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UIPM 2016 JUNIOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS: ITALY WIN MIXED RELAY TITLE

Francesca Tognetti and Matteo Cicinelli gave Italy a convincing victory in the Mixed Relay on the final day of the 2016 UIPM Junior World Championships.

The Italian duo proved too strong for European rivals France, who claimed silver, and Germany, who had to settle for bronze as a high-quality championships drew to an exciting conclusion in North Africa.

The result meant that the seven titles on offer this week in Cairo were split between four nations from three different continents - Russia (3), Korea, Guatemala and Italy (2) - another sign of the expanding power base in global Modern Pentathlon.

Russia and Italy won all of the team and relay titles while Korea (Kim Sunwoo) and Guatemala (Charles Fernandez) picked up the individual golds.

Dr Klaus Schormann, President of UIPM, said: "The Mixed Relay is always a special highlight of our world championships as well as on our World Cups because it is also a showcase of team spirit and collective effort.

"This format is already part of the Youth Olympic program and we hope to see the Mixed Relay also in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games."

Sharif Elerian, President of the Egyptian Modern Pentathlon Federation (EMPF), said: "I would like to thank everyone who made this competition happen, the volunteers, the workers, organizers, judges... this was a terrific job for seven consecutive days and we also know all the effort made before and still ongoing, as it only finishes when everyone came back safe home.

"From a sporting side, the good point was to see several different nations on the podium."

Russia (Alena Popova & Nikolai Dudko) set the pace in the Swimming pool with a time of 1:58.89 ahead of Argentina (Juliana Borgarucci & Vicente Lima, 1:58.93) and Korea (Kim Sunwoo & Jun Woongtae, 1:59.73).

There was an interesting subtext to the early proceedings as Fernandez (GUA, with Sophia Hernandez) and Jun (KOR, with Kim Sunwoo) continued their epic individual duel from Saturday, but neither nation would end up on the podium as a dramatic day unfolded.

In Fencing, Italy served notice of their intention to challenge for gold as they topped the Ranking Round with 21 victories and 11 defeats. With 20V/12D Great Britain (Georgina Summers & Josh Miller) and Korea (Kim/Jun) were next best on the piste. Italy (Tognetti/Cicinelli) confirmed their supremacy in the Bonus Round with a final victory over Korea.

In Riding, one of the clear favourites for gold suffered a major setback as Kim (KOR) fell from her horse and, although not badly injured, the individual gold medallist did not feel able to compete in the Combined Event.

France (Pulcherie Delhalle & Brice Loubet) and Guatemala (Hernandez/Fernandez) were the only nations who left the arena with a maximum 300 points, but Italy (Tognetti/Cicinelli) incurred the limited damage of 17 penalties to enable them to start the Combined Event first, nine seconds ahead of Argentina (Borgarucci/Lima) and 16 seconds ahead of Great Britain (Summers/Miller).

However, there was little to separate the top six and Guatemala (Hernandez/Fernandez), France (Delhalle/Loubet) and Germany (Alexandra Bettinelli & Marvin Faly Dogue) all sensed an opportunity.

During the women's leg, Tognetti (ITA) left the first Shooting range in 1st but Summers (GBR) overtook Borgarucci (ARG). Tognetti (ITA) retained her lead throughout but there were several changes behind her and ultimately it was Delhalle (FRA) and Bettinelli (GER) who enjoyed the big gains and handed over to their male compatriots in the medal positions.

Far from let his partner down, Cicinelli (ITA) honoured the advantage he had been presented with and set off like a bullet. There was an immense battle between Loubet (FRA) and Dogue (GER) which saw the latter move into 2nd place after the final Shooting series. Somehow, Loubet (FRA) summoned the stamina to recapture his rival in the final metres and secure silver.

Ultimately, Italy (Tognetti/Cicinelli) enjoyed victory by 13 points, scoring 1428 ahead of France (1415) and Germany (1411), with Guatemala 4th (1386), Argentina 5th (1371) and Great Britain 6th(1366).

Cicinelli (ITA) said: "When we started in Swimming we were in 4th or 5th place and we had to wait for Fencing until we moved to 1st place. We knew after the Fencing that we had a good chance, and after an extraordinary Riding stage we knew we could win.

"We suffered during the Combined Event, and Francesca knew that she had very good French

and German girls on her shoulder. When we touched hands I had to run and I knew I had about 15 seconds, and luckily I shot well.

Tognetti (ITA) added: "This is my last year as a Junior and I am very, very happy. Next year I will be senior and I know it will be so difficult, but I feel happy."

Loubet (FRA) was definitely one of the standout performers of the Combined Event and he said afterwards: "We started in 6th place but we were confident because Pulcherie is a good shooter and I am a good runner. When it came to the last 100m I knew we could get more because I am also a good sprinter.

"Actually I don`t know from where I got this power, as yesterday I did not enjoy my performance in the individuals."

The next major event on the UIPM calendar is the UIPM 2016 Biathle/Triathle World Championships in Sarasota (USA) on October 21-23. Stay tuned to UIPM Website for details of all competitions and news.

See final results of the Mixed Relay:

1	ITALY	1428
2	FRANCE	1415
3	GERMANY	1411
4	GUATEMALA	1386
5	ARGENTINA	1371
6	GREAT BRITAIN	1366
7	CZECH REPUBLIC	1358
8	MEXICO	1352
9	POLAND	1340
10	RUSSIA	1334
11	HUNGARY	1313
12	JAPAN	1292
13	BRAZIL	1290
14	BELARUS	1277
15	EGYPT	1171
16	UNITED STATES	1167
17	KOREA	792