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## WINNERS IN THE RAIN AT THE EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS



BATH, ENGLAND - Germany and Ukraine reigned in the rain at the Modern Pentathlon European Championships on Wednesday as they won the women's and men's team relay titles respectively at the University of Bath.

Lena Schoneborn, the reigning individual World Champion and 2008 Olympic Champion, produced a classy run/shoot to secure European gold with Annika Schleu in the women's event.

Dmytro Kirpulyanskyy and Yuriy Fedechko performed consistently well throughout to win the men's title on a day when heavy rain made for challenging conditions for the ride and the



combined.

Schoneborn said: "We both knew we were strong in the run/shoot so we were confident. Annika gave us a really good start and I had a good first shoot, so I was able to really enjoy it after that.

"The weather made the riding conditions quite difficult so we took our time. We picked up a few penalty points but some of the other teams picked up even more."

Team-mate Schleu added: "It was a good event for me. A worry was the rain and how it would affect my shooting and the guns as they are electric but it was all OK.

"Horse riding in this weather was also a worry due to the wet ground but we managed to come through it."

Great Britain's Samantha Murray and Mhairi Spence had led after the first two rounds, recording strong wins in both the swimming and fencing, but a refusal at the first fence in the ride and the ensuing penalty points saw them lose ground.

They went on to finish fourth, with Russia and Lithuania taking silver and bronze respectively.

"We are quite happy with the result," said Russia's Ekaterina Khuraskina. "First would have been better but second is not bad either."

Lithuania's Emilija Serapinaite added: "It was a good day – we even like the rain! We had good horses. The shooting was not so good but we ran well."

Spence said: "That's the thing about pentathlon, it was close right until the end. I know all the girls are fighters and it happens, it's pentathlon.

"I'm obviously disappointed but equally I really enjoyed the day. The organising committee has done a great job – considering we train here every day, they've transformed the place completely!"

The men's event saw Russia take a 17-second lead into the run/shoot but they went on to finish fifth.

Ukraine moved up from second place to take gold, while Italy just about held off a sprint finish from Great Britain's James Myatt to complete the podium places.

"I am very happy with that, we did our best and it has made us the gold medallists," said Kirpulyanskyy.

"Right from the beginning of the day we did everything well. The swim was good, we won the fencing and then we had a really good result in the ride.

"That set us up for a very good combined – my shooting was very good and Yuriy ran very well."

Fedechko added: "The shoot was very difficult but I ran well and I knew that if I did that we would be victorious. I am very pleased to have won this gold medal."

Bronze was a second medal of the week for Italy's Valerio Grasselli, who won mixed relay gold on Tuesday, but a breakthrough one for delighted team-mate Tullio De Santis.

"I've dreamt of this for a long time as I'm 30 now and have never won a medal before," he said. "I am incredibly happy."

Britain's Sam Curry was also justifiably proud of his performance with Myatt and said he had truly enjoyed competing at home.

"My voice is a bit sore from screaming at James from across the track," Curry added. "I thought he was going to catch the Italian, he's such a strong runner.

"It's how we pick each other up throughout the day. His swim might not be as good as mine but he picks me up with the running.

"It was one of the greatest feelings in the world just looking into the crowd and seeing all your friends and your family there, you just find something special."

The individual competitions get under way with the men's qualifiers on Thursday, followed by the women's qualifiers on Friday. The finals are this weekend.

Among those taking part on Thursday is reigning Olympic champion David Svoboda of the Czech Republic.

### *How the day unfolded*

Having won a gold medal in the mixed event on Tuesday, Camilla Lontano returned to the relay stage with team-mate Francesca Gandolfo.

And the Italian duo performed well, claiming second place in the 200m freestyle swim in 2:06.07.

However, it was Great Britain's Mhairi Spence and Samantha Murray who thrilled the home supporters by claiming victory. After a solid start from Spence, putting them in fourth place after the first 100m, Murray powered away from the field to record a fantastic time of 2:02:37.

The men's relay swim was also a crowd pleaser, with less than half-a-second separating the top four teams. Italy's Tullio de Santis and Valerio Grasselli were first to touch the wall in 1:53.20, fractions of a second ahead of Great Britain's Sam Curry and James Myatt.

Attention then shifted towards the sports hall as home favourites Spence and Murray began on the podium piste for the women's relay fencing event.

Despite the cheers from the crowd, the British duo wavered at the start of the fence, allowing Ireland and Belarus to take the lead. As often happens with the fencing discipline, the rankings changed dramatically towards the end as Spence and Murray took the lead.

It would all be decided in the last round when GB faced a Germany team including current World Champion Lena Schoneborn and Annika Schleu. After some incredibly intense bouts between the two top nations, it was GB's Spence who took the winning hit against Schoneborn and secured first place. The British duo later went on to win the fencing bonus round.

After so much home cheer, including a very young fan shouting "Come on Auntie Mhairi!", Spence said: "Yeah it's great, obviously the field of play looks amazing! It's nice to have the home advantage as well!"

The rankings table in the men's relay fencing event was quite unsteady throughout the fencing rounds as several nations took their turn in the top three.

Czech Republic, Russia and Ukraine were in particularly good form during the course of the fence and claimed the top three spots for the majority of the rounds.

However, considering they lost ground during the first few rounds, Italy rallied on to reach a third-place rank in the final round. Ukraine's Dmytro Kirpulyanskyy and Yuriy Fedechko managed to reel in the last few points and remain ahead of Russia in first place.

A heavy downpour of rain before and during the riding event meant that conditions were not ideal for the athletes or their horses.

It was particularly frustrating for the women's relay leaders from Great Britain, with Murray receiving two refusals from her horse Daisy at the first fence.

Spence then clipped the last one on Fly as Britain finished seventh overall in the ride, dropping them down to fourth overall and 16 seconds behind new leaders Russia.

They and Lithuania performed with tremendous skill to record clear rounds, while Germany also went round without knocking down a fence but picked up some time penalties.

The men's ride was off to a bumpy start as Switzerland's Jonas Von Allmen and his horse Burley crashed into the starting fence, the resulting delay leading to their disqualification from the discipline.

Russia's Shugarov and Belyakov maintained their good form despite the harsh conditions and took the lead on the rankings with a strong ride – the only clear round of the men's competition giving them a 17-second advantage over Ukraine going into the run/shoot.

The women's combined event saw Russia overtake Germany at the changeover but Schoneborn performed outstandingly to regain first place and maintain it for the duration of the race.

A strong run from Murray moved Britain back into medal contention and Spence took third place after her first shoot but Lithuania were able to regain the podium position in the closing stages.

The men's combined was a nail-biter and when Russia lost ground in the shooting, Ukraine were able to take advantage and open up a respectable winning margin.

Hungary charged through from fourth to second but the home cheer was the loudest yet when, following an outstanding run/shoot from the Brits, Myatt began to close in on Italy in the home straight.

However, the gap was just too much to close down and the host nation had to settle for their third fourth-placed finish of the championships.

*Source: Pentathlon GB*