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UIPM 2018 PENTATHLON WORLD CUP FINAL ASTANA: ESPOSITO (AUS) WINS GOLD AHEAD OF KOVACS (HUN) AND VENCKAUSKAITE (LTU)

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Rio 2016 Olympic champion **Chloe Esposito** of **Australia** won Women's Individual gold at the UIPM Pentathlon World Cup Final for the first time after a typically determined fightback.

Sarolta Kovacs of **Hungary** had started the Laser-Run with a lead of 13 seconds but **Esposito** (AUS) gradually reduced the deficit and then overtook her rival on the final visit to the shooting range.

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Kovacs, the 2016 world champion, summoned the strength to hang on for silver and there was a shock bronze medal for **Gintare Venckauskaite** of **Lithuania**, who had embarked on the Laser-Run in 24th place but surged through the field to reach the podium ahead of 4th-placed **Natalya Coyle** of **Ireland**.

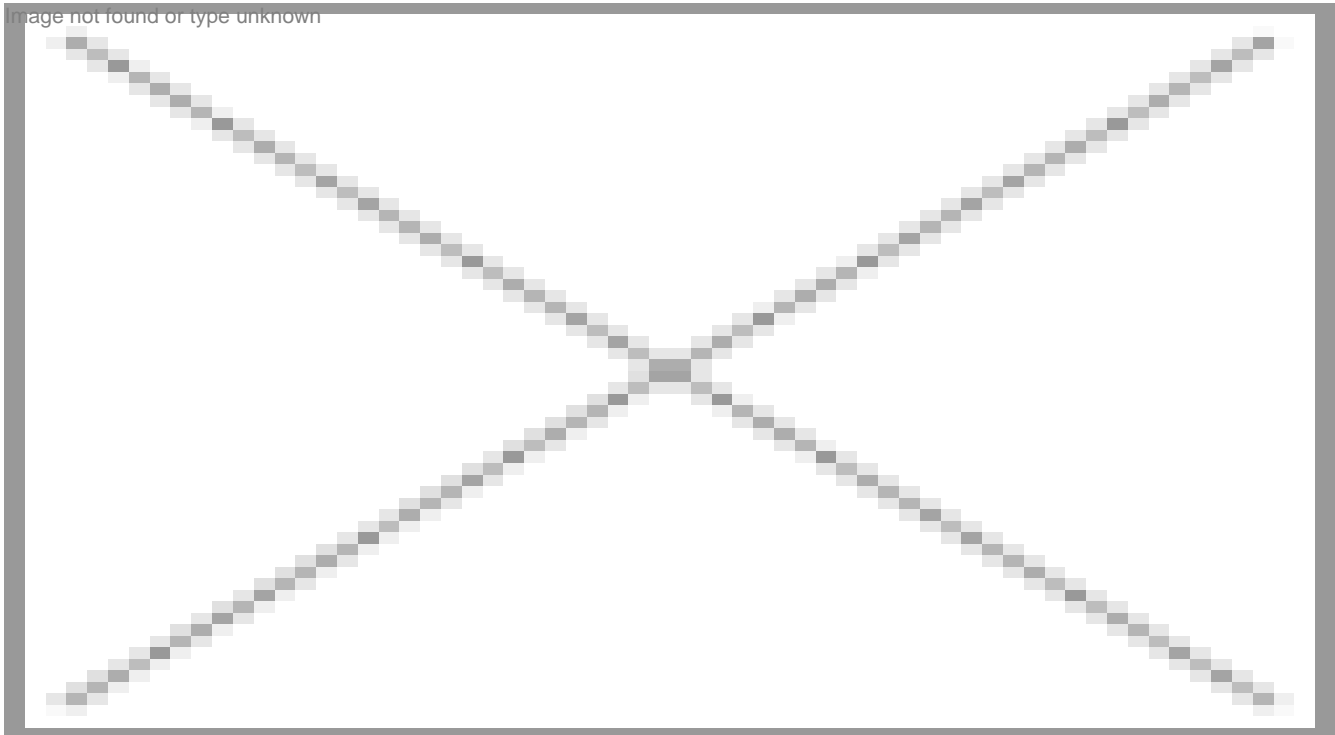
Behind them, **Uliana Batashova** of **Russia** claimed 5th place and **Shino Yamanaka** of **Japan** finished 6th in a major boost to the pentathlon team from the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games host nation.

The results demonstrated the importance of momentum and form during the Pentathlon World Cup season – **Esposito** (AUS), **Coyle** (IRL) and **Batashova** (RUS) all won individual medals during the recent European competitions in May, where **Kovacs** (HUN) won a Mixed Relay gold.

Behind the top six, the ever-consistent **Anastasiya Prokopenko** of **Belarus** finished 7th and 2017 world champion **Gulnaz Gubaydullina** (RUS) crossed the line 8th.

Esposito's victory came on the back of her comeback success at Pentathlon World Cup Kecskemet in May, and the 26-year-old was thrilled with a performance that promoted her to No.2 in the world rankings behind **Gubaydullina** (RUS).

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“My

fencing performance was the best I've ever had in my life so I was really happy with that, and then I equalled my personal best in swimming,” said Esposito (AUS), who took the entire year off in 2017.

"In the riding I was so happy to have a clear round and then I went into Laser-Run in 2nd place, which is strange for me because I usually start further back. I was a little worried I wouldn't handle the shooting pressure but everything went well.

"When I'm in competition I only focus on myself and not the people around me, and that's what I did in Rio. Sarolta is a good friend and a very good competitor so I knew it was going to be tough today. But if someone is in front of me, I just try to chase them down."

Kovacs (HUN) said: "It was a hard competition but the key for me was fencing. Swimming is my favourite event and I had a good result, and in the riding I only had one knockdown.

"I started Laser-Run in first position and I knew Chloe was there, but I felt in good shape for the first three laps. At the fourth shoot I gave away a lot of time, but I'm so happy with my second place."

Venckauskaite (LTU) added: "My Fencing was very bad, but I said I would do my best and in the end it was a very good day for me."

Swimming

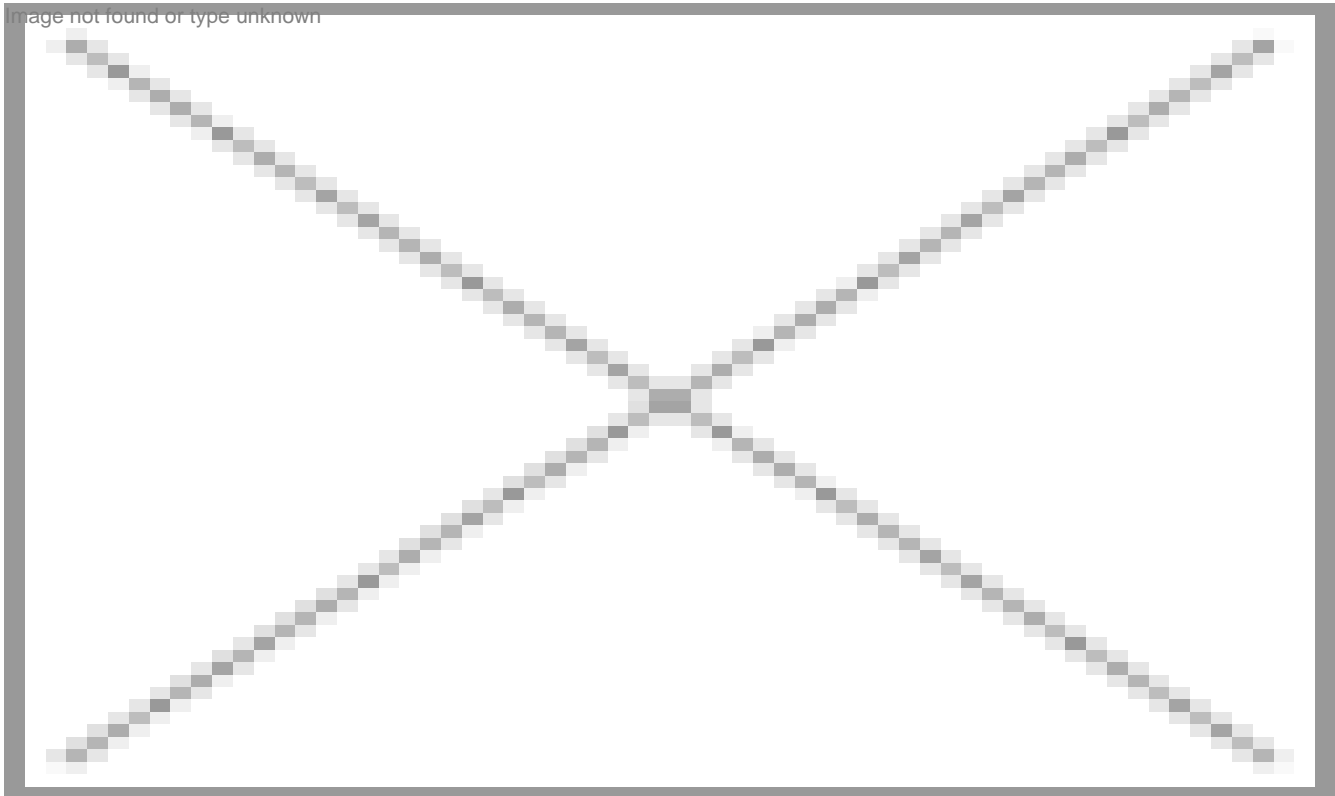
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Gubaydullina (RUS) was quickest in the pool with a time of 2:09.05, ahead of **Kovacs** (HUN) in 2:10.79 and **Elodie Clouvel** of **France** in 2:11.68. **Esposito** (AUS) was not far behind (2:11.69) while **Bian Yufei** of **China** timed 2:12.77.

Fencing

The outstanding performer in Fencing was **Ekaterina Khuraskina** (RUS), who scored an excellent 27V/7D while **Iryna Prasiantsova** (BLR) managed 24V/10D and **Kovacs** (HUN) moved into a strong position with 23V/11D.

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Esposito (AUS), **Coyle** (IRL) and **Yamanaka** (JPN) all managed top-10 finishes in the Ranking Round which counted in their favour in the final reckoning.

Volha Silkina (BLR) managed three victories in the Bonus Round before losing to her compatriot **Prasiantsova** (BLR), who was the last woman standing and added two points to her overall score.

Riding

There were an incredible eight maximum scores of 300 in the Riding arena, with **Esposito** (AUS) and **Khuraskina** (RUS) among the athletes celebrating the relief of an unblemished round.

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Kovacs (HUN) only dropped seven penalty points, with the result that she would start the Laser-Run in 1st place with a 13sec lead over **Esposito** (AUS) and 17sec over **Khuraskina** (RUS).

The other athletes who enjoyed a clean round were **Yang Soojin** of **Korea**, **Marie Oteiza** (FRA), **Sive Brassil** (IRL), **Batashova** (RUS), **Venckauskaite** (LTU) and, to the delight of the home crowd, **Ardak Akhidullayeva** of **Kazakhstan**.

Ilke Ozyuksel of Turkey was the only athlete who suffered elimination, demonstrating the high standard of Riding.

Laser-Run

Kovacs (HUN) showed the composure of a world champion for the majority of the Laser-Run, but ultimately she was up against one of the world's best Laser-Runners and needed a greater advantage if she were to prevail.

The lead did not change until the final shoot, however, as **Esposito** (AUS) took 23sec over her second shoot and even lost ground to the chasing pack briefly. **Coyle** (IRL) looked like the strongest contender in that pack, but she was finally undone by an extraordinary performance from a woman who started 20 places behind her in 24th.

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Venckauskaite (LTU) was 4th in the 2016 World Cup Final in Sarasota (USA) and also missed out on the podium by just one place in the 2016 EMPC European Championships. Again she was 4th in 2018 Pentathlon World Cup Cairo, so it was an incredibly sweet moment for her to secure a podium place after a truly exceptional Laser-Run on the demanding sandy ground.

With a time of 12:14.40 she was more than 30sec quicker than any of her rivals on the day.

Ahead of her, it was once again the **Esposito** show as the Olympic champion built on her comeback success at Pentathlon World Cup Kecskemet and ground her high-class opponent down. **Kovacs** (HUN) finally relented with a 19sec shoot on the final visit to the range, while **Esposito** (AUS) was in and out in 10sec and never looked back.

UIPM President Dr Klaus Schormann said: "The first day of the UIPM 2018 Pentathlon World Cup Final in the capital city of Astana has been arranged at a high level.

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“Kazakhstan is known as a horse country and we could see this throughout the Riding element of the competition, to the benefit of the athletes.

“Modern Pentathlon has a long tradition in Kazakhstan and this World Cup Final will be a great source of promotion for our movement in Central Asia and around the wider world.

“The results of today’s Women’s Final, where the Rio 2016 Olympic champion Chloe Esposito prevailed as the winner, underlined the high performance and quality of our athletes.”

UIPM Pentathlon World Cup Final Astana continues on June 23 with the Men’s Final, followed by the Mixed Relay on June 24.

Rank	Name	Nation	MP Points
1	ESPOSITO Chloe	AUS	1337
2	KOVACS Sarolta	HUN	1324
3	VENCKAUSKAITE Gintare	LTU	1317
4	COYLE Natalya	IRL	1311
5	BATASHOVA Uliana	RUS	1305
6	YAMANAKA Shino	JPN	1298
7	PROKOPENKO Anastasiya	BLR	1295
8	GUBAYDULLINA Gulnaz	RUS	1286
9	SILKINA Volha	BLR	1280
10	SERAPINAITE Ieva	LTU	1278
11	BELHAMRI Julie	FRA	1271
12	CLOUVEL Elodie	FRA	1269
13	TOMONAGA Natsumi	JPN	1268
14	SCHLEU Annika	GER	1268
15	KHURASKINA Ekaterina	RUS	1266
16	KOHLMANN Janine	GER	1262
17	PERMYKINA Valeriya	UKR	1252

18	PRASIANTSOVA Iryna	BLR	1243
19	SOTERO Alice	ITA	1237
20	OTEIZA Marie	FRA	1236
21	BIAN Yufei	CHN	1232
22	KHOKHLOVA Iryna	ARG	1231
23	ZHONG Xiuting	CHN	1228
24	KIM Sunwoo	KOR	1223
25	ALEKSZEJEV Tamara	HUN	1211
26	AKHIDULLAYEVA Ardak	KAZ	1209
27	FREZZA Alessandra	ITA	1206
28	PRISE Eilidh	IRL	1195
29	CESARINI Claudia	ITA	1183
30	YANG Soo jin	KOR	1168
31	KIM Sehee	KOR	1155
32	ZAPATA Ayelen	ARG	1134
33	BRASSIL Sive	IRL	741
34	PRIBYLOVA Eliska	CZE	692
35	OZYUKSEL Ilke	TUR	454