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TAKE FIVE: UIPM 2026 PENTATHLON WORLD CUP PAZARDZHIK

It's the second event of the second season of an Olympic cycle, and several of the world's top pentathletes are rejoining the action as they set their sights on LA28. UIPM 2026 Pentathlon World Cup Pazardzhik sees two Korean Olympic heroes coming back to tackle the new-look Pentathlon with Obstacle racing, while the hottest rivalry in the sport sees the Paris 2024 women's gold medallist go head-to-head with the teenage world No.1 and architect of last season's unprecedented 'Farida Slam'.

1) Jun (KOR) begins his quest for LA28

While the Olympic Games is the crest of a wave for pentathletes, it can also be the moment when dreams come crashing down. ‘Crestfallen’ is the only word to describe the way **Woongtae Jun** looked in the aftermath of the Men’s Final at Paris 2024.

A bronze medallist at Tokyo 2020, held three years earlier, and bronze medallist at the UIPM 2024 Pentathlon World Championships in Zhengzhou (CHN), the Korean was in the prime of his career and one of the firm favourites for podium glory in front of the Palace of Versailles.

Indeed, even at the beginning of the Laser Run there was nothing to suggest Jun would miss out on that coveted second Olympic medal. But somehow his aim and his legs let him down, and more decisive athletes pushed past and left him in 6th.

For the better part of a decade, Jun had been part of the furniture of Men's Finals during the Pentathlon World Cup season. And now he is back.

Twelve years have passed since his World Cup debut in Chengdu (CHN) in 2014. Fittingly, he was a contender from the get-go, finishing 9th. Remarkably, Jun (KOR) would win six World Cup gold medals across six seasons in the years to come – in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2021, 2022 and 2023.

He was also a prolific relay medallist alongside fellow Korean titans, most recently **Changwan Seo** and **Seungmin Seong**, who are also on the entry list as part of a formidable Korean team for UIPM 2026 Pentathlon World Cup Pazardzhik from May 13-17.

Jun, who participated in UIPM's first official Obstacle Test Event in Ankara (TUR) in 2022, is back in the mix, aiming to prove he can match up against a bold new generation aiming to own the road to Los Angeles 2028, where he could make a fourth Olympic appearance aged 32. It would be foolish to doubt him.

2) Gulyas and Khalil renew a burgeoning rivalry

Who remembers April 26, 2025? Just over a full year ago now. That was the last time **Michelle Gulyas** and **Farida Khalil** went toe to toe across all five disciplines.

It was a battle to remember as Egypt's teenage wonder, who had already gatecrashed the senior circuit in spectacular fashion, was given an early reminder that she wouldn't have it her own way. Hungary's reigning Olympic champion came out triumphant in front a raucous home crowd at UIPM 2025 Pentathlon World Cup Budapest and it looked to set the stage for the season to come.

However, injury caught up with Gulyas in a hurry and she only made her return to the elite last month in Cairo at the opening event of this year's Pentathlon World Cup campaign. Typically, Gulyas contended and finished a commendable fifth as team-mate **Blanka Guzi** took the season's first gold medal. Now the 25-year-old will get another chance to take on the emerging rival who is 10 years her junior.

Khalil made the remainder of 2025 her own, completing the 'Farida Slam' by conquering everything in her way. Having missed out on Cairo due to a Fencing commitment, Pentathlon's world No.1 is back in Bulgaria and the stage is set for another compelling contest.

3) Bryson back in the swing of things

In the days before this season's curtain-raiser in the Egyptian capital, UIPM News had speculated that 2026 could be the season of comebacks. Well, things are about to kick up on a notch on that front as the action moves to Europe.

Gulyas, Khalil and everyone else in the women's field will be keeping a close eye on one familiar name returning to the start line. A star of 2023 and 2024, **Kerenza Bryson** is making her return to the elite end of the sport for the first time since the Paris Olympics.

Typically, Bryson hasn't spent much time standing still in the interim. A qualified doctor and reserve officer in the British Army, Bryson is a do-it-all and it's worth remembering just how prolific the 27-year-old was during the last Pentathlon cycle.

Between February 2023 and the Paris 2024 Olympics, Bryson entered 12 events and finished top 10 in every single one, finishing on the podium in seven of those. She also won the first Pentathlon World Cup gold medal of her career on Bulgarian soil in Sofia in 2023.

Like so many of those from the previous cycle feeling their way into this new era, getting a look at how Bryson has got to grips with Obstacle will be fascinating, but her track record tells us to expect her to be more than competitive.

4) Even more comebacks add to the well of talent

Thought we were done with the comebacks? Not close. The women's competition is looking extra stacked with **Aurora Tognetti** poised to make her return from injury; the Italian was last seen claiming an impressive bronze at the UIPM 2025 Pentathlon World Championships.

Meanwhile, the reigning Olympic bronze medalist who was a contender for much of last season, Seong, will make her first appearance of the 2026 campaign.

Let's throw one more serial threat into the mix: **Gintare Venckauskaite**. The Lithuanian veteran also hasn't been seen since the epic Olympic Final in Versailles nearly two years ago. A three-time Olympian, the 33-year-old Laser Run specialist finished 7th in Paris and is now back for more. She'll find herself in the thick of a hugely talented field.

5) Mohamed (EGY) looks to extend rampant run

The reigning men's Olympic champion, Ahmed Elgendy, was onsite in Cairo last month to see his compatriot **Moutaz Mohamed** begin 2026 exactly as he had left off last year – scorching away from the rest of the field.

Mohamed is on a blistering gold rush, having won all five individual elite events he has entered since April 2025.

Elgendy gave signal that he hopes to be back later this year, and in the newer, more dynamic format debuted in Cairo, Mohamed didn't exactly have it all his own way, pushed hard to the line by **Mathis Rochat** and **Mihaly Koleszar**.

With 30+ nations and every continent represented in Pazardzhik, Mohamed will face a literal world of rivals ready to bring his rampant run to an end. Their task may be daunting, but the challenge of catching the world No.1 is enticing.

By Joe Callaghan