDZHIK: MALAN (ITA) GOES GLOBAL WITH FIRST GOLD IN ITALIAN 1-2

Giorgio Malan of **Italy** added a first global gold medal to his collection with a majestic victory in the Men's Final at UIPM 2025 Pentathlon World Cup Pazardzhik.

The Paris 2024 bronze medallist, who became European champion in the process of qualifying for the Olympic Games, performed strongly in all five disciplines to prove how well he has adapted to the new format along with team-mate **Matteo Cicinelli** (ITA), who added silver to the gold he won in the season-opener in Cairo (EGY).

Another athlete who has underlined his versatility is the great **Valentin Belaud** of **France**, a two-time world champion aged 33 who waited six years to get back on the podium. He did that today with a redemptive and well-timed bronze medal (Belaud's partner, two-time Olympic medallist Elodie Clouvel, is due to give birth to their first child next week).

Egypt is never far from the podium these days and the next two places went to Obstacle stars **Mohamed El Ashqar** and **Moustafa Abouamer**, with **Mathis Rochat** (FRA) claiming the final place on the extended podium.

Fencing

Oleksandr Tovkai of **Ukraine** was utterly dominant and ruthless in the Direct Elimination round. Seeded No.3, he progressed through the rounds and used his height and reach to great effect in eliminating the top fencers in the competition, defeating Belaud (FRA) 5-2 and Malan (ITA) 5-1 in the final bout.

Malan (ITA) had earned the right to go all the way after coming from behind in an intriguing Semi-

final against his team-mate, Cicinelli (ITA), finally prevailing 4-3, having already defeated Abouamer (EGY) in the last eight.

Abouamer (EGY) had caused a stir by eliminating top seed **Jean-Baptiste Mourcia** (FRA), limiting him to the maximum 218 points and taking 224 for himself.

Obstacle

The new Pentathlon format can take athletes from hero to zero (and the reverse) in a matter of minutes, and Tovkai (UKR) learned this the hard way in the last of nine Obstacle heats. Clipping his foot on the ramp of the Tilting Ladders, he stumbled onto the landing mats in a costly slip that enabled five athletes to overtake him on the leaderboard.

Typically it was El Ashqar (EGY) who set the standard, rising to a 10-point lead in pole position with a time of 23:30, while Belaud (FRA) and Malan (ITA) fought hard to remain in the overall podium places. Abouamer (EGY) and **Bailiang Chen** of **China** also impressed on the Obstacle course while Mourcia (FRA) slipped and fell further behind.

Swimming

As in Budapest (HUN), two weeks ago, El Ashqar (EGY) continued to use his height to extend his overall lead in Swimming – and without a false-start penalty this time.

A swim of 2:05.10 enabling him to start Laser Run 14sec ahead of Malan (ITA), who touched in 2:06.56, conceding one point to compatriot Cicinelli (ITA) and four points to **Roberto Micheli** (ITA), whose time of 2:04.70 was only bettered by Rochat (FRA) in 2:03.37.

Laser Run

With only 8sec separating 3rd and 7th and the whole top 10 within 45sec of each other, it was destined to be more of a thriller than the Women's Final where three athletes ended up in a race of their own. So it proved, but the top seven all managed to hold their own.

It was a harsh experience for El Ashqar (EGY), who shot well but found himself overtaken by three faster athletes one by one. To his credit, he never quitted and fought hard to regain 4th place from Abouamer (EGY) on the final straight.

The medal content was a story of exquisite opportunism and control. Malan (ITA) cut the deficit on the first lap and then found a couple more seconds at the shoot, enabling him to execute an overtake on the second 600m.

There was a moment of intrigue at the third shoot when Cicinelli (ITA), having left the pack behind to join the podium race, had four green lights when Malan (ITA) left the range. However, that fifth shot proved elusive and Cicinelli (ITA) had to work hard to overtake El Ashqar (EGY) again. And there was no catching the front-running Malan (ITA) after that.

For many viewers, Belaud (FRA) was the real story of this competition, proving that a 33-year-old with no major podium success in six years can still cut it at the sharp end of Pentathlon. In Laser

Run he momentarily slipped back to 5th after a sloppy shoot, but the veteran held his nerve to hold off Rochat (FRA) and Abouamer (EGY) and move past El Ashqar (EGY).